
ESOL VOICES

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ESOL Voices is prepared by the students of English for Speakers of Other Languages at **Monroe Community College**, Rochester, New York, under the supervision of Suzanne El Rayess. This collection of articles presents the personal experiences and ideas of ESOL students in their own words. It also presents their ability to write. We hope you will find it interesting. We are thankful to the students and teachers who put their great efforts to make it complete and successful.

We wish you success and happiness.

The Staff



I Wanted Her to Keep Dreaming

by Margarita Manoilowa

My grandma loved to say that the people who were born close to some big water are very different from others. She thought that the people living near an ocean or a sea, a river or a lake were funny and eccentric.

This reminds me of a story about a ten year-old girl, who walked along the coast of the Black Sea every morning. It was seven years ago when I read an article in a local newspaper; this was a simple story about a simple girl. And why the author decided to write about her, I didn't understand. What impressed me was the picture of the girl, the black and white picture of her face. I looked at her eyes, too dark because of the print ink, and her curly, long hair. She was pretty!

One week later when I was walking on the sand I saw her. Her dark, brown hair fell down her back; her mischievous curls scuffled with each other. She ran in front of the waves and jumped when some of them came close. I sat down on the sand and fastened my eyes on her. When she saw me, she ran towards me.

"Hello!" I heard her voice like a loving puff of wind close to my ear. "My name is Marina and I think I know your name." The silence was broken; I awaked from my reverie.

"You know my name?" I heard my voice too far from me.

"Yes, I do" she whispered. "I have been waiting for you more than a week." Looking curiously at her, I waited to hear her next words. What did she want to tell me? Was this some kind of joke? Or...did she just want to play with somebody? She sat down on the sand and kept looking at me like she wanted me to explain to her something really

important. Slowly she raised her head, moving the curls around her face. Then I saw her eyes, big and aquamarine, like a deep ocean. Her look enveloped the whole of me, and I felt I could dive into her eyes and find a new world created of thousands of emeralds.

I smiled at her, "So, who am I?" Her rotund voice caressed my ear.

"You are the princess," she answered briefly. Marina touched my hand as if she wanted to be sure I was alive. Then she started to tell me a story, a fairy tale about a big, ancient castle and a little, lonely princes who missed her parents. She had lost them in an accident...

I listened to her loving voice, flowing together with the noise of the waves. I felt how her filmy fingers slipped from my hands. I held them back and felt her hand so warm and sensual.

Her story was full of sorrow and hope. Her big emerald eyes were brimming with tears. Her mind roved in the infinity...This was a little girl who had thought about the meaning of the life. She had found her own way to be safe, dreaming.

I drew her to myself and gave her my most tender hug. I hid my face in the fountain of her curls and clear tears slipped from my eyes. I wanted her to keep dreaming...

Margarita Manoilowa is from Bulgaria. She is studying Visual Communications.

I will be there for you.

by Yanfang Huang

"If I close my eyes forever, I know you'll be always there. Maybe we'll stay close together, and this banned love we'll share. Even though you are

not around me, baby, I know you're not apart. I'll be there for you to brighten up your life. I'll be there for you to make your real life..."

When I first heard this song, I was at the birthday party that one of my husband's colleagues held for his five-year-old daughter. Can you imagine how an incredible song affects people? The clamorous party suddenly turned to complete silence. Everyone at the party listened attentively to its beautiful music and moving words. I was deeply touched.

"My cousin often sang it after she experienced this kind of heartbreaking love," my friend said after the music stopped.

"Really?" my eyes lit up suddenly. "Would you please tell me her story?" I was eager to know what happened to her cousin.

"Sure," she began to recall everything...

* * * * *

My cousin, Linda lived in a small town. She was a pretty little girl in seventh grade at the local middle school when David became her neighbor. Dave, also in seventh grade, was a handsome boy with a sense of humor. Linda was shy, while David was sanguine. However, they soon became good friends. At school, they were in different classes and had separate friends. After school, they played together and talked to each other about everything. They looked as if they were brother and sister.

Dave was always able to comfort Linda whenever she got hurt. One day, Linda looked unhappy; her parents wanted her to work hard on her studies and so, gave her little time with her

friends. Dave helped her to efficiently improve her course work so that her parents were convinced that she could have more time for social activities. Another day, Linda was depressed. “What’s up, princess? You don’t look very well,” Dave curiously asked.

“The boy I liked in my class hurt my feelings really badly,” Linda answered.

“You really love him, don’t you?” Dave joked. Linda hit him and began to cry. Dave drew her into his arms and comforted her with tender words, “Don’t worry, my beautiful princess; a prince will find you and marry you someday.” It was Dave who helped her to pass through that emotional and difficult time. Linda felt very lucky to have a friend like Dave.

Time goes by unknowingly like running water. Linda and Dave were about to graduate from high school. Both of them had been admitted to college. But unfortunately their colleges were more than two thousand miles away from each other. Through all of the years, Linda had a vague feeling about Dave and it grew every day when she was with him. She wasn’t sure what that exactly was, but her instinct told her that she liked him more than a friend or a brother. On graduation night, they went to a quiet park, sat on the swing and watched the shining stars. The captivating stars blinked in the immense sky, and the moonlight added its mysterious color to the curtain of night. It was so quiet, and they only heard the crickets singing.

“We will go to different colleges, so I won’t see you so often. I will really miss the time we have spent together. What’s your plan for the future?” Linda broke the silence.

Dave talked about his dream to be an aircraft designer and how to

achieve his goals. He talked and talked, and became excited. He clasped her shoulder, “Linda, do you know what I want to do right after I get a job?” Linda shook her head. “I want to get married and have many beautiful kids. When those little angels are around me, I will be the happiest man in the world!” Dave told Linda.

Linda looked into his enthusiastic eyes and felt an electric shock. She suddenly realized that her vague feeling deep inside was love. Linda leaned against him naturally and ecstatically enjoyed his dreams as if she was the mother of those charming kids. She felt so happy that night, but she was too scared to spell out her true feelings and feared to ruin their wonderful relationship.

A few months later, they went to their respective colleges. Since then, they frequently called each other and talked about what was happening in their schools. When the first Christmas came, they went back to their hometown where they had spent five years together. Dave gave Linda a beautiful necklace as a Christmas gift. Likewise, Linda gave Dave an exquisite watch. Linda put on their favorite song and danced with Dave. They sank into their old happy time, “We’ve been through good and bad times, and we know we had it all. There were storms we had to meet, rain down to the road we walked. I’ll be there for you...” The more time she spent with him, the deeper love she gained.

The years flew by; they kept calling each other and spent Christmas together. Several times, Linda wanted to tell Dave how insanely she loved him, but every time she was too afraid to tell her secret. Soon, they both graduated from college. Dave found an engineering job in the west, a solid step towards his dream. Linda located in the east to develop her own career.

Linda saw him off at the airport when Dave had to leave for work. She hugged him with all her heart and said, “Come to see me when you get a chance!” Dave held her face up with his hands, gazed silently at her for a second, and then lightly and tremblingly kissed her lips. This was the first time he kissed her! Linda’s eyes became wide and round with marvel. But she quickly understood all and closed her eyes, kissing back hard with all her love! Happy and bitter tears ran down her face. Only now she knew that Dave loved her. He was transferring his love with his heart and silence.

She melted and whispered, “Don’t go, Dave!” as if this was the last time to see him. But her hands were slipping from his.

“I’ll see you soon!” He turned slowly and went to the plane. Her mind was gone, empty, and turning with him...

Linda was anticipating that Dave would propose to her because Dave’s “get-married” dream still echoed in her mind. However, Dave seemed to be busy in his work and hardly called her. When she called him, there was always the answer machine. She began to worry about it, “Did he change his heart and have another girl?” Because of the first year of stressful work, she had no time to travel to see Dave, to find out what was really going on. For the first several months, Dave still left words on her answer machine. But later, she didn’t get any answer from him. It was almost Christmas. She was almost delirious and decided to go to Dave’s place.

Just at that time, she received a call from Dave’s mother, “Linda, come quickly, Dave wants to see you one more time! He has leukemia!”

Linda, shocked, almost fainted, “No, no, it’s not true!” Through all these years waiting, her wonderful dream had almost come true. “No, this is not what I want!” She cried her eyes out and couldn’t accept the fact. Picking up their favorite cassette, she flew to see Dave.

“From a distance I am calling, and I’m sending you my heart. Baby, all I got to do now is to pray, so please hold on. I’ll be there for you ...” she played the song on the plane and tears endlessly ran down her face.

When she got there, it was too late! Dave had passed away. Seeing him quietly lying there, she despairingly cried out, “Dave, you promised me you could see me again! Open your eyes, I’m here! Dave...” Dave’s mother came over and helped her up.

Then she gave her a letter, “Dave wanted me to give this letter to you.”

Linda opened the letter with sobs. “Linda, my darling! When I got here, I was full of hope for our future. I planned to get familiar with my new job and find a good place to settle down first. Then I would surprise you by telling my love to you, so we could get married this Christmas. Unfortunately, a routine blood test showed that I had leukemia. I was in total despair and I knew I couldn’t live longer, so I stopped calling you and didn’t want my love affecting your life. Otherwise, it could be too cruel for you. From the way you looked at me, I knew that you love me too. It would break my heart to see you crying and losing hope. I want you to move on with your life. I love you more than ever and wish to see you one more time. Bye, my darling!” She understood now why Dave had avoided speaking to her.

“Dave, you should have told me

earlier! I would never have left you alone!” Linda’s voice became husky. How many times she dreamed with him and she was going to tell her love to him this Christmas, but he was gone! She gently put their favorite cassette in his hands and hoped the song could accompany him forever.

“As the world just keeps on turning, as the birds fly so high, as the fire keeps on burning, our love never dies. Baby, all I got to do now is to pray, so please hold on. I’ll save all my love for you, until you’ll be coming home. I’ll be there for you to brighten up your life. I’ll be there for you to make you really alive. When I look into the future, baby, all I see is you. I’ll be there for you, that’s all I want to do...” This heartbreaking song Linda played every day after she got home. Her heart was bleeding.

* * * * *

My friend ended the story with a deep sigh, but my mind still swam in this wonderful song. Dave’s true love deeply touched my heart. I feel sorry for this perfect couple-to-be. Truly, love is the most precious thing in our lives. The loved one may be gone, but a true love will never die!

Yanfang Huang, a student from China, is majoring in Computer Information Systems.

India

by *Alicja Olszewska*

It’s hard to explain why I really wanted to go to India. I was dreaming of going there since my childhood. India has always been on my mind. I have also been painting my entire life, and one day I just discovered that I was out of ideas. I knew it was time to make my dream come true; I decided to visit my India to look for inspiration.

My parents didn’t want me to go; I was only 19. I knew that they wouldn’t give me any money for this trip. I had to earn the money by myself, working as a bartender in a pub. It was a hard couple of months because at the same time I had my final exams in high school, but finally I had enough money for “my dream.”

Midnight, 24 June 1999, Delhi, India

The plane whirred up to the apron, the motors roared and then died, and we were in Delhi. Hoping that the tips from Lonely Planet had been updated, we reserved a hotel by calling from the airport. Our goal for tonight was Paharganjh with a nice hotel where finally we could take a shower.

As my friend and I stepped out of the airport, a blast of air like that from a steel furnace snatched our breath away. In front of our eyes appeared the sights of a New World, a world known only from dreams. Indians were hanging on the grills, gaping at the tourists as hungry animals at fresh meat. The very bright light from dangling light bulbs made us feel like we were at an interrogation. My body started reacting very bizarrely, not sweating but sticking.

For our safety we paid a taxi already at the airport so we would not have to pay the driver. The driver took with

him two of his “probably” friends and they sat together in the front. It was very dark outside so we couldn’t really see the streets.

“How are you, and where you from?” the driving turbaned Sikh broke the silence in the car.

“Oh, we’re fine. We’re so happy to finally be here,” we answered with excitement.

“So, It is your first time in India?”

We shouldn’t have said “yes.” This short word changed our journey completely. From that moment began a new story, a story of naïve, young people who weren’t prepared for their trip at all. Now, from my perspective I don’t regret anything; we could never have seen Kashmir otherwise.

Now they knew what to do with us. They told us about registration obligations for new people coming to their country. We couldn’t believe that we had to do it right then in the middle of the night. We didn’t realize yet that we were sort of kidnapped.

I found myself sitting again in a small room with very bright lights from light bulbs. I was so tired; I was hardly thinking, but in my head questions were waking up: “Who are these people? What do they want? And where am I going to sleep tonight?”

They seemed so nice but we couldn’t understand them when they spoke Hindi. They canceled our reservations in the hotel and found us a different one. They pretended to be friends, telling us stories that could not possibly have happened if we hadn’t met them. I didn’t know what to think. I was falling asleep.

10 am. 25 June, still Delhi

I came closer to the window, bravely pushing away the curtains. In my eyes appeared the street of India, known only from pictures. I no longer remembered last night. I felt ready to go with these people wherever they were going.

Observing how India mixes colors together in ways we found shocking - orange and purple, green and blue - the whole palette together, I felt like I was watching a theater show. I saw bright colors on a brownish background. People were opening their shops, chatting on the streets. The beggar children were looking for something to grab, to steal. The view was quiet and filled me with so much energy.

I had some whisky that morning. This was a piece of advice from my friend, saying it was supposed to kill bacteria hiding in food, especially not cooked. We walked to our hotel and we had no idea which way to go.

“Could you tell us how we can get to Paharganjh?” we asked the hotel boy.

“If you want I can take you there for a good price,” he offered. We didn’t think much about it and lugged our baggage into the car. But we didn’t get too far, as he took us to the same place where we ended up the night before.

We were more naïve than we thought. “What will these crazy people want this time?” we asked ourselves again. This time they wanted to sell their travel offer and after a couple of hours of listening and looking through their catalogues, we finally bought one.

While sitting on the bus I opened Lonely Planet to figure out where we were going. As a result, I learned that Srinagar, our destination, was in Kashmir. It was always a beautiful place full of tourists, but not today.

The situation had changed because of the war between India and Pakistan. Therefore, nobody wanted to visit. People from agencies like ours were trying to find tourists eager to go there. I realized that there was no other tourist on the bus besides us. We were going to see the Kashmir, where the war was still going on. I was afraid, and I didn’t want to think what could happen to us there. I was happy that my parents didn’t know about this because they would have died from nerves.

June 25th and 26th, on the way to Srinagar

No one has seen India, on the other hand, who has not traveled overnight by bus or train. When the noise, the crowding and shoving, the shifting of baggage and climbing up and down over us had reached a climax of nightmarish impossibility, the bus began to move. This was the signal for a new activity like eating and undressing. We stayed in our bunk, with our clothes and our blanket roll and let pandemonium reign around us. It reigned. Ultimately we slept, but we did not sleep for long. The first leg of our journey took us only two hours when we stumbled off at three in the morning, our heads cotton-fuzzy, and our tongues much the same, and our hair full of other people’s tobacco smoke. We ate something, brushed our teeth and came back to the bus. Just then, it began to wind upward along steep slopes. We ground along at nine miles an hour, the dust pouring in, and the driver stopping at every little teashop.

At last, about midmorning we had a view of the Himalayas across the slopes. I started to have terrible stomachaches probably because of too oily chapattis. During this trip we heard so much about Kashmir and life on a houseboat that we were bound to be disappointed. At the next stop I watched the monkeys

while they dropped down from the trees onto a nearby wall. There are millions of them in India, eating food the people need.

Noon, June 26th, Srinagar

It was noon when we reached Srinagar. The agent who had captured us led us to his shikara. This was a sort of gondola to row us across a canal to the line of sagging wrecks on the opposite shore. Outside, the houseboat looked like something a group of apprentice carpenters had trained on. Inside there was too much furniture, too many curtains, rugs and all sorts of miscellaneous rubbish collected and spread about. I fell in love with this place from the very beginning. From the first minutes, I knew that these three days at the Dal Lake would turn into wonderful memories. I knew I could stay there forever; and I could build my house there.

The best of Kashmir is the shikara that is always at your command; it will taxi you into the wide part of Dal Lake where the mountains rise in the distance to shut in this watery world. It takes you to the terraced gardens of Shamilmir or Nisgat Bagh. This is a world where the land and water merge and change status. Floating gardens grow tomatoes and melons where no land is visible. Small children paddle the graceful little working boats and gather waterweed for their cattle. We took a boat that night by ourselves, only my friend and I. The sky was full of stars and around us, hollow silence where only some mosquitoes were buzzing next to me. Why does life on the water fascinate so much?

Life on the water was like living a dream within a dream of living. Without involvement, entering but also passing by, it was seen but not held. To float, to see, to pass, to have every moment

a new scene was the real charm of Srinagar.

A month would not be enough to see and do all that which Kashmir offers. There were treks into the mountains, the fascinating hand industries of Srinagar. This was where you could see a whole family at work weaving a rug that might take a year in the making, or watch the cabinetmakers at their elaborate carving in walnut. It's too bad that an underlying dispute still goes on between Pakistan and India.

10:04 am September 17th 2001, MCC Learning Center

I've been dreaming of going back to India since I left. I will never forget the watery beauties of Srinagar. It will always appear in my dreams as a place where I could live with my canvas, oil paints and Nikon. I see myself looking at the morning light in front of my very own houseboat, holding a cup of milk tea. I paint all day long, till the sun goes down. I wish I could be there now.

Alicja Olszewska comes from Poland. She is a Fine Arts major.

Reincarnation *by Anousid Souphavanh*

Who really knows if something that happens to someone is a miracle? Who can tell if it is real or not? I went to Binghamton two weeks ago and I saw an old man leaning against a wall. I walked over to him and asked him about himself. He told me a story about his daughter.

They lived in a small village surrounded by mountains, forests and streams. The girl, Malee, was nine years old, thin, dark skin, brown eyes, long hair and quite tall. She sat on a mat surrounded by the villagers. There

was quiet, the people just listening to her every word.

She was talking about a previous life, when she was a village chief's daughter. Her father was a rich businessman with almost thirty slaves. Her house was huge, nice and colorful, surrounded by trees and a few ponds. He raised cows to pull carts on the road when he

It had begun at sunset. It was quiet; there was no sound of insects or bugs around the house. Malee was sitting on a ladder and looking at the sky. There were a lot of stars. Her father and the slaves had left to sell clothes and things. Suddenly, she heard a noise like someone stepping on a stick. She shouted out and glanced at that point. But it was too dark. She felt cold, and her heart beat fast. She went back inside and walked back and forth inside her room, then opened the window. She shouted at a slave's house, "Please come here." There was nothing; no slaves came. She was confused and looked outside the window again. Nothing. She sat down on a mat and looked at the image of Buddha. She closed her eyes and prayed, thinking about her father.

She heard people run up to the house while she was praying. Suddenly, one of them said, "Find only gold, jewelry and valuable things inside every room." She ran to the door and locked it. She pulled out some clothes and inside the closet there was a box of gold and jewelry. She opened it and grabbed them, and put them inside her clothes. She looked outside the window. It was so dark. She was afraid; her heart beat fast and faster and she felt even colder.

Finally, she jumped out of the window and ran to a slave's house. There, something astonished her and she felt fear and regret. Slaves lay on the ground with blood all over their body. She

shook and couldn't say a word. She closed her eyes, trying to concentrate. Then she let her hand reach the switch to turn the light off. She looked at her house again. There were shadows of people walking inside. When she was sure no one could see, she ran away as fast as she could. She didn't know the way. She hurried, not thinking of anything. She wanted to go as far as she could. She ran to a stream where there was huge tree. She sat on the ground and leaned against it. Tears and fear had come into her mind. She looked around herself. It was dark. She pulled some clothes and a blanket out. She lay down and slept.

In the morning, she got up and walked around looking for a piece of hard wood to help her dig. On her knees, bowing towards the base of the tree, she started to dig up the dirt with her hands and the piece of wood. The ground was moist with a lot of small rocks. She dug slowly, removing a little bit each time. She sat down for a while and looked at the hole. Then she put the gold and valuable things in it, using her hands to swept up the dirt to cover the hole.

After that, she tried to figure out where she should go. She felt hopeless, exhausted. When she thought about her house, she knew there was no way that people could hear slaves shouting or screaming for help because it was so far away from others, and it was surrounded by trees and a tall fence. She sighed and leaned on the tree. Suddenly, she heard the noise of people approaching. She tried to move slowly and hide, but when they got there, they saw the blanket. They spread out to search and disappeared from view. She glanced around and thinking no one was there, she hurried to pack up her blanket and clothes.

It was such bad luck for her. They appeared in front of her immediately.

Each person's face was evil. She tried to stand up slowly and run away, but one younger man pulled her hand back and tried to choke her. He pulled a knife out from his bag and pointed it at her throat. They knew she was the village's chief daughter. They asked her about the gold and other valuable things. She shook her head. They became so mad that they cut her throat and she died.

Now she flash backed to the present. The villagers had heard this story that she told them. Some thought she was lying because she was only nine years old. The story might not be real or may be she was just crazy. However, the tale was clear, and one could imagine the images of the story. She looked at the people around her and was furious. She stood up and said, "If you don't believe me, please follow me. I'll show you that it is a real story." She walked down from the ladder and people followed her in a long line. Some were carrying a hoe and a small spade. When they got to the huge tree near the stream, she pointed at one of the bushes. They dug the dirt deep enough, and they did find gold and some jewelry. Everyone came to see and all were astonished.

A week later, Malee was gone. Her father took the gold and jewelry to the monks to build a temple. He was sad. Although, he had the gold, his daughter would never come back again.

Life isn't real. Who knows where we come from and who created being humans. Is there really a hell and a heaven? The answer and the truth are inside us and in our belief in ourselves.

Anousid Souphavanh comes from Thailand. His major is Computer Technology.

Isaak by Emil Manoilov

"He was compassionate, attentive, and considerate as a father taking his newborn in his arms for the first time. He knew what to do, to say, and how to say it to make you feel important to the world, to make you feel that you are somebody, to give you the hope to live and not to give up. He gave me a new life..."

We were sitting on a bench, she - talking, and I - listening to her in silence, staring at the running water, not knowing what to say. It was something that if you have never experienced you would never understand what it was like. Talking, she took off her black sunglasses to wipe the tear starting to appear, and for the first time I saw her eyes like the sky, so pure, and deep as the calm sea. They were mysterious, hiding her personality deep inside.

That day I went to the park near the river, crossing the city I have lived in almost for a year, where I loved to take a walk every sunny Saturday to relax my body and mind after a hard week of studying and working. As usual I sat down on my favourite bench, away from the walks, closer to the river. I was sitting there gazing at the leaves falling into the river, listening to the ripple of the running water, dreaming of the next summer. I was so wistful that I didn't hear when she had come. I turned, surprised by her soft "Hello. Come back to the earth if you don't want to fall into the river."

I was charmed the instant I saw her. She was sitting beside me, on the other end of the bench, looking out in front of her, beyond the river, her hair shining from the sun, falling down to her shoulders, covering half of her face. The black sunglasses added luster to her. Her clothes, the way she combined

them, told me she wasn't from this city. It took me only a few seconds to open my mouth to respond even though to me it seemed an eternity. She had taken my breath away. We started talking about the weather, the going away summer, the coming winter; what I was studying, doing, and so on.

She was a very sensitive woman with strong insight. She made me feel that she needed someone to tell all about what was inside her, the same way I needed someone to tell me a story from his or her life, a story that I would be able to use for my essay. Thus, without my asking her for anything, she decided to give me the story I needed, and in some way to thank the man who had helped her to start a new life, "to look at the world with new eyes."

She had been a photographer, a good one with a good job, in a big city. One day, or rather at the end of the day, she went to the roof of the seventy-eight-story building she worked in to take pictures of the sunset for her next exhibition. From the roof of the high building she enjoyed the panorama that opened out. She was almost done when it happened. All she saw was lightning and then she fell down unconscious. When she came to, she found that she was lying in a bed and the surrounding sounds told her that it was a hospital bed. Suddenly, she became aware of something strange, something that made her freeze; something was missing, something without which, she thought, life wouldn't matter any longer!

Then he came. She heard a voice, a voice she would never forget. It was a soft, quiet voice that made her relax. "Who are you?" she asked him.

"A friend, I hope," was the answer. A simple answer that contained everything she wanted to know; a simple answer that opened the door

to her soul. Since then he talked to her every day, every night. He told her stories about people that in same situation continued to fight for their lives, stories that made her feel better. When she became confident in herself again, he wanted to know all about the accident, but she barely remembered what really happened. All she had understood was that someone had put a bomb on the roof. Then she remembered something strange while she was taking pictures, that day. She remembered that she smelled a man's cologne, an odor she had never smelled before, but at that moment she hadn't paid any attention to it.

Can you imagine that only this information and about two weeks searching were enough for Isaak to catch the assailant? When he came back later, all he said was "Justice for one is revenge for others," and that was the last time she heard from him. For her, life started again. She wasn't afraid of going out anymore; she didn't think about what had happened even though she would never forget it.

After the story ended, she became silent for a long time when suddenly she said good-bye and went away. Looking at her as she was walking away, I saw a big dog walking in front of her, a dog I hadn't seen before or just hadn't noticed. And at that instant I realized that it wasn't just a dog for her, it was her "eyes."

Emil Manoilov comes from Bulgaria. He is studying Visual Communications.

Stranger Than Fear *by Daniel Teclé Wendim*

All he knew about his new friend, John, is what he heard from someone at church. Basically it can be written in a single sentence. John's father died because of AIDS.

He had never known anyone with AIDS. Like most people, he had read a lot about the disease in magazines and seen a lot about it on television. But when he was preparing to interview John, he was aware that reading about AIDS is a lot different from watching AIDS take the life of someone you love.

John told him that his parents had gotten a divorce when he was in grade school, but their relationship was still friendly, so he saw his dad quite a bit. When he went to college in New Haven, where his dad lived, they got really close. His dad was the only family he had there.

John and his dad could talk about a lot of things, but not about God or faith. John had accepted Christ when he was younger, but in college he felt somewhat disconnected from the church. He wasn't very involved with other Christians. His dad had searched for 'religion' in all kinds of places after the divorce, trying out different churches and even different faiths. And now his dad was a member of a church.

John went on to say that during his senior year of college, he began noticing things about his dad that concerned him. One was that his dad was experiencing some pretty serious dental problems. Later he found out they were a result of AIDS.

John became quiet for a moment, recalling the day he learned the truth.

“I don’t remember much about that morning, about what my dad said, but I do remember feeling very anxious to get out of his apartment so I wouldn’t have to hear any more. I just wanted to be alone.” John never made it to class that day. He walked through the city on his way to school. He was sure it was a beautiful summer day, but he didn’t even notice. He was in shock, he supposed. And he couldn’t stop crying. When he got to school, he just couldn’t face the teachers and students. He called a friend from a payphone and told him he needed to talk. This friend came to get him and brought him back to his apartment.

John tried to tell his girlfriend, but she didn’t want to hear about it. “She responded to me almost the same way I responded to my dad.” Like him she was in shock. She wanted to get away because she didn’t know what to say or how to react. “AIDS makes people uncomfortable, even close friends and family members. Sure it is a disease just like cancer is a disease, but it is a disease that carries a serious problem.”

He moved ahead a few months in his story to the turning point in his dad’s disease. He had been helping as much as he could, trying his best to be there for his dad, but sometimes, he felt angry and frustrated. He was trying to finish school, work and take care of his dad. It was too much. He could not focus on his father completely. It was just hard.

Finally, at the end of the interview, he said good-bye to John, his new friend. He had left him with hope, hope because God was continuing to heal his pain. “Hope because God uses even the most painful circumstances to bring us closer. And hope because God offers his unconditional love to everyone.”

Daniel Tecele Wendim comes from Ethiopia. He is studying Marketing.

It’s Never Too Late To Learn

by EunJin Kim-Keenan

Biking is a sore memory of my youth. When I was a young girl, I never learned to ride a bicycle. I couldn’t even watch other people on bicycles because it made me feel frustrated, jealous, and disgraced at my defeat.

“How was your bicycling today?” My mother caught me when I’d just come in the door. My legs froze like a scared and frightened cat with a stolen fish in its mouth.

“It was okay.” Without looking at her, I closed my eyes to pray for the bloodstains on my legs to go away before I opened them again. But I couldn’t get them off. I hadn’t come home directly from where I had been riding my bike. Instead, I was standing out by the door, waiting for the bleeding to stop and letting my legs dry in the air for a while. The wounds covered my legs like the red patches of an actor’s bloody costume.

“Where is your sister? Didn’t you come with her?” Mother asked me, holding my little brother up from his tiny chair, still not looking at me carefully.

“I don’t know.... Oh! She met a friend and wants to stay a little longer. You know, she likes to stay out.” My weak voice became confident as I tried to take my mother’s attention away from my legs. I thought I had successfully passed by my mother so I could go to the bathroom to wash my arms and legs and then go to my room to change clothes.

“Come close to me” a sharp voice hit me. My legs were struggling to carry me to the bathroom. There was a moment of silence in my head. I shouldn’t be fooling around with Mother. You know, Mother knows everything, even though you think you have covered everything perfectly.

I started to walk hesitantly to her and looked up knowing that I had lied to her. I searched for a little segment of forgiveness on her face. I was always Mother’s good girl who could hardly ever say “no” to her. Her hopeless voice and lack of angry words surprised me.

“Why don’t you give up riding the bicycle?” Well, my mother wasn’t always telling me to give up everything. She was the person who told me always to try. But, there were a few things that she thought I shouldn’t do and one was riding a bike.

I practiced for many years. I might not be a perfect athlete in all sports, but I got along well in most. However, bicycling was an exception for me. It was as devastatingly bad as my math scours. The only thing I could do was to add more scratches on both of my elbows and kneecaps, which tore at my self-esteem. In spite of what my mother had told me, I didn’t give it up, carrying on for a few more years.

I finally convinced myself one day that I didn’t have to ride this stupid bicycle ever again. That day, my heart broke.

I had given up, but then I found that it’s never too late to learn. Fourteen years later with my husband, who also taught me how to swim, I tried riding again. As an adult, the results were different. In my parents-in-law’s backyard there were a thick carpet of grass. I didn’t worry about falling. Another reason I was motivated to learn this time was that I was trying on a new bike, a cool-looking hot pink mountain bike that I was proud to try on. I was lucky and excited to be practicing with my husband because he was always so patient. He encouraged me whenever I wanted to stop. He was a good teacher.

I could do it! The first time I rode my bike on the canal path, I was full of confidence, achievement, pride and freedom. Since I live in the US now, I have more opportunity to ride a bicycle than in Korea. Most towns have

beautiful parks or canal paths where you could find your favorite place to ride in safety. And it's good for your health to exercise. I love riding my bike.

EunJin Kim-Keenan has been studying English at MCC.

My Life as a “Pirate” *by Gloriana Rojas*

“Look at me again”, said my mother’s cousin from Colombia who was visiting us for a while. “Why are you turning your head like that?”

“It’s hard for me to see,” I said. For some reason I felt the need to turn my head up to see things, I explained. I couldn’t really remember when it started or what was causing it. The only thing I knew was that slowly, it just got worse. Not understanding why and telling me that it was not normal, she suggested I visit a friend of hers who could help me.

Three days later I was in her friend’s office. Iris was a young Asian woman wearing scrubs. For a moment, I thought she was the doctor’s assistant, but I was wrong. She began asking me questions about what was the reason of my visit and I explained to her that I was not sure.

I sat in that big chair beside all those machines that I was familiar with. It was the 15th year I visited an eye doctor. Each year, I had to check my vision and change my lenses prescription. Since, I was aware of my eye problem, that day I was not afraid. I knew a new prescription was needed and that was going to be all.

She told me my eyes were having problems because my vision was

crossed. Kids usually have this kind of problem, but it was not normal that I, an adult, had it. When she talked about the “treatment,” I thought it was going to be to take some pills for a while. But it was a patch on the left eye. That was the way doctors treated problems like mine. She added that if the patch didn’t work, surgery was next.

I was getting dizzy by now. I’d always been afraid of operations and even more of eye operations and now the doctor was mentioning them.

“It is early to mention surgery, but it’s better to talk about it. I really don’t understand how you have managed to see all the time. Your eyes are not working the way they are supposed to work,” the doctor told me. “But don’t worry. Maybe if you use the patch, we won’t have to think about that.”

She also told me I needed blood tests to rule out other possibilities. The next few weeks I visited a neurologist and someone specialized in cases like mine so that they could study my situation and agree on the treatment.

* * * * *

Frequent headaches, tearful eyes, afraid to go out, those were my feelings at that time. I started using the pirate patch for short periods even though I was supposed to use it always. At the beginning, finding my steps was like when you’re ready to take a picture and you can’t find the view finder of the camera or when you get some dirt into your eye and you’re able to see with just one. I never expected that something like this could ever happen to me.

When I started the treatment it was very uncomfortable, not only because all the people stared at me as if I was crazy, but because I had to see everything with just with one eye!

I refused to go out because I was confronting the idea of being a “pirate” and asking myself, why me?

Later I realized I could see perfectly with just one eye. I got used to wearing the “pirate” patch every day without taking it off. At that time, I didn’t feel the need to put my head up. And I wanted to be able to see like other people did, to see with both eyes, normally.

I had to use the patch eight months, day and night, twenty-four hours of the day. No matter what activity I had, I was supposed to use the “pirate” patch. My ability to see advanced, but I wasn’t able to skip the operation. My strabismus was too big. I visited two more doctors, but they didn’t know what was causing it and why.

I ended up in the operating room. This October 13th it is going to be a year. Now I’m happy I had it because my eyes work almost perfectly and also because with the “pirate” look, I met my husband...

Gloriana Rojas comes from Costa Rica where she was an elementary teacher. She is studying English at MCC.

What a small world! *by Erwin Suarez*

Jimmy is a tall, strong guy. He is very nice and friendly. He used to be the Registrar at MCC, but now he is retired. He loves to fish and he has been fishing since he was eight years old. Fishing is his passion. He not only fishes in the USA, but in Ecuador and Peru, too.

When I asked him what made him go to Ecuador and Peru, he replied “I was supposed to go to England for

vacation after my retirement, but for some reason the trip was cancelled.” At that time he had never been to any other country besides Canada and Mexico.

One day he saw an article in the newspaper for a tour to the Amazon River, starting in Peru. It looked interesting to him, so he made a reservation. They traveled from Peru to Colombia and Brazil by boat. It took them ten days. He said, “ I really enjoyed it because I saw the jungle, and we visited Indian Villages. That was in 1996.”

When Jimmy came back to the USA, he made a call asking if they had other tours for fishing. The answer was yes. Since 1996 he has been fishing four times in the Amazon River. On one of the trips, in Lima, Peru he met a man from England who had worked for Xerox and lived in a hotel in Pittsford for six months. He recognized Jimmy’s Rochester T-shirt.

“In September 2000, I met a man who used to live in Rochester who knew the former president of MCC, Peter Spina, and had golfed with him many times. He also knew many other people who worked at MCC.”

In February 1998 he visited the Galapagos Island off the coast of Ecuador. He liked it so much that he went there four more times! On one of these trips he met the sister of a woman that used to work at MCC. On another trip to Ecuador he met a neighbor of a woman that he used to date twenty years ago. What a surprise! He also met on her first trip, a close friend of Dr. Alice Young, the former chairperson of MCC’s Board of Trustees. On yet another trip to Ecuador, he met Dr. Walter Cooper, a member of the New York State Board of Regents. Guess what? He was from Rochester!

In the year 2000, Jimmy visited a new community college in Trinidad twice. MCC is helping this college. While visiting the college, he met a woman from the college that he had worked with at SUNY Buffalo thirty years ago. He also met the vice president of the college, a man who had been his adviser for his PHD at Buffalo and his first boss nearly forty years ago. While on vacation in Trinidad, he met another person from Rochester who golfed with President Spina.

MCC seems to be known worldwide!

Erwin Suarez is a student from Bolivia. His interest is Business.

He is a thief! by Yumin Weng

“ Bag? What bag? “ I ask.

“ Are you crazy? “ Even though these words don’t leave his mouth, I can read his mind from the tight lips and wrinkles between his eyebrows. “The brown one I had put on the top of these trunks before I left you here.” He jumps on the suitcases to wake me up.

“Didn’t you take it with you?” I still stare at him, confused, but my heart is beating quicker and quicker because of his loud voice. My daughter starts to cry. She seems to know that her father is getting angry. He looks around. There are crowds of people in the hall. Everyone is busy with his own business, and it is too noisy for anyone to notice if we have problem.

“I will run back to that telephone booth to see if the bag is there.” He leaves as soon as he can while he is still talking. I raise my head and look at all our stuff. Our suitcases are stacked up like a small mountain. I can’t even

see the people going around behind our cart. I see most Chinese have heavy carts, not just us. Compared to other foreigners, we take more stuff when we are traveling. Probably this is another Chinese custom.

Grace is still crying. But “who took our bag?” I am just in a dream trying to picture all that I have seen, a person, one thing or some noises... This question is like a little fly hitting against my every nerve.

* * * * *

Looking out of the window, I see clouds piled as a blanket over the whole sky; they also cover all my past life. Listening to the soft voice from the microphone, I know my life will be different now. I have to face all strange people, my husband’s relatives, in a strange country.

Thirty minutes later, I hold my four month old girl and follow my husband’s steps out of the airplane. Instead of familiar Asian faces, the people who are working there have big eyes, big noses, are tall in stature, with white skin, and black skin, even their hair in varied colors. After many procedures, finally we go through Customs and stand in the most famous airport in the world-JFK International Airport.

People crowd at the exit to look for their relatives who have emigrated from China on this flight. We are lucky to have such a big cart that everyone tries to avoid us; we can pierce through them easily. But I feel a little bit disappointed because my sister-in-law isn’t in that throng. She has promised to come to pick us up. My husband looks at his watch and says, “ We have arrived earlier than scheduled. I am going to call her.” He opens his brown bag to look for the phonebook.

“Grace is hungry,” I reply. “Find a place for us first. I cannot hold her if she is not quiet.” I am afraid he will go right away. Fortunately, an empty chair in the hall is waiting for us. He pulls our cart in front of me, then leaves while I am feeding Grace.

Half a bottle of milk is almost gone, but he still hasn’t come back. I start to feel impatient. It is very noisy, and there are more people coming in. I shake my head like a rattle to look at people from left and right, and try to search for my husband. I am not even sure which way he was going. Suddenly, there is a voice by my side. I look towards it. A man is sitting on the chair two down from mine. He looks dark and thin. His eyes sink in their orbits. I fix my eyes on him to make sure he was talking to me. He speaks to me again when I look at him, but I don’t understand a word. I shake my head, and then look back to my daughter. She is asleep.

* * * * *

That man, who spoke to me, is a thief! Maybe his partner took the bag when I noticed only him. This is so terrible. I feel sweat on my forehead. New York City, people always talk about it. Why am I so inattentive? Maybe we, my husband and I, both have to take responsibility for the missing bag. He should have taken the bag with him because he knew anything could happen in New York City, especially in an airport, a public place. And I should have taken more care of our stuff when I was alone.

In the following few months, my husband is busy looking for the bag. Finally, we realize it is gone. We lost all our passports, two American passports and one Chinese passport, my daughter’s birth certificate, all the documents about my immigration, a bankbook which is for a bank in

Shanghai, three airplane tickets from New York to Rochester and many things that I cannot remember. We have spent almost half a year getting our important things, but still cannot get everything back.

That was my first lesson in American culture on the first day I came to America. And this is one of the reasons that I don’t like New York City!

Yumin Weng, from mainland China, is studying Accounting.

Wang Hang by Ha B. Nguyen

At the time, I was studying ESL at BOCES in Fairport. One day the secretary of the school entered the classroom and following her was a small girl with a shy face. Wang Hang was her name and she was about four feet eight inches tall, with long wavy hair around her oval face. Later she told me her hair was naturally straight, thick, and real dark; however, she looked beautiful in this style. She also had a very nice complexion and a good-looking shape. I thought her parents were lucky to have her in their family.

After the secretary talked to our teacher and left, Wang Hang was offered any chair in the class. With a quick look around, she stepped forward to my table, which was in the middle of the classroom, pulled up a chair next to me and sat down. I wondered why she decided to choose this chair.

Our class rule was if any new person joined the class, we were supposed to introduce ourselves. And Wang Hang was the first person to start. From the beginning, I knew she came from China; she arrived in America in June 1998, just a few months before me.

After we introduced ourselves, the teacher and students returned to the article that we had just finished reading twenty minutes ago. We studied and discussed that article until lunchtime.

Just like everyone, I began to leave the classroom to go to the cafeteria. As I stepped out of the class, I turned around and I saw her still sitting in her chair. Walking back to her, I asked, “Do you have something for your lunch? If you don’t, you can share mine.” Putting her hand into a bag, she took out an apple and a strawberry yogurt and then answered, “I don’t feel hungry; I just have these.” “Ok, that’s fine. Would you like to have lunch with me in the cafeteria, or do you want to stay here?”

Five minutes later, she and I were sitting in the cafeteria. It was so noisy because there were a lot of people in this room. We were talking and asking a lot about our lives; we were so excited about our conversation.

From that day on, we sat next to each other every day. And definitely, in the second level class, we spoke English like a two-year-old baby. We tried to speak and understand what we were talking about in our conversations.

One day, while we were talking, she asked me a question that I couldn’t understand. I asked her to repeat it again and again. Then I said, “I am sorry, Hang. I really don’t know what you are trying to ask me.” Looking at her face, I guessed she seemed a little upset that I didn’t understand her. Suddenly, she repeated the question in my language. I looked straight into her face with my big opening eyes; I was so surprised. “Wow, I didn’t know you could speak my language. It is unbelievable!” And then, “Why didn’t you say some Vietnamese words after I said I was Vietnamese in the classroom?” We laughed so hard.

From then on, we spoke Vietnamese, my language. She explained that she didn't dare speak my language to me because she thought the students were not allowed to speak any other languages except English in class.

Finally, I was able to answer the question that I had asked her to repeat a couple of times: "What area, county, and district in Saigon City did you live in when you were in Vietnam?"

Although her accent was heavier than the Vietnamese, I still understood her in most of the stories. She told me her parents had lived in Saigon for many years. Her father is Chinese and her mother is Vietnamese. She has four sisters and they all were born in Vietnam; she was too. She was the youngest in her family. After living in Vietnam, her parents moved to China to live with her father's parents at the time when she was just seven years old. At her grandparents' insistence, they hadn't spoken Vietnamese any more, but Chinese instead.

Every day we were at school, she told me a lot of things about her family and her life when we were on break or at lunch. And I told her about my life, too. The same as my situation, she came to America because she married a Chinese man who had lived in the US for a long time.

Day by day, we became friendlier. Then four months later, one day she told me she wanted to go to work and she had already applied for a job. She would stop school the following week. I knew I would really miss her.

Now, I haven't seen her for a year. Last Christmas she called me and said that she was going to have a baby, her second boy, in two weeks. Cheerful, we talked quite a long time on the phone, sharing things that had been going on between the two of us.

After that, we often called, to keep in touch until one day I came to visit her after she gave birth to her little boy. Now she is living in Fairport with her husband and their two sons. One is four years old, and the other is almost ten months. Her children are so cute. I always love to see them and play with them. My husband and I have visited her every few weeks since she had her second son.

It has been three years since I met her. I can't believe that she became my closet friend. Now she is working full-time at FieldTech Company. We usually share on the phone when something very happy or sad happens to us like last night; she called and told me that her family is planning to visit China next summer. This week, she wants to go to the Department of Motor Vehicles to apply for a passport for her second son. "I can't wait to see my parents and sisters in China," she told me.

Even though she doesn't speak perfectly and smoothly in my language, it is enough for her to communicate with Vietnamese people. I am so grateful to be her friend. She is an easy girl and she is very friendly. I like her very much. I always feel like she is my sister.

Ha B. Nguyen is studying Computer Information Systems.

Waiting for a Long Time

by Mi Sup Jung

Before my husband and I met in the USA, we had been a long time apart because he couldn't get his citizenship. Only he had permanent residency. I didn't know how long I would not be able to see him. We thought it would only be about one year. Then

I would go to America and we would live together.

Eventually, twenty-eight months after our marriage, I got the permanent residency too. These twenty-eight months were very difficult time for me. Every day I sent letters to him and he to me. I waited every afternoon for the postman to bring my husband's letter. I was happy when I read his happy news and happy stories, but I was sad if he wrote sad and upsetting stories in his letters.

In these twenty-eight months, we telephoned each other two times a week. Nine years ago, in Rochester, there was only one telephone company. I suppose they charged more than \$1.20 a minute for the international phone calls to Korea. It was horrible that we paid such high phone charges.

One day, I said to him on the telephone, "In! I have an idea. Next time, don't call. I will buy a phone card. It's only five dollars." My voice was smaller. "But we can talk for only three minutes with it. After that, the public phone hangs up all by itself." He didn't answer. One day, I bought the phone card and called him. "...time's up, can you hear me? I will call...bebeeeee" I didn't even have time to say bye to him.

Then when I got back home, he called me again. Whatever I thought, we were actually using more money. When his bill was over a thousand dollars a month, AT&T had cut the phone line.

Then, on my twenty-ninth birthday in February, I was delighted with a letter from the US Embassy. They wanted me to have a permanent residency interview. They gave me the interview date and time. That same day, my husband sent me a letter and birthday present with flowers. I was very excited. Perhaps, I will never forget my twenty-

ninth birthday. Immediately I prepared my passport because when I received the citizenship, I didn't want to wait another day. Fortunately, things went well and the consular representative gave my daughter and me the permanent residency. I packed my daughter's and my things.

Finally, I made a phone call to my husband, the last time in Korea. "Hi! I'm ready to go to the USA, but I can't believe it. Can you?"

"I can't believe it either."

"You know... We have been waiting almost twenty-eight months."

"Mi! Before you arrive here, I will buy many roses, and I will give them to you." He made a great impression on my mind.

"Thank you, but that's okay."

The morning I arrived at the Rochester airport in the countryside, it was snowing heavily and was very cold. I had never seen this heavy snow before. I saw my husband with my sister-in-law and his friends. But he didn't have the roses. We went to my sister-in-law's house where she had a lot of Korean foods for us. I was so tired and felt uneasy about this different country, too cold with snow.

One day, I asked him, "Why didn't you give me any roses?"

He smiled and said, "Just one rose is five dollars; it's winter time." But he never gave me the roses even now. Can you believe it?

Mi Sup Jung is majoring in Computer Information Systems.

Brother

by Roman Kshysyak

Many of us have a sister or brother. In many cases they are your best friends, good advisors, persons who can help you in hard times. And it just does not matter if this is an older brother or younger sister. We are always trying to do for them the best that we can. We have the same blood and genes. And they are the closest people for you, after your parents. I have got one brother...

His name is Bohdan, which means given by God. He is six years older. Last summer he graduated from medical school, as a dentist. Now he is living in Ukraine and working on his dentist's license, which will give him the right to work.

My brother and I are really close. I think that we have just the perfect relationship. Some people could say that six years of difference in age is a lot. Actually, I agree. When I was born, he was preparing for first grade of elementary school. When I was in the first grade, he had begun to be interested in girls. But it didn't matter. We always try to support each other as much as possible, even now, when we live on different continents, four thousand miles apart, an eight-hour flight on the plane. Almost every day I'm receiving and sending e-mail for him. Once a week we talk on the phone. I ask him for some advice, and he also asks me.

This summer I had a chance to visit Bohdan in Ukraine. I was so excited about that trip. All eight hours in the plane I was thinking about how it was going to be. How would it be to meet my brother after two years? What was I going to ask him first? The words "how", "what", "why" just terrorized my brain.

When the plane touched down, I started to look out the window. I was trying to find my brother. In the back of my head I knew that this was impossible. But my feelings took over. My parents and I quickly got out of the plane. The time in the line for passport control was just terrible. Finally I got my bags. My sixty-three-pound bag was heavy. But in that moment when I noticed my brother in the crowd, those pounds were nothing compared with my feelings. I quickly set up my camera for some sports shots, grabbed my bag and started to walk towards my brother. I pushed the button on the camera and held my finger for a short while, until the camera began to rewind the film. One more moment. We hugged each other, took a deep breath and froze up. Those fifteen or twenty seconds of life are just unforgettable.

The first four nights we didn't go to bed. We just sat in the kitchen, talking until four or five in the morning. We were sharing information, events, and the personal history of each of us. Every small thing, every event was discussed. During the three weeks in Ukraine I had such a good time. It was a high quality vacation.

But the hands on the clock don't stop, even for a moment. Vacation was almost over. At this time only sad feelings attacked my brain. I don't know why, but that time of waiting to go back to the US passed really fast. Probably I didn't want to leave my brother. A few more hours, minutes and I said "Good Bye. I'll see you."

Eight hours in the airplane and another life waiting for me. Vacation became history. I don't know why, but I am really missing my brother.

Roman Kshysyak is studying Business Administration.

The Chance

by

Nattawut Ratanapongsakorn

"I loved to teach the foreign students, and I never got bored when I taught them." The silence of the living room in my neat-looking apartment is interrupted by these words spoken by Marian Gutzmer. Understanding, helping people and kindness are the personality traits that assisted her in her successful teaching career. Twenty-one years of teaching English for the immigrant students never made her feel tired of her job. On the contrary, all those years made her love teaching even more; it has become part of her soul.

The room is quiet, except for the

sound of the busy traffic on the road, the wind blows heavily, and the rain outside can still sneak inside the room. She closes her eyes and tells me that a teaching career caught her interest when she was a senior in high school. A major in English Literature for a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree at the University of Rochester helped her obtain her goal to become an English teacher of the American-born students at Greece Olympia High School for seven years. How did she get started teaching ESL and why did she like teaching the foreign students, I wonder.

Having her children made her take twelve years away from her job. She goes on with her story. "I just wanted to raise my children myself, and my husband agreed with me. We believe children need to be close to their parents as much as they can," she utters in a soft voice, which, full of love, spreads out all over the room. Loving and caring for her family make the memories flow into my mind as I realize how much I needed to be with my parents when I was a child.

Then one day her neighbor, who was the President of the parents' association, asked her to tutor in English a Vietnamese student, Diep, who had just moved to the United States four months ago. She started out by volunteering for two mornings a week at Fairport High School. "I had so much fun tutoring this kid and discovered a lot of interesting things about him." Her radiant smile all the time when she talks about Diep helps me feel how cheerful she is.

In the late nineteen eighty's, more aliens moved into the US. One after another, pupils started packing up her tutor class. Finally, the counselors decided to establish the English as a Second Language class, making her,

the volunteer part-time tutor, a full-time English as a Second Language teacher. "I'm glad that I had the chance to be an ESL teacher, and I had a lot of fun, learning new cultures and new things," she says, while picturing the memories in her mind simultaneously. A quiet spreads out all over the place.

Breaking into the silent moment, her question catches me by surprise. "Do you know what was happening to Diep?" she asks me, knowing that I don't have anything else to ask her. She starts to smile and says, "His brother left for another state, so Diep had to live in the apartment in Fairport alone. Shortly, the apartment closed out and he didn't have any place to live. Then I decided to talk to my family and took him to live in our house." Her face is full of joy. She continues, "I thought he was going to live with us about three or four months, and then after he found a new apartment, he could move out. But what happened was he lived with us about thirteen years and every one of us liked him." He was a hard worker and respectful toward everybody in her house. Intelligent, motivated, and enthusiastic were his attitude toward his future.

After all of her immigrant students graduated from Fairport High School, she started to look for new job as ESL teacher at another high school. Rush-Henrietta Senior High School was the place that accepted her as she requested. "I had a lot of immigrant students from many countries. Differences between cultures were not creating any problems for me. Students knew how to adapt to American culture, and I also had to adapt to their culture. I had a lot of fun." She sits at the same spot, no physical movement, picturing the old days.

Sixteen years with ESL kids at Rush-Henrietta Senior High School must not have been enough for her. "Retiring

wasn't easy for me. I still miss teaching, all my friends at school who aren't retired, and all of my immigrant students who are still in high school." Sadness comes along with her soft voice, as she utters her words from her heart.

"So, do you have other reasons other than having a lot of fun, learning new cultures and new things?" I try to eliminate the silence and sadness, which are covering all the room now, by asking more about her favorite job. Also, I want to know what she thinks about foreign students.

"Well, all of my foreign students were appreciative, respectful, intelligent. More than that, they were motivated and enthusiastic about their future. On the other hand, some American-born kids don't have all these qualities especially, the respectful attitude toward their teachers." Answering proudly, she makes me sure that she really likes teaching immigrant students. Yet, she continues, "They all want to learn more and more. I believe they will be successful in their lives, families and careers, and I believe you'll be one of those successful immigrants, Nattawut."

Observing her reaction and emotion, I can say she really liked being an ESL educator. As she talked about the old days, it seemed to be just last week for her. I was impressed by how deeply she felt about her students and how pleased she was with them. They were lucky to have her as their teacher, too. The influence of immigrant students will be an everlasting memory for Marian Gutzmer.

Nattawut Ratanapongsakorn is a student from Thailand. His major is Business.

Swimming by Leo Lin

As a child I always dreamed one day I would step onto the first place block with a gold medal on my chest in the Olympics. I started swimming when I was six years old in China. I swam for eight years and then my family immigrated to the US. In the past six years I was forced to stop swimming because of my communication problems. But now, I am on the MCC swim team!

While I was in China, I went to the GiaQu County Training School to Swim. The school provided a study program, housing, food and facilities for us. Only those who did well in the first four years could move on to the next level at the City Training School. Those who did not make it had no choice but to quit and return to regular school to continue their education. Some could skip this second school and jump straight up to the State Training School. After the state school, the next level was the State Professional Team. Here education was optional; all we did was swim in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Finally, there was the National Team in Beijing, the capital. The team picked the top swimmers and provided them with anything they wanted.

A big difference between the Chinese and American systems of swimming was the measurement of the pools. In China, we used the metric system and all pools were twenty-five or fifty meters long. In the US, most are twenty-five or fifty yards long. This causes time conversion difficulties.

Another significant difference is the concept of the team. All the swim teams I was in were broken down into little groups. In the lower level, the coach usually had large amounts of swimmers

to coach, but once you move up to the higher level, there are fewer swimmers in the group. However, we never trained as a team in either the lower or higher levels. Everyone on the team only cared about himself or herself, and that included me, too. Because of the system of the strongest, we had to compete with each other in order to move up to the next level. When we went out to compete, all we cared about was how we each performed. And what “I” should do to get the higher-level coach interested in me.

Now I am swimming for MCC, and our team is wonderful. During the meets or practices, everybody on the team is helping each other and pushing each other up to the top. We care about each other; we have tried to build a team, not just the individual. My coach said, “Fight for a good fight. In order to be a team, we all should do our jobs as individuals, but if one of us fails, we all fail, so we should help each other in order to help ‘yourself.’”

Leo Lin is majoring in Business.

Learning Foreign Languages *by Mirnes Biscevic*

I walked into the classroom and said, “Gdje je moje sjediste.” The students just stared at me. My heart sank; I did not know what to expect next.

It was my first day of school in Germany. My family and I had left Sanski Most, Bosnia because of the war. As a ten-year-old child, I did not recognize where I was. When I asked where I should sit, speaking my natural language, Bosnian, the students did not understand. They just looked at me. I felt very isolated. However, the teacher motioned me to sit in the front row, which was next to a girl. My feelings

were so bad at this time that I thought going back to Bosnia would be better even though there was a war going on.

My parents also had a hard time being in a different country. Both were without a job. My father, however, helped us a lot. He had lived and worked in Germany in 1979; therefore, he spoke the language fluently. After a few weeks, he got a job as a truck driver, and my brother, my sister and I started to attend school.

My first day of school in this new country as a fifth grader was the worst day of school that I ever had. I was scared. I felt like a totally different person in the class. And I was, just because of the language barrier. All the classmates looked at me like I came from a completely different world. They did not accept me like a normal student. Many made fun of me, but some were really nice. The teacher was nice as well. She told me to be self-confident and to always be positive.

The classmates tried to talk to me, but I could not understand them. I tried to communicate with them as much as possible. During the lunch breaks we came out together and played soccer. Most of them played for a club. Playing soccer with them was great fun. I could tell that some of them played for a club because they were very good. They had good ball skills. I was not bad either. All the time that I spent playing soccer with them was truly enjoyable. One day they asked me to go to one of their practices. I did not know what to say; I was speechless! I had never played soccer before for a club team. However, I was so happy about it that I said yes right away.

With a year spent in Germany, my language improved a great deal. Yet it was still hard for me to communicate with my classmates. At the same time

now, I had to learn the English language as well. I could not believe that I had to learn two different languages at the same time! But it was exciting learning about the different cultures. Soon I found out that the German language was much more difficult than the English language.

The reason why I learned the language so quickly was because I was the only one from Bosnia in the class. Nobody could speak my language with me, so I had to force myself to talk with people in German. Many teachers could not believe how fast I learned. My English was not that good, but I gave it my best. I was pressured to learn German as quickly as possible because it was the common language and then I lived in Germany. As a matter of fact, now I speak the German language better than my own Bosnian language.

Learning different languages is a lot of fun, but it also can be very stressful. All the rules are different, phrases change, and descriptions of things are different. However, it is very good to know how to speak at least one different language. It can really come in handy. When I went to a German restaurant in France with my family, nobody had to help us with reading the menu. We never know when it can be helpful in our future. And now I’m studying in English and playing on the MCC soccer team.

Mirnes Biscevic is a Physical Education major.

Best friend

by Jeff Yu

I used to live with many people, and I know many people from many places around me such as in school, in the neighborhood, and in my family. But only one person is deep in my memory. He is my best friend. We went to the same elementary school and high school, and during those school years we built up a true friendship by trusting each other and helping each other. Our friendship gave us our chance to build our future together.

I remember he was little and he was very thin. I always picked on him. He was like a match; I could blow him to the ground. I still remember the first time I saw him was in school. School break was almost over; I was going to be a new elementary school student. Many parents were taking their kids to the elementary school to register. Of course my mother was doing the same thing.

Very early that morning, I had a bad dream. My uncle was buying candy for me when suddenly a big eagle claw took away the candy from my hand, and I jumped up and tried to grab the candy, but when I did that I crashed my head into my mother's head. She started yelling, "Get up, we are going to elementary school."

I did not say anything from the house all the way to the school. My mother and I sat on the bench outside of the main office waiting to be called. I was so bored and turned my head looking everywhere. When I stopped looking, I tried relaxing my head from the repeating motion, and I heard my mother calling my aunt's name. I put up my head and saw a thin boy standing by my aunt, and I felt that he was very happy. He looked at my face and gave me a smile, but I did not have that spirit.

When they called my name, my mother waved her hand, and we went into the room. This was the first time I saw him, but I did not know then that he was going to be my friend for life.

On the first day of school we were in the same class. I was so bored that I put my head on the desk. Someone put his hand on my shoulder; I lifted my head and saw him standing in front of me. He handed over a piece of candy to me, and said, "Friend?" In the first thought I was very happy my dream was coming true.

Then I said, "O.K., we can be friends." From that moment we were friends, but not like now, best friends.

It was a rainy day; every student had their parent to pick them up. Only he and I were parentless. We waited for our parents for about an hour, but we did not see them coming. I was starting to complain. "Why aren't my parents coming?" I saw him standing by the window, looking outside. I walked over to him and said, "Your parents will be here soon."

He turned around and said, "Do you think something happened to my parents when they were on their way here?" Then he turned back and kept looking out the window. In that moment I felt ashamed. I was complaining, and he was worrying. Compared to him, I was nothing. After that he was a star in my heart.

After three years we both graduated from elementary school, and we went to the same high school. Although I am a college student now, I miss my high school life, because that was the best time in my lifetime. Every time I look at the picture of him and me, I feel I am back to high school again. I was not a person who liked to go to outside; this is why I never played sports during the

high school years. Anyway, he helped me to see the real world.

It was Halloween; many kids went out for candy. I was staying at home watching TV, and I did not think about going out with anybody. About 7:00 P.M. I heard someone knocking on my door, and I opened the door to I see him holding some color sprays. He said, "Come on. Let's go have some fun!"

I said, "That's O.K.. I never go out on Halloween." But he grabbed my hand and pulled me out of my house.

He took me to his uncle's party. His uncle had a big house; many neighbors were there acting like ghosts and many kids I knew in my high school. They were having a great time. He threw me a can of spray paint and said, "Let's party!" From that party I got more friends and went out a lot more often than before.

We were the best of friends, and we often went to the dance club. He was a good dancer; he had talent. Usually, I didn't like to dance, but after his "unfriendly" help he changed me. He wanted me to come with him every time he had a practice. One day, I went with him as usual. I sat in a chair and watched him dancing. That day was a little bit different than before. Not his clothes, not his shoes, not the ways he moved his body and definitely not the music. It was this girl; I had never seen her before. She was very beautiful. He danced with her.

After practice I asked him who that girl was dancing with him. He told me that she had just come, and today was her first day at practice. He was kind and understood why I asked him. The next time he wanted me to dance with her. I was totally shocked at the moment because I was not prepared. He told me to go ahead and not to think too much.

So I kind of staggered to in front of her. I closed my eyes, and I did dance with her, and this is how I got my first girl friend. Recently I have found out that was a plan. He just wanted me to have a girl friend. If I had never had a best friend like him, I would never have had that great high school life.

We are thinking about our friendship, and it could bring us to somewhere in the future as friends or as a team. Two years ago I moved to Warsaw, because my father had a new business over there. Although we had not seen each other for two years, we were still in touch. I have written thousands of letters to him and he, to me. He is a computer programmer. We are thinking about having our own business after college. He would like to have a computer business and dance club. Once he sent me a future plan. It was a monthly schedule. He told me how he was saving money every month and how many days he was working. He said it is our first step in our future plan. We are going to build our foundation for our future business. I like his plan and I have sent him my monthly schedule too. I trust him and he trusts me too. Together we will have a wonderful future.

Jeff Yu, an Engineering Science student, comes from China.

Starting Over by Stanka Arkulin

A few days ago I interviewed Emina, a Bosnian immigrant who came to this country six years ago with her husband and two sons. Because of the terrible war that was raging in Bosnia at that time, they had to leave their home and everything they loved behind.

I chose her for my interview because she is a very kind and wise woman from whom I could get full and interesting answers to my questions. Namely, I wanted to find out a little bit more how she felt about her new life here compared to the old one in Bosnia.

I began our conversation by asking what coming to America meant for her. She hesitated for couple of minutes. Then she said, "Landing in the States brought another 'war' to us, although we fight different battle now. Dealing with a foreign language, new customs and life style was very stressful at the very beginning. However, we haven't been alone. I will never forget how the US government took care of us. They organized English language courses where we learned basic reading and writing skills, as well as many interesting details about American culture." While I was listening to her, I recalled when I used to be in the same position during the Croatian war, depending on someone's help.

"What was the most difficult thing you had to face?" I continued.

Suddenly, the tone of her voice became lower, and I could see sadness on her face. She answered, "Hmm....," she shook her head. "The hardest thing definitely was understanding that we had to start all over again. I was forty, my husband was forty-five, and we had never spoken a word in English before. My Bosnian college degree wasn't accepted here. Therefore, instead of being an accountant, I had to do low-level jobs. I was working hard, taking care of my family and studying at the same time. Sometimes, I felt like I couldn't make it."

It seems to me that lots of immigrants are faced with similar problems. Many of them can't perform the same jobs they did at home, and they miss that.

"What do you miss the most?" I asked.

"I miss lots of things," she replied. "I miss my family the most, my parents and my sister. I was very close to them, and we used to visit each other very often. Unfortunately, we can't do that anymore. We talk over the phone occasionally. Sometimes, I even miss small things that might be funny for you like real Bosnian coffee or some specific candies that you can't find here."

While she was talking about this I could hear nostalgia in her voice. I know from my experience that most of the food products and cooking ingredients are completely different here. It took me some time to adapt. I asked her how she managed to make the transition from old to new cooking habits. She said, "At the very beginning it was hard because, remember, I had problems with language, so I didn't know the names of different ingredients. The wrapping was different too. Furthermore, I couldn't find some specific seasonings, so I had to look for a replacement. At the same time, I enjoyed American grocery stores because of their size, variety of offerings and service approach. That is definitely one of the things I like here. I even learned lots of recipes that are really good. Next time I can tell you some of them if you are interested."

Suddenly, I noticed that it was getting late, and that Emina had to go, so I asked her one last question. "Are you happy here or do you think about going back some day?"

She replied with a smile on her face, "Well, six years after landing, we own a house, and both my husband and I have decent jobs." She is working as a waitress now. "And our sons attend good universities. This year all of us will be accepted for American citizenship at

a naturalization ceremony. We definitely want to stay in this country, enjoying our 'American dream'. Our journey is over, and we won't have to start over again - ever!"

I enjoyed meeting with Emina in my apartment that afternoon. I felt very comfortable talking to her. The most important thing I was amazed by and learned from this interview was how a person with strong will, commitment and hard work can achieve almost everything. Although faced with difficulties, this country with its endless opportunities allowed them to start over from nothing and make a decent life.

Stanka Arkulin, from Croatia, is majoring in Hotel Technology.

An Unforgettable Birthday

by *Tatiana Velloso*

What can be more fun than celebrating your birthday with all your friends, being the center of attention, your relatives giving you presents? I simply love to celebrate birthdays. Not only mine, but I think it is wonderful to make someone feel special on the day they were born.

It was the year of 1998. October 18th, my birthday. I woke up breathing the satisfaction of being eighteen years old, when in my country you become independent! It was a beautiful day, not too hot, not too cold. It was Sunday and we know that Sundays are the days that you can do absolutely nothing. You know the days, sit and watch TV, rent movies, eat and wait for Monday.

But that Sunday was different, for me at least. I woke up and looked in the

mirror saying: "Happy Birthday to you! " I went downstairs and my mom gave me a big hug. "Finally, you're eighteen now. How do you feel?"

"I feel fine, just fine!" I said. Then at 11:00 a.m. my cousin called, inviting me to go to a picnic. At first I refused because I wanted to stay home to help my mom. The party was going to start at 6:00 pm. and I wanted to be there. But I decided to go.

My cousin came to pick me up at noon and we went. On the way to the picnic she turned to me and said: "I had a bad dream last night. You were shot and then you died." After staring at each other for a couple of seconds, she said, "You know that this means that you will have a long life!" This is a superstition that some people have. When they dream that a person died, it means this person is going to have a long life. The next minute we were talking about something completely different. The conversation of the dream was forgotten.

A picnic in the park, not the way I would have chosen to spend the afternoon of my birthday. It started to rain at 4:30 p.m. I really would have liked to be home instead of at this picnic, in the rain. At 5:00 they finally sang happy birthday to me and we left. "What kind of birthday party is this - where the guests arrive before the host? " was the comment from my friends while laughing at me. They were already at my house.

"Excuse me. I was having some fun" I replied. So we started to play cards and listen to music and more people started to come in. That was the only party where I had all of my real friends around. Why is it that there's always someone that you don't know at your own party? We were having fun. We sang happy birthday; I even remember

my wish when I blew out the candle. Then we danced, ate the cake and talked.

It was around 8:00 P.M. when I saw my father arriving with my sister. They parked on the other side of the street, and I started to cross the road to help them bring things from the car. It was raining and some friends and family were standing in the front yard. I crossed the street with a sweater on my head and didn't see the car that was coming.

The car hit me on the left side, or I hit the car because it was actually my fault. My head hit the windshield and even now I can remember my thoughts perfectly. I wasn't afraid or anything. I was thinking, " Why me, why today?" Too much for just one person. I really thought that I was dead while lying on the pavement. But after a minute or two I woke up again with everybody around me. People were crying, my sister was yelling so much. I thought I had broken my left leg because I could not feel it. When I sat up, the first thing I said was, "Where's my shoe?" It was my favorite tennis shoe and it had flown away when the car hit me.

My family carried me inside and put me on the couch. My godmother came to me, crying and asking if I was O.K.. I was fine, of course, just a little bit unsure at the moment about how this had happened. My mom didn't know what to do because everybody was still there, and I had just ruined my own party.

They took me to the hospital and did all the X-rays and everything else. I was just fine. And the doctor that took care of me that night was the same doctor that healed my broken arm when I was seven years old. In fact, then I broke my arm at a birthday party, too. I thought it was a big coincidence so many years

later, the same doctor.

When I got home, everybody had already left. It was then that my mom, my dad and my sister started to cry. I was trying to be tough, not crying. But when I went to bed that feeling of relief, knowing that I was alive, was pretty nice. That was the most incredible experience of my life. I changed a lot from that day on.

I guess after all my cousin was right. "Long life!"

Tatiana Velloso is a student from Brazil. She is studying Travel and Tourism.

From a Distance

by Elizabeth Rodriguez

*"Good-bye, happy homeland, dear paradise
Anywhere that the fate in its furor impels me.
Your sweet name will flatter my hearing."*

~ Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda

The homeland is more than the earth that you walk on or where you were born. It is part of your life, and when you decide to leave it, you have to take the remembrances as a lifebelt because melancholy can be dangerous waters to travel in exile. I am a little sick from nostalgia; it is not only for my country but also for all that I left there: my family, my friends and my neighbors.

To me the memories of my Cuban neighborhood are as a strong smell of the sea, as wet reeds and sunny people that are mixed in my mind like a preserved image of my native land, so distant and so close at the same time. Of course, when you remember your past life, a comparison is inevitable. How different can they be, the life here in Rochester, a little city in the USA, and the life in my neighborhood in Havana?

I re-take the memories and transfer again in time. My childhood takes me to a street in Havana, one of the popular streets in the Cerro. I can hear the echo of steps on my sidewalk and see the queues of the people when they buy milk, the neighboring greeting and asking about your health. My street is a big family where you don't need an invitation to enter a home, to sit and converse, or where you can even request a little sugar or salt because you forgot to buy some yesterday. And that is not all. In my neighborhood you can always find cooperation and support. With them, you breathe and feel the love.

I can see with hindsight as the criollos dishes are going from home to home, an age-old custom of bringing something delicious: congris or black beans to your neighbors to taste how you cook. You know the name and the life of everybody, which means that privacy is impossible there because we are completely mixed. That is why the people that live in my quarter in Cuba aren't only my neighbors; they are my family, too. My pupils are wet when I start to remember, but it doesn't matter because if all these memories hurt me in the distance, it is a sweet pain and I don't want to be cured. I must remember everything to continue to be alive.

Now I have been living in the same place for almost two years. Fairport is a beautiful little town in the suburbs of Rochester where I feel comfortable and unrushed. In contrast with my Havana, here we don't have sidewalks because the people don't walk; they 'run' in their cars all the time. I don't even know who is living in the apartment next to me. It is true that my neighbors are polite, but it is a kind of cold courtesy that hits me; so our relations are very impersonal and distant. I assume that they are only scared. I don't know for

what reason. Maybe they are scared to lose their privacy, but they are so lonely. Where do the people hide the love here?

Since we want to receive tolerance from others, we must be so tolerant too. We must also consider that the idiosyncrasy of the people defines their lives. That is why the culture shock is big when you go outside of your country. Despite the truth, we have to learn the good things from other points of view and unquestionably what the people have here is agreeable, too, but for me, the price is too high. To obtain more privacy, they are losing the feeling of being part of a community. I still miss my Cuban neighbors and that will be forever. They are irreplaceable and unforgettable.

Elizabeth Rodriguez is from Cuba. She is majoring in Chemical Engineering.

Superstition

by Yanfang Huang

In elementary school, our teacher told us a tragic story about superstition. It was a true story that once happened in ancient China.

Many years ago, there was a flood caused by the Zhang River every year. Many people believed the story that "witches" told them. When the God of the river couldn't get a beautiful girl to marry him, he angrily turned over the river and caused the flood. Because of this, a witch and the local government asked people to send them money for a wedding feast, for sending a beautiful girl to marry the God of the river. Each year, a witch would bring several officials to search for an attractive girl from a poor family since such a family didn't have money to bribe them.

On the ceremony day, a beautiful young girl, wearing a white long wedding suit, slowly got out of the sedan chair, full of tears on her face. At the same time, an old woman was struggling towards her, mournfully calling her name. The girl turned her face to the old woman, trying to reach her. "Mom, save me! Dad, save me!" The miserable cries affected all the people around her. But the guides separated the girl from her parents. They put her on a grass mat and threw her into the river. At first, the mat floated. But when it moved to the center of the river, it sank with the girl. The girl's parents staggeringly ran to the edge of the river. Seeing their daughter drowning in the river and not being able to save her, they cried endlessly and their hearts broke.

Year after year, many pretty girls were thrown into the river. The poor people couldn't resist the feudal officials, so they fled from their homeland. This terrible thing happened every year until a strong governor came. His name was called "Xi Manbao."

When the time for the annual wedding ceremony came, Xi and his attendants arrived at the river. The local officials and a witch hurriedly stepped forward to greet him. The witch was already seventy years old. Several disciples wearing silk dresses followed her.

Xi said, "Bring the bride to me." When he saw the sad girl full of tears standing there, he turned to the old witch and said, "This girl is not pretty enough. She can't satisfy the God of the river. Please go and tell the God of the river that I will choose another lovely girl for him and send her to him another day." Then his parties raised the old witch and threw her into the river. After waiting a little while, Xi moved toward the chairs of the officials, "Why didn't the witch come back?

Would you please go and see what was going on?" Now his parties threw the chairs of the officials into the river.

Xi waited a long time and didn't see the chair of the officials coming back, so he asked the rest of the officials, "Would you please go to the river and tell them to come back quickly?" The rest with their pale faces were scared. They threw themselves on their knees immediately and kowtowed until blood came out.

"Ok, I think that the God of the river has let them stay there with him. Get up you all and go home!"

From that day, people began to realize that there was no such thing as the God of the river's marriage. The witch and the corrupt officials had made it all up. Seeing Xi's punishment, nobody dared to tell the story again.

Next Xi organized the people and excavated twelve canals. These canals led the water into the fields to irrigate the crops. Since that time, they had a great harvest every year.

The story ended with happiness. But the prologue was miserable. I couldn't understand why people believed in a superstition that would give the witches and corrupt officials a chance to get benefits from the poor. However, I admire Xi's wisdom, boldness and resolution. When he threw the witch and the chairs of the officials into the river, I laughed with tears. He fully drubbed this scum of a community. Without him, the superstition would have remained to kill more people.

"What was it like to be a medical doctor in Nicaragua?"

by María A. Gaitán

I love being a medical doctor! I decided to become one when I was a little girl. I used to play, thinking I was the smartest doctor in the whole world, saving everybody's life. At this time, I just thought about the romanticism of it. I did not realize the difference between my dream and reality, not even the amount of hard work I would have to do.

I studied in Managua, Nicaragua, in one of the two medical schools. I had to leave my family; I had to go to the "big city", and start studying as hard as I could. I still remember the anxiety during so many tests, the endless nights without sleep, but also the happiness when I saw my grades good enough to become a doctor. I was so excited! My biggest dream at last came true! But it was just the beginning of a new phase in my life.

During the time spent studying basics subjects, I started to build my expectations about what kind of doctor I wanted to be. I started to understand what it meant to be part of a team, who worked together with the only purpose of helping people in need. But, even though this is part of the job of a doctor, you cannot solve the endless problems of poverty, hunger, hopelessness of thousands and thousands of people you meet.

Until now, I think I have talked about the feelings of every doctor all over the world. But being a doctor in Nicaragua was certainly different from some countries as U.S.A.

Nicaragua is a small country in

Central America. Most of its inhabitants are poor, with no health insurance because there are a lot of unemployed. At the end of medical school, I had to go “somewhere” in my country to spend two years of obligatory social service. That was the law for everybody. Otherwise, we could not get our diplomas. The government sent me to a very poor town in the mountains. I was not afraid of the hard work because I was aware of it. What scared me was that in the country we had a terrible time with war in the mountains. The place where I had to go was a strategic place for the people who were against the government. You can imagine what kind of time I was going to have!

In this place I met very modest and kind people. They made me feel comfortable from the very first moment I arrived. They gave me the best place they had: a small shack, a hammock for a bed, with a fire close enough to keep me warm and to send away the mosquitoes. My food for almost six months was rice, beans, tortillas, and if we were lucky, a piece of cheese and a glass of milk once a week. I can tell you, this kind of food was a banquet. Sometimes they only ate tortillas with salt. They substituted milk with coffee for everybody. You can imagine the amount not only for children, but also adults with malnutrition. Most of the people were peasants, with a high illiteracy level. This made my work more difficult because they had a lot of superstitions and beliefs. For example, they believed some diseases were consequences of punishments, or simply they did not believe in doctors, medicines or vaccines. We also did not have enough instruments and materials. I did my job as well as I could.

I remember many experiences, but one especially. I was working at night, waiting for somebody shot or wounded, or for a woman in labor, as was usual.

On this day, I was so scared, because early in the morning a fight had taken place between the governments and the rebels. We had received many men who were shot in the legs, arms and chest. Our little hospital was very crowded with their families. That night I tried to be calm because I was responsible for the hospital, the patients, and the workers. I needed to be calm for any decision I would have to make.

That night, I heard a woman screaming outside, asking for a doctor. “Help me. I need a doctor! I am bleeding! I think I am going to die!” the woman said. I left what I was doing and went to see this woman, who was pregnant. Immediately I knew she was in labor. What I did not know at this moment was that she was going to have twins! With the help of a nurse, we went into the labor room, and immediately I saw a little head coming out! The first baby was a boy and he was okay.

At that moment we heard a loud sound outside. It was a bomb and the lights went off! The woman started screaming again, I touched her, and to my surprise I felt her big abdomen. I thought the worst. “Oh my God, she is bleeding inside!” When I checked her, I felt something moving inside. “She is going to have another baby!” I said to the nurse. What I did not tell you yet is this was my first time delivering twins. I knew what to do because I had studied it in books. But believe me, there is a huge difference between reading it and doing it! The nurse lighted a candle, and I explained to the patient what we were going to do. She was scared, and so was I, but also very brave. She was young, and it was her first pregnancy. The second baby was a beautiful girl. Thank God, they did not have any complications. I felt I had been born again myself when everything finished. I felt so happy for them! ... and for me also.

As you can see, it was not easy. After I finished the first six months, the government sent me to another poor health center. Even though I was in the city, I continued working with the same kind of problems, but with a list a little bit larger. I treated patients with a lot of social problems, such as drug addiction, teenagers’ pregnancy, prostitution, malnutrition, domestic violence, and the worst part, worked with government officials who did not care about these kinds of problems.

At this moment I have to say, I had a lot of good and bad experiences. All of them have not been written down in books. They made me grow as a professional, but also as a human being. I am so thankful to all these people who allowed me to work with and for them. I know I was able to help when they needed me. I know I was right when I decided to be a doctor. I just love it!

Maria Gaitan is from Nicaragua. Her goal is to become a medical doctor here, so she is working hard to improve her English.