
ESOL VOICES

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Contents

- What Does Hair Mean to You? *Chioma Ndukwe*
Shakila, *Bezhan Durrani*
The Mines, *Kadiatu Yatabarry*
A Polygamous Home, *Martha M. Kamara*
The Mutilation of Bade, *Saba G. Abay*
An American Journalist in Jordan, *Ahmed Almasarweh*
Cultural Variations, *Shabir Ferdows*
Tidy Cities vs. Untidy Cities, *Serra Karadeniz*
Paterson, *Carlito Blanco*
Apostille, *Maxim Fomine*
The Power of Faith, *Yevgeniya Wurthmann*
Jinn, *Ahmed Rashed*
I Will Survive. I Am a Warrior. *Daniel Branca*
Gambling – a Destructive Craving, *Anonymous*
The Garden of Love, *Adriana Lara López*
The Gentlest Hands Ever, *Yevgeniya Wurthmann*
Tears of a Mother, *Burcu Akcer*
The Decision, *Erika J. Ramirez*
The Longest Ride Ever, *Lija Dzounsa*
Friday, *Itka Melo*
Nightmare Message, *Kenan Ahmeti*
Sia's Coming to America, *Kadiatu Yatabarry*
Crooked Red Nose, *Reda B. Juodeikis*
Stolen Feelings, *Rostyslav Fedysiv*
The Call, *Cristina Nedelcu*
Love You and Miss You Daddy, *Ramya Devarajulu*
Want to Be a Millionaire? *Farah Butler*
Why Don't You Grab Your Pot Lid, Instead of a Wheel?, *Jawon Park*
Christmas, *Galina Kusmiy*
Gone at the Train Tracks, *Jesus Duprey*
The Right Directions, *Sthefanie R. DeSouza*
The Replacement, *Svetlana Butova*

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



What Does Hair Mean to You?

By Chioma Ndukwe

“Ok guys, let’s go shave our heads,” my father said as he came into the living room. “Very funny, Daddy,” I laughed as I went across the room to give him a hug. His facial expression did not change. “Are you serious?” “Yep,” he said.

There are three tribes in Nigeria where I come from, the Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa. I am an Ibo girl. My name is Chioma, which means good God. Ndukwe is my surname. You see unlike my father, I grew up in the city of Lagos where the English language was my first language, and then the Ibo language. When it came to my culture, nothing was taken for granted. My parents told us again and again to always remember where we came from and that we should never forsake our culture, no matter what.

My Father had grown up in a very rural setting. Although he had several elder brothers and sisters, he still had to wake up early every morning, and cut the grass with hoes and a cutlass, fetch pails of water from a river or a well, clean their room, and since he was the youngest, his elder brothers made him do most of their chores. They all had to do very hard chores but this is what they were expected and most times willing to do. They were used to it. They were always there to help out their parents and the people in their society, especially the elders. Neighbors were considered family, and family always came first. Everyone worked together, ate together, and even at night all the children in the community would gather around the home of an elder, who would tell them a story, usually folktales.

There are a lot of beliefs and a lot of things people value in my culture but this particular one about death struck

me. We believe that when a loved one dies, certain female members of the extended family are expected to cut their hair. We believe that a woman’s hair is one of most valuable things to her, so when a loved one passes away, the woman, as a sign of her love for that person, shaves her hair. It was only unmarried female relatives that were to cut their hair, and of course the wife of the person. The other married females didn’t have to.

My maternal grandfather had died, and a couple of months later he was buried. We lived far away, so we were not close to him, and we were very young when he died. I was only seven. Days after his funeral, my father arrived home from work. That is when I learned for the first time about shaving our heads. It took the whole household about half an hour to get me into the car that evening to go to the barber. I cried so hard even though my parents were trying to make me laugh. I just did not understand why I had to cut my hair whenever any of my relatives died. I told my father that night, “Dad, just make sure that no one else dies!” He laughed out loud and replied, “Ok, sweetie.”

I am older now, and I have convinced my parents to let me keep my hair next time. I haven’t shaved my hair since that one time. I respect my culture and our beliefs, but this is the one thing I feel strongly about and that I am not comfortable with. I am not condemning it, and I understand where they are coming from. I just feel that you shouldn’t have to shave your head to prove you love someone. As long as you know it and that person knows it, that’s all that matters.

Chioma Ndukwe, a student from Nigeria, is majoring in Accounting.

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Shakila

By Bezhan Durrani

While the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan, they became notorious internationally for their treatment of women. Women were forced to wear the *burqa* in public. They were not allowed to be educated. They were not allowed to work. They were not allowed to be treated by male doctors unless accompanied by a male relative. There were many other laws that were enforced by the Taliban, which were not based on Islamic beliefs as most people thought, but based on their ignorant personal beliefs.

This is the story of twenty-four year old Shakila from Kabul. She was one of the victims who suffered from the baseless beliefs and laws toward women in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime.

“The Taliban regime was like one of the most violent horror movies. With each scene, your heart beat rises and you regret watching it. But when you see these violent and horrifying scenes in real life, you regret living in this world,” Shakila said.

Obviously, she was still suffering from those unpleasant and horrifying memories as she was responding to my questions. She was raised in a very educated family. Both of her parents were always engaged in fighting for the eradication of ignorance by teaching in one of the high schools in Kabul. Her parents kept teaching enthusiastically despite the ongoing civil war, but as the Taliban took over the country, and deprived females from education and work, her mom had to sit home while her dad was still teaching. He had to adopt the new rules and regulations such as growing a big beard and wearing a turban.

“I was not upset about my mom losing her job, but I couldn’t believe that women were deprived of education and work,” Shakila continued.

As time went by, this brutal regime came up with new unpleasant laws and regulations in order to create fear in people’s hearts. As they were saying, “the face of a woman is a source of corruption” for men not related to them, all women were forced to wear the *burqa* when coming out of their house. The one without a *burqa* would be in violation of Taliban law and would be punished according to their law. Shakila had never worn a *burqa* before, but now she had no choice but to wear one in order to get out of the house and attend a secret home school in their town.

Since our topic of discussion was female lives under the Taliban regime, she shared one of her pitiful memories that she won’t be able to forget for the rest of her life. “Thank God! Despite all the difficulties, I am still attending school, and I am hopeful for a brighter future.” These thoughts were floating in her mind while walking with the fear of getting caught by the Taliban for breaking their law by attending a secret school.

“It was a sunny afternoon, and the weather was unbelievably hot. I couldn’t breathe because of the hot weather and the burca I was wearing. I looked around to make sure there was no one near me, so I could pick my burca up and breathe. I didn’t see anyone behind me or anywhere close to me, so I picked up my burca. The fresh air felt good; I kept walking with my burca up. I heard footsteps getting closer to me, and before I knew it I was hit by something, twice on my back and once on my head. I woke up several hours later in the hospital with a bandage on my head. Later I found out my skull was cracked.”

She had been beaten with a leash by a Taliban patrolman for uncovering her face. “I had the scars and marks for some time and when they were cured, the scars and marks of those brutal actions of the Taliban still remained with me forever,” Shakila said.

She was not the only one who was beaten by the Taliban for uncovering her face. Many other women that she knew were beaten violently for minor violations of Taliban law such as not having a male accompanying them in public. But Shakila was brave enough not to give up. She continued her education secretly during the Taliban regime and finished high school. Now she is majoring in literature at the University of Kabul to become a teacher like her parents. “Life was tough, but I never lost hope. I am glad that I achieved my goals. I still have a long way to go.” Now she lives a successful life in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan.

Bezhan Durrani was a translator for the US military in Afghanistan. He is interested in Electrical Engineering.

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The Mines

By Kadiatu Yatabarry

When I was seven years old, my father took me and my brother to his job, where he spent most of his weekdays managing the diamond miners, since he was the General Manager. However, the day we went was his day off from work. We were ecstatic because for the first time we got to see a real diamond mine. It took an hour to get there, so we left home at around 4 in the evening. We packed some of our books, a few clothes, and our toothbrushes in our bags and we were on the way.

We were very excited and it was a

great feeling. I would be able to share our experiences at the mines with our classmates and friends. Most of my elder brothers and sisters had already been there because Dad was taking us there according to our ages. We had to be seven years old in order to go to the mines, and since my dad was having two or three children in a year, we always had an accomplice.

Unfortunately, the journey took more than two hours. My brother and I wanted to stop in some of the very small towns on the way or by the street vendors on the highway. Dad was a little reluctant at first, but he stopped. My brother bought a wooden truck and I picked out a doll made from hay and beads. We spent time between stops for some sightseeing and telling Dad about school. My brother started with his paranoia rants. He believed his teacher was out to get him and the next door neighbor kept dead children in her dark house sacrificing them. We spent half an hour arguing because he believed that the neighbor never kept the body; she kept just their hearts. I thought that he had been watching a lot of scary movies. He needed to stop and think about what he had just said.

We finally arrived at our destination, a big town called Yengema, where the National Diamond Mining Company (N.D.M.C.) was. It was almost 6 pm. The sun was setting and it started getting dark. There was electricity in the mines and the surrounding quarters. The rest of the town had light every eight hours, off for two hours and on again. My father parked underneath a big mango tree. We got out of the car and walked to a big hut. There was no light in the hut except the glimmer of orange from a kerosene lamp in the corner. A rickety old woman came from the corner and embraced my father. I was clutching my straw doll so hard that I could hear the stuffing inside crumble. She hugged

us and told us it was time for bed, and that we would have a big day tomorrow. My father told me that I was to sleep with Mamyahbou, the tiny old woman, and Hassan, my brother, to bunk in the boys' room. The old woman handed us a pail of water. We went to the back yard and brushed our teeth and it was time for bed.

I was awakened by the blacksmith hitting on metal objects around the corner, not far from where we were staying. I was still half asleep. It was only five in the morning. I had never been up that early before. I walked into the living room, and there was a group of about seven men, sitting in a circle with a cup of tea and some bread in each of their hands. They were eating breakfast. My brother walked up to me and said, "We are about to go Awa." That was my nick name that only my family and friends call me at home. I ran back to the room quickly and put on my clothes and came back outside. The old woman handed me a cup of tea and some bread. The bread was toasted dry but too dry for me, so I dumped it in my tea and swallowed as fast as I could.

We went outside and there were two donkeys with a cart hitched to them. All of us climbed onto the cart and it seemed like eternity on a narrow passage with eleven people on a cramped cart. I was terrified, so I buried my face in my dad's lap until we got there. We were in the middle of nowhere. The place looked deserted. My father helped my brother and me get off the cart. Everyone got off except for the old woman. We all waved good-bye to her and went inside a small cave. It was dark and cold. The further we went, the darker it got. The men took out their flashlights. We stopped after a while and the men took out their pick-axes and hacked at the wall.

After a while of watching them do that, I remember thinking this is not what I had in mind. I thought the caves would

be magical holes with sparkling stones on the walls. I was very disappointed at that moment so I turned around and looked at my Dad and said, "Daddy, this is not where we talked about coming; I would like to go to N.D.M.C." He looked at me and said, "Mama Awa, Hassan, come here and give me your hands. Just come with me; and close your eyes." We did as he asked.

Suddenly, we heard his voice say, "Open your eyes!" When we opened our eyes, what we saw and how we felt at that instance, we can never forget. With my mouth wide open in disbelief, I hugged my Dad and kept saying out loud, "Daddy, Hassan, oh God Almighty, Daddy? I love you, I love you and you are the man." My brother was speechless, so he ran and gave Dad a big hug with a smile that I would pay today to see. There were six or seven different minerals right in front of us and the shiniest sparkles that I have ever seen. There were different colors, shapes and sizes of diamonds. I felt like I was in heaven and that was just a taste. I never knew that there were so many different colors like brown, pink, crystal clear diamonds that existed on this earth. For a moment, I thought that I was going to lose my sight, from the reflections and the glittering shine of those gems.

He let us feel with our fingers the different kinds of gems. They were so light, smooth and slippery. We also went to other sites and it was time to go for lunch. I can still remember saying in my head whether we were going to see more and more. Then it was time to go home. This experience taught me a lot about patience, different kinds of minerals, caves and what a wonderful time I spent with the miners, my brother and especially my dad, Alhaji Abdul Karim. May his soul rest in peace. This is what makes this story a childhood memory that I will never forget.

Kadiatu Yatabarry comes from Sierra Leone. She is studying Hospitality Management/Hotel Technology.

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A Polygamous Home

By Martha M. Kamara

I was born in a polygamous home in Sierra Leone. My father, James, had many wives, but my mum was the eldest wife among the four. My mother, Adama, was a business woman, selling food and other commodities. She was given all the respect by the younger wives of my dad because she was kind to them. She treated the younger wives like her kids because she was not only the first wife, but also the oldest. She gave them whatever they asked of her. As a matter of fact, they did all the domestic work at home. I did nothing in the house but eat, bathe, then go to school.

My struggles started when I left my family for the boarding home of St. Joseph's Secondary School in Moyamba town in the year 1993. When I passed the Selective Entrance Examination, I was sent to a boarding School to do my high school. That was my first time away from my family for days, weeks, months. It was hard for me to live among people from a different background. Some of these students were from South Africa, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, but from different parts. They spoke different languages that I couldn't understand like Mende, Kissi, and Kono. Even though we were Sierra Leonean from the same country, we came from different provinces. I came from the Northern Province while others came from the South and Eastern Provinces. Those students that came from South Africa had their own languages and those from Sierra Leone's neighboring country Guinea spoke French. So

when all these students spoke, I was just looking at them producing sounds from their mouths with the movement of their lips because I had no clue about what they were saying. I started my language struggles; at home my family spoke the common language, Creole and temne. I was able to understand simple sentences in English, but was ashamed to speak for fear of being mocked by my classmates.

The school passed a law that we had to speak English, and anyone that was found speaking vernacular would be given a black spot, like a marble, and at the end of the day, the beholder would pay five cents. I became dumb for two reasons; First, I could not speak English because I didn't know how to say the words in English and second, if I spoke my vernacular, the black spot would be handed over to me and at the end of the day, I would have to pay my money. One day, I came to realize that keeping mute wouldn't solve my English struggle. I made up my mind and ignored all the mockeries made by my mockers, by giving them a deaf ear. "I would speak and let them laugh," I said to myself. I made up my mind to speak English, and I was never given the black spot any more. Still, the struggle continued with my English until twelfth grade.

When I took my General Certificate Examination Ordinary Level, I had an equivalent to 'C' in English, which was just an ordinary pass, but I had credits in English Literature, Bible Knowledge, Home Management and Typewriting. I wanted to do nursing, but I was not accepted in the major I wanted because I didn't satisfy the entrance requirements which were five credits including English and a Science subject. My struggle continued. I attempted English a second time and the results were confiscated and voided because of examination malpractices that took place in the schools that year.

I moved from the boarding home in Moyamba, to the city of Freetown in Sierra Leone to advance myself in education. Here I was faced with many more struggles; I had never learned how to cook, launder and iron my dresses. I had been used to my stepmothers doing all the domestic work for me, and in the boarding home where I was going to school, I didn't do much except sometimes help the senior girls on Saturdays in the kitchen or pick up the bits and pieces in the compound; that was it. In Africa most homes don't have electric or gas stoves. We use either firewood or charcoal and pots to cook our meals. In the rainy season, the wood and charcoal would be so wet that making a fire would make you want to give up. Even those that knew how to cook struggled a lot trying to start a fire. My eyes would be as red as crimson, running like a shower. My nose would be pouring like rain, and my stomach grumbling and rumbling like thunder because it needed some food. I would struggle to cook, but when I was done cooking the meals, nobody would want to eat because the meal would be loaded with salt. I would be the only one that ate my meal or I'd throw it in the garbage. The gossipers gossiped, giggled and made all kinds of remarks against me. They said, "Oh! She thought she was a queen, but she couldn't boil an egg." I would go in my bedroom, sit on my bed, hold my head and cry for not having learned how to cook at the time I had the opportunity to learn.

If you have the privilege and opportunities to learn something, do so, or else it will be too late. It is difficult to build Rome in a day. As the proverb says, "Make hay while the sun shines." Make good use of the time you have, for time is very precious.

Martha M. Kamara intends to study Nursing.

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The Mutilation of Bade

By Saba G. Abay

"I could not fight while the mutilation process was going on. How could a family do that to their own little girl?"

In her country, there was a season when you would be off from school because of a lot of rainfall happening in the area. That's why she was home from boarding school. She came from a big Christian family. There were thirteen girls living in the house at that time. "I knew something was going to happen to one of us because of the unusual things I saw in the house. There were lots of relatives, all preparing food for a feast." Her daddy had five wives. One of them told her there would be bond (circumcision in English) for one of them. She was the oldest girl in the house so she thought it might be for her. She told her sisters, "Let's go hide." They ran away to one of the aunties' house, but afterwards her aunts took them back to her house. They couldn't say no.

We met at MCC. Her name was Bade. Bade and I went to the library, the second floor, where there was no one but us. We sat down and started to talk about our husbands, that they don't change even living in America; they want us to do everything for them. It happened that Bade was from Africa, too. We had similar ideas about what men from Africa wanted with their women. We had a good time talking about our loved ones. Then I said, "Let's get to the point because I have limited time. I have to go pick up my kids from school." There were a lot of questions I was dying to ask about this topic. "Let's begin. Tell me about the time they circumcised you."

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath and smiled at me. Suddenly, Bade

said, “I was stripped naked.” “What? Hold on, hold on,” I said. I grabbed my pen and paper, and I said, “OK.” She started to talk non-stop; my eyes were open very wide. Her eyes were covered with a white piece of cloth because they didn’t want her to see what was going on around her. At that time many women were waiting to do the same thing after her, and they didn’t want anyone to know.

One of the women carried her on her back like a baby. She walked down the bumpy hill and laid her on the ground. Another woman sat behind her, like a chair, to support her back. I started thinking about myself. I couldn’t even remember when it happened to me. I wish I knew but I didn’t. I had never asked any questions to my mom or my grandmother. I think I was a little girl when they did it. But it was very sad. They shouldn’t do things like this to their girls, I thought.

There were two other women who held her hands and feet like she was going to have a baby. She was a 16 year old girl. “I was a virgin, having a circumcision.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I asked, “Why couldn’t you run away when they were doing that to you?” “I was scared,” Bade answered. She couldn’t fight while the mutilation process was going on because there were a lot of women.

According to her words, “The head of the society took a sharp razor like a surgical knife and sliced off my clitoris.” My body was shaking like it was being done it to me, and I wanted to cry or scream, but I didn’t want to make Bade feel bad. When she was telling her story, she was angry, shaking her head and at the same time smiling. There was silence between us for a couple of minutes. But in my head I was thinking, “What about me? What did I do?” She breathed heavily. “Then what happened?” I asked. “I screamed, yelled and shouted

until my throat ran dry.” It was a sad thing to happen to the young girl, and they weren’t even allowed to tell other women what happened to them!

Yes, the only women that were allowed to be around were the ones who already had been circumcised. Sometimes they did two girls, one right after one another, and the one girl didn’t know about the other. I asked if any girl could escape it. “No, never,” Bade answered. One of her sisters was trying to fight because she was a very strong girl, but she was injured and had bleeding problems. The sad part was she couldn’t even tell anyone.

I found it very hard what a family could do. It’s still happening back in Africa. A year ago, before I went home to visit my family, my grandmother told me, “Bring your little girl. We have to do kensep (circumcision, in English).” They all think that it makes the girl calm down and not look for any men. She would stay like that until twenty or until she got married. It was all about control. “No,” I exclaimed. “You don’t do that in America.”

Recently, I have heard that there was a change in some places. I am so happy to hear that. Now with the new generations, no one believes in it anymore.

Saba Abay comes from Ethiopia. She wants to work in Health Care.

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An American Journalist in Jordan

By Ahmed Almasarweh

In September of 2006, a young American journalist traveled to Jordan to live with a Jordanian family and work as a journalist at *The Jordan Times*

newspaper. This is the story of her experience in the Middle East and how her views of Middle Eastern culture were changed after living in Jordan for three months.

Stephanie Berrong is from a very small town in western Kentucky named Cairo. She grew up knowing she wanted to be a writer and she graduated from the University of Kentucky with a degree in English. After working as an English teacher in a high school in Kentucky, she quickly realized that teaching was not for her. She subsequently went to graduate school for journalism and during her last semester, she spent three months in Jordan working as journalist at an English newspaper.

I read an article by Stephanie about her trip to Jordan in a magazine and I decided to interview her and gather some information about her experience. I was interested to see what her view was about the culture and the country as an American. My first question to her was “What was your family and friends’ reaction when they heard you were going to live in the Middle East as a journalist?” “When I said I was going to the Middle East for my final quarter of journalism graduate school, there was a bit of an outcry from friends and family. They were no doubt worried I’d be kidnapped or become the target of some unfathomable violence. I am blonde with blue eyes and blindingly fair skin,” she said.

Stephanie lived with a Jordanian family in Hashmi Janoubi, which is a small neighborhood in the capital city of Amman, where people still live in traditional ways. I asked Stephanie what the similarities and differences were between American and Jordanian families. Her reply was “Jordanian families are larger and more involved in one another’s lives than American families, but people are human everywhere and families there

seemed more like families in the U.S. than different. They have problems and conflicts and family drama just like the families here, and they laugh together, joke together and love one another just like American families.” She stated that her Jordanian family treated her like she was one of them and they surrounded her with love and respect and made her journey as easy as possible.

Stephanie worked at The Jordan Times and she noted that there were a lot of differences between journalism in the United States and in Jordan. “Working as a journalist in Jordan was a lot different from working as a journalist in the U.S. The news media is more tightly controlled by the monarchy (although not totally controlled) and there is not a “freedom of press” tradition in Jordan. Native reporters (and people working in press relations) seem to be in the beginning stages of learning the profession also.” I was curious about some stories she covered in Jordan. One story was about the access (or lack of access) to education for Iraqi school children in Jordan. She was touched by this story and wished that the world would take notice of what is happening to Iraqi refugees. “Because of the war in Iraq, there are hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees in Jordan and the government has started to prohibit students without residency permits (which are difficult to acquire) from going to school in the kingdom. The government says it has very limited resources but is not being open about the problem. The students still need an education, and it seems that the U.S. must have an obligation to help them.” Since she left Jordan, the country is now allowing all Iraqi children to attend school.

We talked about her favorite memory from her trip and Stephanie said “My favorite memories from the trip involve laughing and joking with my friends

and my family there, whether we were eating *maglouba* or *mansaf* or I was at work talking with my boss and my co-workers. Once I was smoking an *argillah* with my friend, Ghazal, at an outdoor cafe. A little girl came over and asked for a dinar for a single plastic red rose. Ghazal felt bad for the girl, bought the rose and then gave it to me. Ten minutes later, another girl this one a little older came over and offered a small keychain. Ghazal reached in his pocket and gave the girl a dinar. He gave the keychain to me. Thirty minutes passed and a guy came to our table. Ghazal gave him a dinar and the “buy” gave him...a box of band-aids! It’s funny and bizarre and it makes me laugh just thinking about it.”

Stephanie made good friends while living in Jordan. The family loved her and she still has contact with them and she is planning to visit them soon. She is currently working at a magazine in Evansville, Indiana, although she’s still searching for her dream job. “This trip opened my eyes to how much I love traveling and meeting people and hearing and telling stories. I would like to find a job that incorporates all of these things.”

Ahmed Almasarweh, a student from Jordan, is majoring in International Business Administration.

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Cultural Variations

By Shabir Ferdows

It is a well known fact, that social interactions are different throughout the world. Social interactions can very well vary from one village to another, even though these villages are located not far apart. In spite of the “Globalization” world moving toward a unified culture

and language, social differences will always remain as a source of national identity in the formation of nations throughout the world.

For instance, in the Afghanistan when people meet, they hug and kiss each other to show their respect. In the United States, when people first meet, they shake hands. In Afghanistan there is a much stricter code of etiquette and how to behave with company and strangers. Afghans feel obligated to extend their hospitality to people whom they don’t know very well. By contrast, in America it will be considered unusual to invite someone who asks you for directions or an address, for tea or something to eat. It happens almost every day to people in Afghanistan. When someone is asking for directions or any other sort of help, every Afghan feel it’s his/her social obligation to offer him or her a place to stay, or something to eat or drink. This kind of hospitality is very common in southern and eastern Afghanistan. It is part of their tribal identities as well as a sign of wealth. I have noticed since I have been in the United States that it is very unusual to see a stranger or someone who is not part of the family have lunch or dinner in one’s house, except on social occasions such as parties and weddings.

In Afghanistan there is almost no social interaction between the opposite sexes. In other words, at weddings for instance, if the house is not big enough to accommodate both men and women to an extent where they won’t see each other, they have to be in two different houses. It is the opposite in the United States when there is a party or some other type of social get-together, men tend to be socializing with women and vice-versa.

Another example of the social mixture is the “word of mouth” in Afghanistan. That is why it is very difficult to keep secrets. You tell your best friend; he or

she will tell their best friend. And before you know it, half of the town will know the story. On the contrary, in America people don't really have any interest in other people's business, as long as it doesn't directly concern them.

In Afghanistan, close social interaction and a strict code of hospitality is part of the national identity. In the past it has had great impact on political decisions. For example, after the catastrophe of September 11th, 2001 some Afghans were divided over the issue of extraditing the leader of the Al Qaeda terrorist group. Extremely religious people like the Taliban insisted on seeing the evidence linking Osama Bin Laden to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. However, the majority of the Afghan people wanted him out of the country because he broke the code of hospitality by using Afghan soil as his base of operation for attacks against the free nations of the world.

The US on the other hand, has a different perspective, based on the facts of terrorist activity. Americans want the attacks to stop. Americans are not interested in codes of hospitality or religious considerations. Like the America society itself, these matters are only governed by the black and white of the law, and the real military power of the two countries. Thus, it is very important for the United States to understand the social and cultural customs of other societies. Only with this kind of understanding can the US be effective in reaching its goals of cooperation and mutual security in the long run.

Shabir Ferdows, an Afghani who worked as a translator for the US military, is a pre-med student. Once he is trained as a doctor, he intends to return to Afghanistan.

Tidy Cities vs. Untidy Cities

By Serra Karadeniz

What is the most beautiful city in the world? Paris? Istanbul? Bombay? Prague? Or maybe it is New York? What is the criterion? How can you determine if a city is beautiful or not? There may be some natural beauties, some historical places, or human effects. Nature and history are gifts to the city. What about human effects? How do governments make their cities look beautiful? Based on my experience, I will compare the cities in the United States and in Turkey.

First, in the United States, cities are planned. When your plane takes a low trip over New York at night, you can see that the lights of streets and houses are drawn with a ruler. It looks as if it is impossible to get lost over there. On the other hand, unplanned city structure is one of the biggest problems in Turkey. Streets do not go in one direction. Roads look like they are made according to the houses. When you watch from the plane window over Istanbul, it is a bunch of lights with no shapes. It is like Istanbul welcomes only people who know Istanbul.

Second, in the United States, houses are the same. The only difference is their colors. In Rochester, I see the same house everywhere in Henrietta with the same roof, same door, and same windows. In contrast, in Turkey, houses differ from each other. In the ancient part of Istanbul, you can see French, Italian, and Turkish architecture mixed with each other. You can distinguish the Italian school from the French school when you enter a street without reading the signs. Even the palaces of different Ottoman kings do not look alike. Or sometimes, people build their own houses illegally. It makes the view ugly, though, but still

different. Just like different people, there are different houses all over Turkey.

Third, in the United States, roads are labeled. You know what street you are on just by reading the street name signs. But in Turkey, streets are not often labeled. I had friends who did not know what street they lived on. In Turkey, street names are not as important as they are in the United States. People use the apartment complex name as their addresses, not the street names.

Fourth, in the United States, tall buildings are for businesses and they are located in the downtown area. On the contrary, in Turkey, people mostly live and work in tall buildings. Your next door neighbor can be an office. There is no separation between a business district or residence district in Turkey. There are small houses with gardens and tall buildings next to each other in Turkey.

Finally, there are more parks in the cities in the United States than in the cities in Turkey. Even in Manhattan, there is huge Central Park. In Turkey, there are not enough parks in the cities.

On the other hand, houses are decorated in a traditional way or in a modern way in both countries, no matter in which part of the city the house is.

In conclusion, I tried to compare already drawn and planned, correctly labeled, and similar cities of the United States with the unplanned, unlabeled, different cities of Turkey. Sometimes, the beauty is in the mystery of the city. These listed aspects are related to architecture and just one part of the cities. Tidiness of a city makes life easier and looks beautiful. However, untidy cities give people a message: you do not know me that well!

Serra Karadeniz is studying Accounting. Her goal is to become a CPA.

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Paterson

By Carlito Blanco

“Smile and have fun” is what Paterson always said every morning before we started to work at the mess hall of the USS Nimitz, a small city that weighed an enormous ton of metal and floated like a sheet of paper on water. Every new sailor is assigned to mandatory detail duty as a dishwasher, assistant cook or a table cleaner. I was assigned to be a table cleaner for ninety days. Every day I always wished that the day would be over quickly and hoped that I could transfer back to my regular job.

After a few weeks, I was put in charge of a booter (a name for a new sailor) named Paterson. He was at least six feet tall, skinny and had golden brown hair. At first he was quiet and always preferred to work alone. After a while he became more comfortable working with me and our colleagues. Oddly, he was very friendly and funny to work with; he always made us laugh with his jokes. Soon we became best friends. We started to do things together and helped each other to finish our jobs. He helped me get through a lot of my problems, and sometimes when I was depressed from work, he always had a way to make work fun and make us forget about our problems no matter how bad they were. We worked long hours, and most of the time we stayed after just to finish the task we were given.

“Liberty call, liberty call.” Finally, we were off work. Paterson was always my liberty buddy wherever we went - Hawaii, Australia, Dubai, Jebel Ali,

Singapore. He and I always drank till we passed out at the bar, and we also pushed each other to talk to every girl in the club. It was really fun.

After eight months of deployment in Iraq, we headed back to San Diego, California, our homeport. Everybody was excited and very happy. Paterson got his bags packed and ready for his vacation leave, while I stayed and waited for the next month to take mine. We kept in contact while he was home and I was still at work. Two weeks later we had our first captain’s call. It was a routine report, nothing out of ordinary; it was all about the mission and keeping out of trouble, until the captain said that one of our crew had died. I wasn’t surprised at that time because almost every month someone died of a work mishap or health issue.. Hearing the captain, I suddenly felt heavy, cold, and my eyes started to tear when the captain said it was Paterson. I could not believe what I heard, that the only friend I had at work was dead.

Months passed and I tried to forget everything that happened and started to focus on my work. Then one day at the office, I overheard my coworker’s conversation about my friend Paterson. “Have you heard?” I kept working and tried to ignore him and walk away, but my curiosity pulled me back. “Heard what?” “Paterson committed suicide. They said that he locked himself in his room and put a bullet through his head with a 38 caliber gun.” I was shocked. My knees started to weaken and my thoughts were empty for a brief moment. I asked myself why Paterson would kill himself. He always seems to be peaceful, and he never talked to me about any problem he had. Till now no one knows what his reason was for ending his life. His parents did not have a chance to talk to him and I will never have another opportunity to thank him for all the things he did for me.

Carlito Blanco is from the Philippines. He is interested in becoming a pharmacist.

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Apostille

by Maxim Fomine

Do you know why so many people are hiding their passports in a very safe place while traveling and always keeping an eye on it, especially when they are overseas? Of course, you know – not to lose it. I knew it very well too, but once, found myself without all my identity papers. My Russian passport and a travel passport along with my American visa were gone. My suitcase was stolen during the check in at one of the many hotels while I was traveling across the USA with the Disney on Ice show “Toy Story.”

When the sadness of the loss had gone, the question “How to return back to Russia?” arose and I called the Russian embassy in Washington D.C. to ask what to do. Have you ever tried to reach the embassy? I spent several days dialing the number, but the line was always busy. It seemed to me that nobody was ever going to pick up the phone and tell me what to do. I felt lost and very frustrated. I talked to nine Russian skaters on the tour, but none could give me any advice on how to reach the embassy. Finally, I called my mom. It’s amazing how mom can always help. She advised me to call at 9:00 am sharp to be the first in line, and it worked. I got connected to the embassy. The official I talked through my situation with told me that I had to prove to the embassy that I was myself. I needed to collect two reference letters from Russian citizens with valid passports, who knew me, and who could prove that I was myself. Plus I was required to provide an *apostille*

for these letters. I asked the lady what an *apostille* was, but she wasn't sure. It was what people brought to the embassy in such situations. The instructions required providing it, but didn't say what it was and where to get it. While I was thinking what else to ask, she hung up on me. No need to say, but when I tried to call again the line was busy. Here I was, a young man in the middle of a foreign country, speaking two words of English, without any identity papers, moving every week from one city to another. Well, despite my frustration, I decided to figure out what an *apostille* was and get it anyhow.

I started asking people around what it might be, but nobody knew the answer. Nobody had ever heard of it. Nowadays I could simply "Google" the word and find the definition right away, but this was a few years ago and "Google" wasn't quite out there yet. Pretty soon everybody around knew about my hopeless research, and one of my American friends told me that he spoke to some lawyer and mentioned in the conversation my problem. The lawyer said that he wasn't sure what an *apostille* was either, but he heard that it probably could be found in the office of the Secretary of State. Wow, I didn't know I would need something from the American government, but I obviously did. It took just a few hours to figure out where to find the Secretary of State's number. In comparison with many days of research on an *apostille*, a few hours seemed nothing. I saw the light at the end of a dark tunnel. It was in the yellow pages. Well, we didn't have those in Russia, so this was new to me as well. We called and got everything straightened out.

An *apostille* is a special seal applied by the Secretary of State to certify that a particular public notary stamp is true. The notary stamp is supposed to be on my friends' reference letters

proving that I am myself. The notary stamp is good only for a certain period of time. The stamped documents are supposed to be mailed to the Secretary of State, who is supposed to seal it with an *apostille*. My English has improved significantly since then, but I still need to focus to translate such a definition. Can you imagine me trying to translate and understand every line written when I spoke just two words of English? Just try to translate one line of Russian, and you'll feel what I felt.

The rest of the story went smoothly, though. I collected two letters. The notary placed his stamps on it. I mailed it to the Secretary of State and received it back sealed by an *apostille* shortly afterwards. Then I flew to the Russian embassy in Washington D.C. and turned in my application for a new identity card. In almost no time I received a traveling document allowing me to return to the Russian Federation. At the border, I had to explain my whole story from the beginning and was then approved to enter the country. It was much easier to speak in my own language and I immediately felt a relief. In my home town I turned my traveling document into the local traveling passport department and finally got my new passport for foreign travel.

Despite many bureaucratic regulations, thousands of people are traveling daily and crossing country borders in every corner of the Earth. It is fun to explore the world and no *apostilles* can stop one from the joy of exploring the countries and continents of our beautiful planet. Even though I never got my lost identity papers back and learned a very tough lesson about the importance of personal identity documents, I never stopped enjoying my adventures.

Like someone said, "Life is a journey, not a destination", and I fully agree.

Maxim Fomine is a professional ice skater from Russia.

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The Power of Faith

By Yevgeniya Wurthmann

James reminded me of Santa Claus when I saw him for the first time. He was neither tall nor fat. He didn't have a beard. Just the opposite, he was a short, dark haired man. But he had Santa's eyes. They were very warm and kind. He looked like a man who had lived an easy and pleasant life, and everything had worked out the way he wanted. I had no idea how wrong the first impression can be. All his life James had been fighting for his life, his family, and his faith.

James was born in Eastern Europe. His parents had three sons. According to the old tradition of their country, people lived with very big families. James' family was very hard working and rich. He always knew that he wanted to devote his life to the Lord. The local German priest in his parish helped him to get a high school diploma. After that the young man decided to attend the seminary to study philosophy and theology. In 1944 communists overthrew the country. "All the principals in my seminary were executed." "What do you mean?" I asked him. "They were murdered?" "Oh, yes, and students kept, tortured and one was executed. I was so distressed and scared." At the same time James' family members were declared government enemies. Communists didn't recognize rich people as equals. James' ancestors and his devotion to God predetermined his future.

One day a friend of the family came to his house; he advised James to get a government job to save his life. That friend was a teacher and he wanted to

help James become a teacher too. They went to the Department of Education together. Right at the doorway they were surrounded and questioned by three men. The leader of that group had only an elementary school education, while James' education was equal to two years of university. They were impressed by the level of James' education. No wonder that in two weeks James got a letter containing the information about his future job. In a few days James arrived at a little school in the mountains. Most of the people who lived in the village were Muslims, but they were very nice people. James had never taught kids before, but a Catholic teacher who worked at that school gave him some ideas about teaching techniques and in three days James started his teaching. To my question about whether he liked his job he answered, "No, I didn't. I was forced to do it to save my life." The dream of being a priest was still alive in his heart.

James was doing a great job teaching kids, and in two years he received a promotion. He was going to be a specialist on the methodology of teaching. However, the communists kept their eyes on him all the time. A man cannot be married if he wants to be a priest. They wanted James to have a family and give up his dream. James went to a church to talk to a priest and get his blessing for his marriage. "You go, get married and save your life and your family's life." That's how Mary became James' wife. They had five kids, but being a rich family they had to go through lots of challenges. They had to pay triple taxes, and after all, they were forced to work for the cooperative. Life was so hard and miserable that escape from the country looked like the only way out. Even the fear of being killed didn't stop them.

They built a boat according to James' drawing. There were eighteen people

in their family and all of them had to fit under the floor of the boat. No hammering was involved in the building process as their secret would be revealed. One night when the boat was built and sealed, all the adults decided to try it out. Only a foot of the boat was visible above the water line, which was perfect. Now it was time to pray and ask God to bless them with a flood. God sent a flood in February. After packing their personal belongings they randomly picked a night and started their dangerous journey to freedom. First, they floated on the river. Then men carried the boat over the mountain and then back into the river again. Their absence had been noticed and they were chased by the guards. Thank God they had reached the border of the desirable country by that time.

James' eyes darkened with fear, and I felt sorry that he had to remember that horrifying night again. After a three week investigation, the whole family got legal documents and stayed in the new country for two years. Then they got permission to move to a Western European country where James worked as an interpreter for the Vatican for a few months. Eventually a country of freedom welcomed them. They were in America.

James knows six languages, but he was never able to learn English properly. That's why he was employed at janitorial jobs in the USA. "Why didn't you learn English, James?" "In Europe I could not. English was the language of the enemies – England and America. And I did not have time to study language in America. I had to work because my family wanted to eat." For the last fourteen years before his retirement, he worked for the local Catholic school. Right now he lives with the family of his youngest son. He has six kids and sixteen grandkids.

At the end of his interview James asked me not to write his real name. Fear from the past still lives in his

heart. All the names in this story are not real. There are neither real dates nor geographical names. James' dream to become a priest has never become true, but his faith helped him and his family to survive.

Yevgeniya Wurthmann comes from Ukraine. She truly enjoys writing.

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Jinn

By Ahmed Rashed

In Islam the jinn are part of the creation, an invisible order of Allah, and they are his slaves, accountable and subject to his commands and prohibitions, just like human beings. Jinn are invisible orders of beings, created from fire, possessing amazing powers. They are creatures that co-exist with humans and they are not all evil. They are not like human beings in real meaning and reality, so the commands and prohibitions to which they are subject are not like those to which humans are subject, but they have in common with humans the fact that they are subject to commands and prohibitions, and rulings on what is permitted and what is forbidden. Muslims also believe that the world of the jinn is the world of the unseen, and no one knows anything about it except what Allah has told us in his book or on the lips of his Messenger, Mohammed.

My family and I lived in a small village in the mountains. There was no electrical energy to light up the street in the night time. When I was growing up, I was a very scared boy; even hearing the word Jinn itself used to scare me. Every time I used to hear it, I would try to sit next to somebody. At night, it would be very dark outside, so I was really afraid to go out of the house. And the bathroom in the house didn't even have a light. To

use it, you needed to use a lantern or flashlight. Sometime when I needed to use the bathroom, I would just run there so fast, or ask someone to wait for me behind the door. I thought if I was by myself, the Jinn might come to me.

Then an unbelievable, strange incident happened to my uncle. It disturbed most of the people in the village, making them so apprehensive. First, when I heard about what happened to him I disbelieved it, until I saw him with my own eyes. Everyone in my family was shocked, traumatized and wondered how it had happened to him. It almost destroyed his life; it brought him almost to death. About ten minutes after the event, he was unable to talk, walk or even move his hands. He was paralyzed, powerless, and had lost the ability to move most of his body parts. In the morning my grandmother went to see a person who she thought had a spiritual soul. He told her to do things that would help my uncle. And he also asked her about my uncle's right hand, if it had swollen up or not. At that time my uncle's hand hadn't swollen up, but after they took him to a hospital in the city, his hand really did.

He stayed in the hospital for about a month, but the doctors were unable to discover what his problem was. They gave him some treatments, he started to talk and move his right hand, but he couldn't walk and could barely move his left hand. It didn't help him that much, so in order for him to get better treatment my dad decided to send him to a different country. My dad was in America, so he sent some money to my other uncle, and told him to take him to Iraq, where they had very skilled doctors in the private hospitals. After two weeks in Iraq, he started to move his left hand, his legs and slowly to walk. He stayed in Iraq for a month and half, and then came back. They said that his heart arteries were blocked. They gave him

some medicine for his heart and told him to exercise, to help the blood circulation in his body. But after that he was not in his right mind for a period of time. He even divorced his wife who had lived with him for almost ten years and had three kids and was pregnant.

“What had really happened to my uncle?” One night after my uncle was coming home from a friend's house, he was standing beside his house to smoke a cigarette. Suddenly, a very beautiful woman appeared to him and touched him on his right hand, then just as suddenly disappeared. She wasn't human; she was one of the Jinns. He was so scared and shocked when that happened to him. He couldn't bear it. Unfortunately, that incident blocked the blood in his heart arteries which led to his paralysis. Finally, after all that, he was treated, and went back to his normal mind. After nine months, he remarried his wife, got work with the government, took his kids and his wife and went to live in the city.

Ahmed Rashed is a student from Yeman.

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I will survive. I am a Warrior.

By Daniel Branca

Fresh air crashing into my face, mixed with the splash of the water in my eyes, and the burning ball of fire giving a strong light to the day. The wave shakes my surf table, proving that I can't control it. If not, I am not going to make it. “Live to be free,” I have always said, but inside the wave, you are not free. The wave shuts you inside her walls as she tries to eat you alive; the best part is when you get out from the walls and all the power

of the wave gets to your body, making you feel powerful, free, a warrior, a sea warrior. That's the price for the brave. The power of the wave. She makes you her son, and changes your heart into a shark's heart. Now she owns you. You can't run away. You can't stop surfing. You don't want to stop. It's an addiction. The best drug ever made, surf and St. Catalina, the surfers' paradise.

Forty degrees Celsius outside, a sunny and hot day, a hard wind, eleven foot waves, St. Catalina, a beach created by God just for us. A big jungle behind me, full of tall, old trees with very green leaves shaking their branches like they were mad at you. You can hear the sound of the animals. You can see them walking around the white sand that covers all the beach to end in a crystal clear, blue water, the clearest blue ever seen, with beautiful foam after the wave crashes against the big rocks on the shore; and now it's time to surf.

We went into the warm water and started to paddle into the sea, going down the waves every time they tried to hit us with their power. After five long hours of surfing, tired of fighting the sea, I left my friends and went out. I kissed my girl and lay down on the hot sand to get a tan. There is nothing better than the sun, in your body, burning your skin, is there? I fell asleep listening to James Blunt on my ipod.

With no notion of time, I suddenly woke up. Everybody was screaming, crying, pointing at me like you would point at a rat in a restaurant. I wished it was that. In this case, the rat was me, full of blood. My legs. I couldn't feel anything. I couldn't move my left leg. What happened? I didn't get it. Confusion everywhere I looked. People were running away from me instead of helping me. I wasn't sure why I was bleeding until I saw him. He was there, standing, frozen on his big feet, with a 38 special in his hand. The gun was

still smoking and his face, pale. I got it. I had been shot, but why did I have three holes? How many times did he shoot me? Before I could scream, cry, or even make a single movement he started running as fast as Forest Gump, all the way into the big jungle that separated the city from the beach, the civilization from the wild. He disappeared.

I thought I was going to die; there was too much blood. The sand stopped being white and became a red puddle. My friends grabbed me and yelled at me. "DAN, DAN, DAN, ARE YOU OK?" The only thing I said before passing out was, "Isn't that a stupid question, you idiot?" After that, everything turned black. I passed out. I was lost in a black sea, without feelings, without mercy. Death was taking my soul, taking it without my permission. Thoughts raced through my head: "I won't let her take it. I am a sea warrior. I am the son of the sea. I am not lost in this black sea. There has to be a light. I will find it. I will survive. I won't give up."

I woke up, white lights, white walls, doctors everywhere and my mom crying. I did it. I made it. I was alive. God gave me a gift, a light in the black sea, an exit. He gave me life again. He allowed me to walk, to run, to swim, to forget that day. I am strong. I am a surfer. I have a shark's heart.

If you are going to dream, dream big; but if you do it, don't let them be just dreams. You can do it. Work hard. Make them come true!

Daniel Branca, a student from Venezuela, Italy and Columbia, is a champion swimmer and studying Business.

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Gambling – a Destructive Craving *Anonymous*

Many people have problems with alcohol and drug addictions; however, I am addicted to gambling. I started gambling because I wanted to learn the skills needed to play the game with the primary goal of winning. I also played the game to entertain myself, but eventually, as I played more and more, I became greedy to win.

Getting addicted to gambling is one of the wrong steps I took in life. I started out at a young age of 14. Instead of an education, I was more interested in gambling. Gambling didn't get serious until I had a job. I was used to living a poor life, because I had nothing, living in one room with four family members. During that period, my parents did most of the struggling, so I never understood the meaning of money. I used the money that I earned to gamble in different ways, playing poker, betting on football games. I did all types of gambling but I did not realize it was becoming a severe problem. This addiction was uncontrollable. If my close friends asked me to go to the casino, I would respond with a "yes" as often as possible.

I won most of the time but sometimes I would lose. Whenever I would win, I got a happy feeling inside, and then I would not care if I had class the next morning. I can't really say gambling has made my life unhappy but it has ruined some days in my life. The biggest problem now is that my family knows that I gamble, so it has destroyed my reputation. In addition to my reputation, other Vietnamese families know of this addiction and think it reflects on my parents.

As life goes on and I still gamble, I fall into debt, so I gamble to get money with which to pay debts. However, most

of the time I fail and I get into more debt. I will rush home and return with money as soon as possible and try to win back the lost amount of cash. One time, I was lucky enough to win three hundred dollars at the casino but I had a strong urge to return and win more. I lost back the winnings and even more. Like most gamblers, I usually gamble to the last dollar. Losing my own money still isn't enough; I borrow friends' money and my boss's money to help feed my gambling compulsion. One time I sold my gold chain that my parents gave me because I had lost and I was in debt. I have also seen my friends do the same thing. There is nothing I can do to help my friends because we are all in the same situation. I can watch them and I can feel their pain because of my similar experiences. This pain is the most stress I have ever felt in life.

Many times I try to quit gambling, but I fail. I continue to tell myself to stop going to any gambling places, but I still return. It is as tempting as smoking a cigarette. My gambling addiction has caused so much trouble in my life and one is the pain I put myself and my family through.

From all the experiences I have had from gambling, I never want to return to the horrific temptations ever again. The disease doesn't help anything and just brings personal conflicts into my life. I should have thought about the fact that no one becomes rich from gambling. It is basically all luck. The "winners" in the game of gambling are usually one in a million and even some of those lucky individuals lose all their money due to the addiction. Gambling problems can turn into an uncontrollable destructive craving and cause a major disruption in life.

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The Garden of Love

By *Adriana Lara López*

“My life has been the best life ever” Elsa told me while sitting behind her desk, answering a phone call. On the other side of the line, there was the father of a student who told her that, once again, he didn’t have enough money to pay the monthly scholar fee. She, as usual, tried to persuade him to pay; but, after a few minutes she turned the speech around to comfort him. After giving him words of wisdom, she started to make some arrangements to balance the monthly budget, hoping the missing money wouldn’t matter.

Elsa is the principal of a school for handicapped children. They are named “children” but their ages are from two months to thirty-five years. She thinks that more than children, they are “angels,” who have come to the world to change the life of their families. I asked if that change is for the good or for the bad, and she admitted not having the answer. She just commented that it’s certainly a big challenge. She immediately told me that she started to run this school thirty years ago, in the backyard of her own house. In the beginning, there was a small group of three “little” neighbors, and others were coming soon.

Her inspiration, in her personal and professional life, has always been her own daughter. Her daughter’s name is Elsa, just like hers, and she suffered anoxia (lack of oxygen) when she was born. Her daughter is actually the “deepest” autistic in the school; she can’t talk and sometimes she turns a little bit aggressive. She didn’t discover the condition of her daughter until she had five more kids. The other kids were OK but little Elsa was not like the others at all.

She said smiling: “My little girl

couldn’t fit into any school, and nobody cared about her. I had to establish my own place.” Elsa is an elementary teacher by profession, but after she realized her daughter’s condition, she enrolled in college to complete a major in “special education.” She started the school after graduating.

She doesn’t realize how amazing her story is. But, she agreed that it was a hard time for her, studying and raising six kids. Life with an autistic kid is not easy for anybody in the family. Besides, at that time she discovered that her husband was cheating on her, not for the first time but certainly for the last. Because of that, she didn’t accept him at home any more. Then, she became alone. Fortunately their sons and daughters were already in college and high school. After her marriage break-up, she decided to spend all her efforts on little Elsa’s care; but she realized that her own daughter barely had chances to improve. She didn’t give up because she saw that there were other kids with possibilities, and so she chose to spend the rest of her life helping them.

The name of the school is Tlazochic. It’s a native Mexican word that means “the place where love blooms.” Nowadays, the school is run mainly by Elsa, but she is helped by other mothers with disabled children also. She encouraged some of these mothers to pursue a major in education for children with disabilities, and after that, to keep working in the school. They are mothers and teachers simultaneously, and are able to understand the other mothers’ concerns.

Located in a poor neighborhood in Mexico City, the school is a suitable choice for families with not much money. Besides the low scholar’s fee, the school is a great option because of the people that work there. They put all their hearts into it. They always have

budget troubles, but they always find support from their own community. It is not really a business; instead, it’s a way of life for these families and children. They are always working to collect money and looking for sponsors; sometimes they have good luck, but not always. However, they never reject a child because his/her family can’t afford the expense.

When you get to know this 68-year-old woman, you see a hardworking woman. Sometimes her stories are incredible regarding how she and “her people” hurdled a lot of obstacles in all these years. They always did the best for their sons and daughters. Nothing seemed impossible. Elsa is amazingly happy, optimistic and confident about the present and the future. It’s hard to believe all the things that these people, and the school, can do with that little budget.

Finally, I asked, “What about the missing money after the desperate father’s phone call?” She just took a deep breath, smiled with resignation, and said “The school will survive. It’s supported by love.” “But, nobody can live just from love” I stated. “We already do,” she said. “We have been doing it since 30 years ago.”

Adriana Lara López is from Mexico. She is a math teacher and currently pursuing her doctorate.

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The Gentlest Hands Ever

By Yevgeniya Wurthmann

I will always remember his hands – black with coal, as twenty years of his life he worked as a coal miner; and with the scarred and rough skin on them. For me my dad's hands were the most reliable, strong and gentle.

My father, Yeletskii Nicolai Ivanovich, was born in 1945, the year when World War Two was over. Despite poverty and starvation, the spirit of victory, new life and hope was in everybody's heart. When my father was a kid, he had almost no toys, but he was born under peaceful skies. He spent most of his childhood outside playing with his friends. The description of one of his regular mornings came to my mind. He started his day with the best breakfast imaginable: homemade, freshly baked bread, still warm milk from their own cow, and honey, collected from their bees, of course. And after putting his pants on, which his mom made for him from a military raincoat, he disappeared from the house until darkness. What a great way to grow up!

No wonder that eventually he became a very good father. We spent lots of time together outside. Thank God, way back then we had neither the Internet, nor a radio available in our house to check the weather regularly. Once in a while we got information about the weather on TV, but most of time nature's behavior was a surprise for us.

One day Mother Nature made me and my dad even closer to each other. We were bicycling and enjoying a warm sunny day, when suddenly the sun hid herself behind a dark cloud. Then we heard the thunder and an approaching rustling sound. A wall of rain was moving toward us! My father bent over,

covered me with his torso, protecting me from the rain. In a second a wave of rain swallowed us. We were standing in the rain overwhelmed with the power of nature. I was so happy hiding in my little "house."

All his life my dad has worked very hard. He tries to be fair and nice to everybody; that's why he has lots of friends. He is not rich, but he knows how to enjoy what he already has.

Yevgeniya Wurthmann

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Tears of a Mother

By Burcu Akcer

It was hectic at home. Ozgur's mother was moving the furniture around, straightening the tablecloth and checking the dishes of food cooking for dinner. She was always in front of the window whenever she heard a sound. She was very unhappy when someone's doorbell rang.

She missed her son, who had found a new job in a different city. He was far away from her. She thought that he wouldn't come to visit her today because it was very difficult for him to get permission. However, she was hoping to see him once every two months. She always listened to the doorbell and footsteps. She just wanted to hear that "Happy Mother's Day, Mummy. I love you so much," and then, her son would hug her around the neck and eat the sweets, which she had made for him. When she remembered that he couldn't come, her heart filled with sadness.

She started to prepare some things in the morning. Everything was done. When her husband saw her panic, he asked her, "What are you doing? Why

are you so anxious?" And she told him, "Don't worry for me. I am fine. I have lots of work today. I have to finish. You can go out." He knew that she was waiting for their son and stressed because she didn't know what would happen.

Time was passing very quickly. It was almost noon. She started to say inside, "If you can't come, call me, please." It wasn't hard. Everybody has cell phone. Later, she decided that the phone wasn't enough for special days, so he had to visit them. Her father missed him, too. He was a big boy. He didn't want his mom to love him like a baby. But, he was still her little baby and would never grow up for her.

When she remembered their old phone calls, she smiled. He loved to make surprises. She was always looking at the clock. Again, she got calm.

The phone started to ring just as she lost her hope. She answered the phone: "Hello." "Hello. How are you, Mummy?" "Thank you, my dear. How are you?" "I am fine, Mummy." "What are you doing? How is your new job?"

"First time, it was a little difficult for me, but I am accustomed to my job and this city now." "Okay, honey." He hasn't said something about Mother's Day and spoken about visiting them yet, she thought.

"Did you get permission to take the day off, my dear?" "Yes, Mummy. I got permission from my boss. How did you know that?" "Because today is Mother's Day." "Ohhh! That's right. Happy Mother's Day. I love you, Mummy." "You, you...didn't you get permission for that?" "Ah, Mummy! I am going to meet a very important woman for me. She has been waiting for me."

Ozgur's mother paused and tried to control her voice. "Is that so? How is this lucky girl?" "You can be sure she is

very nice and cooks very well like you. We are going to have dinner tonight. I love her a lot.”

She whispered, “What about me?” and continued, “Very well, honey. I hope she loves you, too.” “I am sure she loves me. I got my first permissions to leave work for her. By the way, where is my daddy?” “He is outside. Hah... The doorbell is ringing. I think your daddy is coming.” “Okay, Mummy, say hello to him from me. Oh, now I have just arrived at her home. I think she is very excited.”

“My dear, I will tell your daddy you give him your regards. Call me back, please. I am very happy to hear your voice. I haven’t seen you for a long time. God bless you.”

She hung up the phone. She tried to stop her tears. Mother’s Day was just a pretext to see him. Actually, the real reason was that she missed him a lot.

The door opened. “Happy Mother’s Day, Mummy. I missed you.” She was confused. It was a great surprise. Almost two minutes ago, she had spoken with him on the phone. Now he was at home after such a long time.

Burcu Akcer comes from Turkey where she graduated from the Faculty of the Arts. She hopes to become an art teacher in the US.

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The Decision

By Erika J. Ramirez

I remember one day, when the dentist Mauricio gave me a hug and he whispered to me, “Calm down. Everything is going to be all right. Try not to listen to the bombs. Everything is going to be all right!”

I had finished my day of work in Cartagena del Chairá, a small town in the heart of the Colombian Amazon. I was coming back to my house from the hospital. After a normal day, I started to talk with my best friend Jhoana. She asked if I had seen the patient that she sent to me in the morning. I told her that I taken the test according to her orders, and also another second sample because it wasn’t enough. As we walked together, we saw the typical life in the town, when suddenly we heard a big noise like a bomb very close to us. I was in a panic and tried to see around us what was going on. We were dizzy from the noise. We heard a lot of screams, then gunshots. We started to run to the nearest house.

When we were in the house, everybody asked what was going on outside, and nobody said anything. I almost started to cry. My heart almost exploded because I felt desperate. I was asking myself why I had accepted to work in a dangerous place. In recent decades, Colombia has been plagued by the effects of drug trade and by guerrilla insurgents such as the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), or FARC, also illegal counter-insurgency paramilitary groups such as the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), or AUC.

We tried to decide what to do; I wanted to escape, but I didn’t know how. Then the bell door rang. It was the door man of the hospital; he gave us a message

from the director that all personnel from the hospital needed to meet there right away. But everybody was trying to keep safe by staying in their houses.

In the sky, I could see the helicopters flying around and they were flying very close to the ground. There were voices saying, “Stay in the house.” This was a war conflict close to the town. We were wearing hospital coats so people could identify us as hospital workers. We ran to the hospital. The director of the hospital gave the plan that we needed to follow. I cried and felt very afraid.

I thought it was the end of my life. I couldn’t move when I heard a big shout, “Dr. Erika, please go to do your work now!” The nurses and the helpers started preparing for the injured people that were coming to the hospital.

The director told us that we needed to stay all the time, and if it was necessary, we needed to sleep there. The helicopters were above the town all the time. Finally, four hours later, the gunshots stopped. The director kept everybody in the hospital for this night. All night, I was thinking about escaping the next morning. I wanted to leave this town, I wanted to see my family.

On the other hand, I had my professional life. I had chosen to work there. Besides, the people needed my help. I tried to calm down and to put all my thoughts in order. After midnight, the electricity was shut off because the town didn’t have normal electricity. The big generator was only available on a special schedule (10 am to 12 pm). The hospital had its own little generator for emergencies. When the power returned, the army called the hospital and asked for the doctors. They needed the doctors at the army base.

The doctors could estimate the numbers of injured soldiers. This experience of my life was very scary,

but the decision I took to stay in the town, not to run away, to help the people and do my work gives me today the professional and personal knowledge of how to manage my work in an intense situation. I learned that it is important to have priorities in life and to focus on your objectives. I also learned that my family is very important to me.

Erika J. Ramirez is planning to work in the field of dentistry.

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The Longest Ride Ever

By Lija Dzounsa

“Get up, get up, son,” little Adolph heard from far away. The boy was half awake, half in a dream. His eyes felt so heavy and even though the voices came louder and louder, Adolph slipped again into the dream. He dreamed that he was running carelessly on the green meadows around the house where he lived. He felt so free, like a bird flying in the blue skies. His mom’s voice interrupted his dream again. Her voice sounded very upset and worried. She shook the boy’s shoulder very softly, but at the same time the touch was very alarming. “Adolph, son, wake up, my boy,” she whispered. She locked her arms around her son, as if she wanted to protect him from something very bad. And then something dropped in his face, something burning hot. It was his mother’s tears that were flowing like a brook in the mountains. In a sleepy voice Adolph asked, “Mommy, Mommy, why are you crying?” She didn’t answer him; she just strewed the boy with thousands of kisses.

* * *

It was 1949, the end of World War II. Little Adolph was just eight years old, when one summer night Russian soldiers came to his father’s house. They gave his family one hour to pack their clothing, grab a little food, say a little “good bye” to their house and farm and then sent his dad and family to Siberia. This was the longest ride in the young boy’s life. They were driven with all their belongings in wagons, for one month. As a little boy, Adolph didn’t understand what was happening, but he felt that something was totally wrong. His mom was crying all this time, his dad was very quiet and his brothers and sisters didn’t say too much. Little Adolph was the baby boy in their family. That time was very difficult for a lot of families and a lot of people lived in misery and want.

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It was June 1947. Adolph’s childhood was very lucky. As the last child in the family, he had his parents’ entire love. His father, Mikelis, was a farmer. He had an orchard of apple trees. This was a fun time for his dad and the family. Little Adolph helped his father a lot. His mother was a very shy, quiet lady who loved work. Sometimes Greta didn’t say a word. She just worked. Baby boy Adolph was his mother’s favorite boy and his dad loved her very much. It seemed that Adolph’s childhood definitely was happy and blessed.

* * *

The soldiers didn’t even explain where people were being taken, so they didn’t have a clue where they were going. The ride to Siberia was unforgettable. The wagons were very narrow, without windows. Instead of toilets, in the floor there was a hole. Because of that, inside the wagons there was a terrible smell. Sometimes the train didn’t stop anywhere for two days. People didn’t have a chance to have fresh air even for one minute. Little Adolph was so

scared that he pulled on his mom’s skirt all the time. He didn’t leave her for one second. The boy’s eyes were full of untold questions and sadness, but he never asked anything from any of his family.

One rainy day, after they had been driving one week, the little boy fell asleep for a little while. He returned to his lost childhood again, but this time it was just a dream. He was running again on the green meadows like he used to. He recognized the same sounds around his farm. He felt so happy. In his heart flowed a memory stream and he just dove in. After he woke up from that little piece of heaven, little Adolph knew that his life would never be the same again and that minute his face was covered with a pale shade and sadness that would never go away for the rest of his life.

Soon, people were starting to get sick and died. It was so ghastly and terrible. A lot of them lost their minds. Little Adolph’s mom prayed all this time; Greta was a very strong woman. She kept everything inside, but her eyes told everything. They were full of pain, worry and hope; and all this time, my grandmother never lost hope, hope that everybody she loved would be okay. She didn’t care much about herself.

After the longest ride ever, the end of July 1949, finally their family arrived in Omska, Siberia. They didn’t know anything about the future. People’s lives depended on Russian soldiers. Half of the people who were in the wagons had died. His father’s family, four girls and two boys, my grandmother and grandfather miraculously survived. I believe that they survived on this “death road” and those eight long years in Siberia because they had a very strong spirit and belief. In my culture, people don’t talk much; they always believe in any situation that everything will be okay. Even now, sixty years later, the longest ride ever is reflected in my

father's eyes. My father's thoughts are always about that time in Siberia and in his dreams my dad always returns to his heavenly childhood. I really don't know what the little boy was going through in that time, but I just know one thing, that it should be something, that human beings never forget, "the longest ride ever."

Lija Dzounsa comes from Latvia. She is thinking to become a dental hygienist, but mostly studying to become a better educated person.

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Friday

By *ItkaMelo*

Oh! Just another day in the boring city of the lilacs, the hometown of Susan B. Anthony, the George Eastman House and the Memorial Art Gallery. It was the second week of the eleventh month. The sun had disappeared. A painting of a white frozen world at the other side of the window was waiting for me. The trees no longer were holding their orange leaves, and the ducks had flown a few days ago. Deer foot prints were left in the snow. The unwarmed wind was playing with my hair. I did not feel my icy red nose. My legs were shivering. The color of my soul was the heavy gray of the clouds. At this time of the year, it did not matter whether it was five in the morning or five in the afternoon. My soul had lost her essence; the amber that came in the summer had evaporated.

A cold Friday afternoon was the day that God chose to talk to me, in the way that He only knows, talk without even pronouncing a word. That Friday he decided to show me his greatness without even looking at me. Once I got inside the store of Sam Walton's dream, Wal-Mart, my feet hurried up

and I started working. Time went by; it was four in the afternoon. While I was working, some people were making messes, others were stealing and others complaining. But across the street there was a male with a big smile on his face, singing a song of melancholies with a macabre plan on his mind.

Ring, ring, ring. "Thank you for calling. How can I help you?" Martha, a coworker, answered the phone call. At the other side of the line his voice was echoing, "You have five minutes to leave this place. There is a bomb in the bathroom." He no longer was on the line. Martha was in limbo. It took her two seconds to react. Her clumsy fingers dialed 911. After she spoke to the policemen and explained the situation, she hung up. Using a walkie talkie, she contacted the store manager to inform him that there was a "Code Blue."

"Itka! Itkaa!" Her voice was echoing while her feet directed her towards me. It was Ana's voice that made me stop what I was doing. "What does she want now?" my mind was wondering. "We have a Code Blue," she said. "Are you serious?" All of the sudden, the clocks were no longer running. The noise completely stopped. My heart was pounding like Brazilian drums. The first thought that came to my mind was: "If I don't leave this place now, I am going to die." Back to reality, my brain told my legs, "You better walk NOW!" Nothing made sense. After that moment I knew the cold wind was again waiting for me. I flew through the condensed air and grabbed my coat. My mind was playing tricks on me. It could not quite remember if my mother was still there. My seeking eyes scoured every single corner of the building. My long steps gave direction to my body. I ran from the back of the store all the way to the front. With my nose and the palms of my hands, I opened a light gray door.

Finally, my eyes found the face of the woman I was looking for, my mother. "Mom, we have to go NOW." "What happened?" were the only two words that came out from her mouth." "We have to leave NOW," I kept saying. "Is your brother fine?" she asked. "Yes, he is fine," I confusedly replied. "I cannot explain it now." Our elbows became one. As I pushed people away, I kept holding her hand. It was no longer a mother giving direction to her child. My young hand was grabbing hers. "What is going on?" "Mom, there is a bomb." Her face turned whiter than the snow. Her footsteps gained speed. Finally, outside, my eyes were picturing the red and blue lights of the police cars. My ears were listening to the noisy sound of the siren. The wind was again blowing my hair. My legs were shivering, but the ebony and amber came back, occupying a place in my soul.

Itka Melo is from Colombia. She plans a career in a Health Related field.

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Nightmare Message

By *Kenan Ahmeti*

It's a dark and cold night and I am walking through a crowd holding some old wrinkled books in my hand. Voices come to my ear and I walk by saying, "He is not coming anymore." Lightning and thunder rumbles in the distance. My ears hurt from the thunder and my eyes sparkle from the lightning. Finally, I get out of the crowd and take a deep breath. In front of me I see my school. I walk in and no one is inside. It looks like a cemetery. I go to my seat and sit down, noticing that the other chairs are empty. Outside the window it is cloudy and rainy. I call my friend's name, and he answers from outside. It has started raining and he is sitting

there in the rain and dripping. I ask him, "Why are you not coming in?" He is sitting there miserable and so worried that his face has turned red and he looks scared to death. He finally answers, "I can't come in there because they will get us." I get up from my seat and get close to the window and ask him, "Who?" The strong thunder rumbles and the lightning flashes in my eyes. When I open my eyes, my friend has disappeared, and it has started to rain heavier. I turn back and look at the classroom filled with soldiers. I blink my eye so they will disappear, but they are still there.

I jump from my sleep and realize that I have been dreaming. I get up and look out the window, and the sun has just started rising. I went to eat breakfast at the table. I was going to talk to my mom about my dream, but I just didn't want to relive that memory again. I get up and leave for school. When I get there all my friends are sitting outside because the teacher hasn't come yet. We waited and waited, but no one came. The next day the same thing happened, but on our way home we saw our teacher coming toward us. We went back to the school property and talked to him. He told us that in some Albanian schools Serbian soldiers had entered and beat the students and teachers. I realized then that the nightmare was probably a message, a foreshadowing of the future. The teacher told us that we should not risk our lives coming to school because the situation was getting worse every day. We were in jeopardy by just being there. At first I did not believe him, but that same night after I heard the shooting, I realized our risk.

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A month before we all knew that there was a war, but not around our area. We went to school and came back home with no problem. The war was mostly in suburban areas and, then it slowly

entered the cities; but none could have guessed it could happen all of a sudden. We were in class during math when one day our teacher interrupted the class and told us, "Listen, students. There will be a day when I can't show up for a class because the war is getting worse." We all sat there with nothing to say, but praying that nothing would happen.

Today that had happened and now we were leaving our homes. While I was waiting for the train, I realized that the nightmare I had was a message. Whether it's the past or the future, nightmares have a message in them. We all dream of things we did or might do in the future sometimes.

Kenan Ahmeti, from Kosovo, has also lived in Macedonia. He is undecided about his major.

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Sia's Coming to America

By Kadiatu Yatabaarry

Sia was born in Quendu, a town that is located at the Sierra Leone and Liberia border in West Africa. She has a family of six: her two parents, two brothers, her younger sister, and she was the oldest.

When I first entered her home, I saw different kinds of sculptures on the wall and that made me feel a little at home, almost forgetting why I was there in the first place. After a few minutes, we decided to start my interview. My first question was "Why did you come to the America?" She smiled and said, "I was trying to escape the civil war in my country, and I lost everyone in my family. My parents, my brothers and sister... Can I take a break, 'cause I have not talked about this in a very long time." With tears in my eyes, I just nodded my head. All I could think about

was my own story, and it was hard.

After a little while, she came back to the living room. I was ashamed to ask her another question, because I didn't want her to feel sad again, but I needed to complete this interview assignment for my ESOL class. Come to find out, she was only fourteen years old when she came to America with their next door neighbor in Africa, who adopted her as one of her children.

Sia was in school when the rebels attacked. That was the last day she would ever see her family again. Luckily, a good neighbor took custody of her since she had no one to go to.

I asked her, "How did you and your neighbor adjust to America?" She sighed, "Life was not very easy considering when I last saw my family, I was only 11 years old at the time. I was still depressed; I had to learn almost everything fresh with my new mom. But life is better here and there are a lot of opportunities if you are willing to take them, which is one of my life goals." I could feel the anticipation and readiness in her voice and also the voice that was calling for her family to be there and watch her accomplish her goals.

I then asked her what she would like to be when she grew up. She said a doctor, in order to help children and people, because of what she saw during the war with wounded people. She is now eighteen years old and in high school this year.

My last question was, "What advice would you give to young teens like yourself from your life experiences?" She looked up at the ceiling and down at me and said, "Keep up hope and pray for everyone, not just for you and your family, cause you never know what could happen in any second; believe that nothing lasts forever and that in

life, we should always accept the good and the bad.” “Wow!” That was all I could say at that time. She made me forget that I was a refugee myself. I understood where she was coming from, but her own context was different and I loved it.

Kadiatu Yatabaarry, a student from Sierra Leone, is studying Hotel Management/Hotel Technology.

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Crooked Red Nose

By RedaB. Juodeikis

“Mom! Mommy! Can I go?”

“No dear, you know the rules.” Her voice sounded slow and firm.

“But Mom! I...” I asked again in a sepulchral voice.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “This is just impossible right now.”

Yes, she was right. I knew the rules, but he didn’t.

It was the last month of the winter season. Slowly, with a disappointed face, I, a 5th grade girl, turned from the front door, and deliberately came back to the hallway, where I sat down near the window on the stairs. Suddenly, I looked with a frown through the glass wall near the stairs, and then with my left hand leaned heavily forward; I warily started to push my shoe down off my foot. Somehow, I still stared through the window. I saw people shivering as they rushed by on the sidewalk near our house. A few hurried birds were flying nowhere, and a dog was playing in the falling, pancake size snowflakes. It was my dog.

It was sunrise – my favorite time. I moved closer to the window and slowly propped myself up against the glass. I pushed my face so hard that somehow

I could feel the cold weather outside. I slowly closed my eyes.

In my mind, I was running so fast that even my dog couldn’t catch me. He tried to bark, but I couldn’t hear him clearly. He was so far behind me. I hollered at him, “Lordas, Lordas, come here. We need to run faster.” I yelled, “What is the matter with you! Come on! He has been waiting for us so long! Run!” Lordas ran and barked. He tried to run all-out, but each time I looked back, he was further and further behind me. I ran and felt the cold breeze on my face, and the blizzard. Everywhere was surrounded in white. I couldn’t see clearly ahead. I turned back with frightened feelings, and started to panic - my dog was gone. I freaked out, but still ran with watering, freezing eyes. I screamed, “Lordas, we need to run to him. Don’t give up! It is just a snow storm, like usual! I will slow down little bit. Hurry!” I stopped. Around me, from the sky, fast as the rain falls in torrents, fell huge cutout white flakes. I turned to the left, then to the right, and finally to the back. Everywhere the snowstorm lingered. My dog’s bark was drowned out in the dead silence. In a wink, I stood there looking at the dark white picture. In the distance I could see just a little crooked, red nose.

Unwillingly, I opened my eyes and slowly my gaze stopped at her hands. Near me, one hand holding a wet towel, and the other taking my hand, stood my mom. I stared at the towel, which had red spots everywhere. Questions were running in my mind; when did she buy this kind of towel, and why with those strange shaped spots? I knew everything about towels in our house, because taking care of these soft and cushiony linens was my job.

In a second, in my mind, like an arrow flew a thought. I popped up from the bed, and landed on the stairs, near the wide window. I stared through it with glazed

eyes, pushing a sore place from the surgery on my right side. Outside were pitch darkness and a huge snowstorm. I couldn’t see my man. Where was he? My dog was in his doghouse. I leaned my face on the glass wall, and with my eyes turned up, pressed strongly against the glass. I wanted to see him. Where was he? Where was my man? Drop by drop from my nose, dropped blood. I cried loudly, and I cried not just from the pain in my heart. Suddenly the snowstorm died down a bit, and behind the doghouse, finally I could see him - my lonely man, with the crooked red nose. He stood there, with his head almost falling off, one missing eye, and a bird-pecked carrot nose.

He looked pretty much the same, except for this sad look on his white face.

Reda B. Juodeikis, a student from Lithuania, is now studying Dental Assisting. She hopes to continue with Dental Hygiene afterwards.

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Stolen Feelings

By Rostyslav Fedysiv

When you least expect it, something happens that changes everything. Nobody knows what can happen in a few minutes. We always hope for better and often don’t expect anything bad.

My wife and I got married in 2003. The first fall days were beautiful and warm right after our wedding. We were very happy because everything was just great. Our house was full of flowers, wedding gifts, decorations, family and friends. Even though it seemed like everything was already over, we still had one more exciting thing coming up. It was our honeymoon.

The honeymoon is a great time. It

welcomes newly married couples with a beautiful hotel, beach, great service, lots of fun. It also brings new feelings of being married and lots of happiness from being together. It was also the time for us when we could finally rest and relax after months of getting ready for the wedding. We had a very short time for the honeymoon because my wife had to go back to the United States, while I needed to stay in Ukraine and wait for the paperwork to be ready for my visa. My wife had come to Ukraine only for three weeks.

We decided to go to Turkey for our honeymoon, not only because it was beautiful over there, but also because it was only a one hour flight from Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. We didn't want to waste time traveling.

I think that we made the right decision because the little Turkish town, Antalya, on the Mediterranean Sea was really beautiful. We had a great time and after not even a full week we were packing our stuff to come back home. We bought many souvenirs in Turkey, since it was our first trip as a married couple. Early in the morning we left the hotel and arrived at the airport. There was a shuttle service that took us to the airport and there were many people on the bus. We had some time before our flight and we were not in a rush. We let other people get their luggage first, and then we went to get ours. Shocked, we found that all our stuff was missing. Somebody had taken our luggage, and we were left with nothing. All our clothes, personal stuff, cameras with all the beautiful pictures that we took were gone. It was very disappointing and unfortunate. When everything seemed to be going perfectly well, we were faced with a problem that we didn't have any hope to get resolved. We filed a report with the police, but there was not much hope. It didn't look like somebody had mistakenly taken our luggage, and it

seemed like somebody had stolen it. There were not that many people and that many different bags to mistakenly misplace it. Fortunately, we had our passports and tickets with us.

Another surprise was waiting for us in Kyiv. As soon as we landed, it was announced that it was 10 degrees C degrees outside, which is less than 45 degrees F. It was also raining and very dark. Coming from Turkey, we were wearing shorts and t-shirts and those were all the clothes we had. We were just freezing. We went to a little restaurant and got some hot tea to warm up. We still had to get to our hometown from Kyiv. We took the train, and my best friend picked us up in the morning. We were happy to be home, but at the same time, very disappointed because we had nothing to bring home. It seemed like somebody didn't steal just our stuff but also all the good feelings we had from our honeymoon.

Without any hope of ever getting our stuff back, I received a phone call two weeks later. Somebody called to inform me that our luggage had been found. I was very happy to hear that, but my wife had already returned to the United States. The bag was delivered to me three days later. Surprisingly, nothing was missing. I was able to find everything we bought in Turkey, and it brought a lot of warm memories.

Exactly one year later I received my visa. When I arrived, I brought the same luggage and all the souvenirs in it to JFK. But this time I was holding that bag really tight in my hand, so nobody could steal it.

Rostyslav Fedysiv is majoring in Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning Technology.

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The Call

By Cristina Nedelcu

At the end of 2004, I decided to interrupt my studies for an year, and to go to the United States as an Au Pair (Au Pair is an intercultural exchange program where you come to the US, learn English, learn about American culture and visit the country. All this time you have to stay with an American family and take care of their kids. It is a Work and Travel program).

Preparing to go to United States wasn't difficult at all. I was very excited to come here even if I knew I was going to miss my family and my friends. I knew that if I was coming here, I would have to start a new life, learn where I should go if I needed something, make other friends - start a totally new life. But nothing kept me from changing my mind. When it was time to leave my country, I was still happy; I didn't cry when I left. The only person who cried was my mom. You know how moms are, always caring for you.

The time passed very fast, and when it was almost time to go back home, I decided to stay another year because I really enjoyed my life here in America. When I made this decision, I also decided to go to Romania to see my family and friends. I went there and when I saw them I was shocked to see how much they had changed. They looked older and skinnier. It was very hard to get used to the idea of seeing them like that. But I spent a wonderful time with them. When it was finally time to go back to my other life, I realized that I was not going to see my parents for another year, and that seemed more difficult for me, because I already knew how much I would miss them. When it was time to get on to the bus, my dad gave me a hug. He hugged me so hard that I thought that this was going to be the last hug that he would ever give me.

He was trembling while he was hugging me, and then he suddenly started to cry. I never felt that way before, and I was shocked to see my dad crying. It was the first time I ever saw him like that.

After I finished the second year, I decided to study in the US. I knew I wouldn't be able to go home and see my family. It was a visa issue (when you apply from the US for a student visa and you get approved, then you are legal to stay in this country until you leave. As soon as you leave the US, you need to reapply for another visa in your own country). It is very hard to get an American visa; that was my reason for not going home. After a while I got my new visa, my student visa, which made me feel very happy. I called my family to tell them, and they were very happy for me.

During all that time, I knew that my dad wasn't feeling very well but I never thought that it was serious. I was very worried about his health and I started to call every day to ask what was going on and how he was doing. My mom used to tell me that everything was ok and that I shouldn't worry about it.

One day I was sitting at the computer chatting with some friends, when the daughter of our neighbor got online. She insisted on talking to me about my dad. She told me my dad was very sick and didn't have a lot of time to live. I was shocked. I didn't want to believe her. I asked her again to tell me what was going on and how she knew that. She told me everything. Right away I called my mom and asked, "Mom, I know that you love me and you want to protect me, but I think I am old enough to know what is going on with my dad." I was very serious, and I didn't cry at all. I was strong, and at the same time I tried to make her tell me the truth. She answered me, "Are you crazy? Your dad is not feeling that good, but he is getting good treatment. So far the doctors

don't know what he has, but they are investigating." For a moment, my heart came back, but then I started to wonder why my neighbor would say something like that. She didn't have any reason to do that. This made me think a lot about what she said.

I called my dad almost every day, and he always tried to make me laugh. I was trying to make him happy with my day-by-day stories. The first of February was his birthday, and I called him to say, Happy Birthday. He told me, "Don't worry, Cristina. I will not die this year." This made me more worried, and I started making some phone calls. Finally, I got my dad's doctor's number. I hesitated to call for a while, but I decided that I had to do that.

I still remember that day, when I decided to call my dad's doctor.

When I called her, she gave me the worst news that I had ever had so far. She said, "Cristina, through your dad I heard that you are in the US and you are studying there. I am sorry that I have to be the person that gives you the worst news ever. But your dad has very little time to live. I think you should come home and see him as soon as possible." When I heard that, I fell to my knees, and started crying so hard. It was like somebody had cut your wings, and you couldn't fly anymore.

The next day I bought an airplane ticket and I went home; I didn't care if I was coming back or not. The only thing that I cared about was seeing my dad. When I saw him, I was amazed at the way he looked. He was skin and bones, barely moving and not eating. He wasn't that happy to see me. My mom told me that before I got home, he had said: "Mommy, tell me please how should I pretend that everything is ok? I want to die." He was in bad pain, and nothing could make him feel better. He was on morphine all the time, and yet he was

still suffering a lot.

I got home, and when he saw me, he got up and he hugged me. He couldn't hug me the same way; he was very weak. He said weakly, "Don't squeeze me because I am falling apart." It was very hard for me to see him like that.

Two weeks passed fast and in all this time I managed to get my visa. When I got my visa, I didn't even care about what I was going to do. I just wanted to stay with my dad, but I had to go to school because I couldn't miss a lot of classes. And my dad wanted me to go, too.

The worse time was when I had to say Good-bye, and I wasn't saying "bye" for just awhile. I had to say Good Bye forever. I felt that my heart was stopping. He was playing with my hair, and he was asking me what time my flight was. I promised him that I was coming back for Easter and that I was going to see him then. He looked at me, and he gave a smile. He knew that he was not going to see me again. After I left the house, my dad didn't talk anymore. I came back to United States and three days later I got a phone call from my sister telling me that he had passed away.

This was the worst news in my life.

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Love You and Miss You Daddy

By Ramya Devarajulu

The feeling that rushes through me is so painful. I wonder why people need to suffer. Parents do so many nice things to bring you up. Then when you see them suffering it is painful.

My father was a hard worker, and with his small earnings he gave us a

high standard of living. He took care of us more than his power. My mom bought so many expensive things for me. I was like a princess to my parents. When there was any wedding ceremony to attend, I was the first to get new things from head to toe.

Then one day they started the process for my marriage. That is when it started to get even harder for my parents. But my dad found the best man for me. The day came for me to leave them and go with my husband far away. We went to the airport, and we thought we would come back to say bye. But when we went to check in, they said that we could not go out. I felt so sad to leave like that without saying bye to my parents. They were waiting for us and they did not get the chance to say bye. Then they saw the terminal displays and knew that we had departed. At home, they felt sad. My mom told me that my father was saying my name when he wanted little things like a cup of water. When I heard that, I felt sad. He used to call me when he came from work to open the gate.

After I left them, they began to have lots of problems. My father told my mom that I had been their lucky charm. "After Ramya left, all my charms are gone." When it was time for my brothers to get married, they ended up marrying sisters. My brothers wanted to be with my parents and look after my father's shop, but my sister-in-laws did not like that. From there it all started to go downhill for my parents. There were problems and fights. Everyone of my father's friends started to ask my father what was wrong. All of that started to bring pain to my father. One day he had his first heart attack. But my parents did not tell me. They thought that I might get scared.

Every week I call my parents on Monday, but one week I called them on Sunday. I wanted my husband to speak with my parents. My father was

so happy; he spoke to my husband for a long time, like best friends. My husband told my father not to worry about his daughter. He said that he would take good care of me. Daddy felt so happy; I don't know why I wanted my husband to speak to him.

On November 28, 2005, it all started normally that day. I was doing my regular chores, and I went to do my exercises. That is when I got a call from my mom, but she hung up when she heard my voice. Then she called my husband and told him, "Ramya's daddy had a heart attack. Please don't tell her right away," and she told him that she had called me first but hung up.

It was around 11 am, and I was in the basement when I heard a noise. What do you know? It was my husband; I was surprised to see him home so early. I asked him, "You are back so soon?" "The weather is so nice out I thought that we could go out," he replied. But he was acting so weird. He forced me to eat lunch. "I told you just now I was doing my exercises." He yelled at me, "Come and eat with me." We both had lunch, and then I was making something for my daughter to eat. He told me to stop what I was doing. Angrily, I retorted, "What is wrong with you?"

He came and hugged me. "Ramya, your dad had a heart attack and he passed away." I couldn't believe it; I was not able to breathe or even cry. I felt like everything around me stopped. I was saying to my husband, "Yesterday, today my father was so happy speaking to you."

That day I started to feel the pain and learned a lot. I started to grow up and feel the loneliness around me. The strength that I had was gone. I told my husband I wanted to go and see my dad. So sweet, he had already arranged for tickets for me and my daughter. When I called my mom to tell her that I was

coming to see him, she cried "Ramya, he left me, Ramya." When I arrived in India, I called my mom to say that I would be there in 10 minutes, and I was able to hear the ambulance arriving there bringing my father from the hospital. I still hear that sound in my head. Now, even here, if I see an ambulance, the scene comes right back in my mind.

I would have liked to have spent more time with my father. I got married fast. I did not have much time with my parents. I think I was not there when my parents wanted my help. I used to think if they had told me when he got his first attack, I would have helped him in any way. He was the anchor for my mom and now he is not there, and my mom is suffering.

If I can do something, I would try and bring back my dad for my mom. But I miss him too. I miss his voice. When he called me, he would say, "Ramya, it is Daddy. Ramya kutty" (kutty means the little one in our language, Tamil). I still hear his voice in my ears. I love my parents a lot and I miss my dad the most.

Ramya Devarajulu is from Sri Lanka.

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Want to Be a Millionaire? *By Farah Butler*

"I was only 26 years old and I had to marry a man of 60. I had no other choice because I had to obey my mom." These were the very words of Amina, the woman whom I met online.

Amina was born in Sydney, Australia, but she did not feel Australian culturally. Her parents were from India. Her mom was a Muslim, and her dad a Buddhist.

She tried to follow both cultures, and she worked as a cruise manager in a shipping company based in Sydney. She worked on board a passenger ship which specialized in publicity of women's products by various fashion models. Sometimes she used to model for women's clothing. Over the weekends she came home to listen to music and do her own cooking. She was independent by nature and completed her university degree a few years ago.

"But now everything has changed!" I heard her sigh in the web cam. "In our family my mom is the dominant person because my dad, due to serious illness, stayed home most of his married life. He did what my mom told him to do."

A silence followed. When I asked her to tell me more about herself, she said, "I am reasonably religious, but amongst work related friends I do wear very fashionable clothes! I was working as a model when I was nineteen. I have a diploma from Brazil in Beauty Therapy and a certificate in body massage from Japan. These skills are useful for my job because all our passengers are fashion models working for various advertisement agencies. My mom does fasting during this month. As long as I am a strict virgin and do not eat pork, my mom says that I can wear any type of dress! I thank heaven for that! As I am working most of the time, traveling at sea on the cruise boat, it is difficult for me to regularly talk to my friends through my ship's radio phone as much as I would love to! Therefore, my laptop computer is very useful to me to send and receive messages."

Her whole family had been looked after from her childhood by her mom's distant cousin, Ahmed. She called him Uncle Ahmed. Her entire education and each and every expense of her family had been paid by him. Her cruise company was owned by Ahmed too. He also owned many ships, houses, and

acres of land in Australia, and tea estates in India. He was her dad's age around 60. But he was athletic, a body builder, even at his age, and also immensely wealthy. He was a multi-millionaire. Both her parents, especially her mom, treated Uncle Ahmed like a god. In return, he knew how to keep her mom happy with plenty of gifts! When Ahmed visited her, it was like a wedding day in her home! His wife was sick and there was a rumor that he was looking for a second wife!

Mirza was Ahmed's only child from his first marriage, a boy Amina fell in love with. He was only two years older than her. Both of them loved each other, but Uncle Ahmed wouldn't let that happen.

Her voice trembled, "I could not marry for love, but I knew how to become a millionaire by marrying one. Now I don't have to worry about money anymore, because I am secure for life."

On her 30th birthday, Uncle Ahmed and his wife Mita arranged a huge party for Amina and treated her like a princess. It was here Amina heard that she soon had to marry Ahmed according to her mother's wish. Amina froze at the announcement.

Amina's mother had once been admired by Uncle Ahmed, but she couldn't marry him because her parents did not have the status or wealth to approach Ahmed's family. Later on, with a broken heart, Ahmed married a rich girl, Mita, but his eyes were set on Amina, who turned out to be an extremely beautiful young woman. "When I turned 17, I started taking Mita's place to go with Ahmed for parties and functions. Ahmed was very happy to introduce me as his 17 year old niece to all the wealthy friends. They were in their 50s and 60s, like Ahmed. I enjoyed all the attention, gifts, rich food,

etc. etc. I was a pretty princess!"

Amina got married to Ahmed on an island in secret in order to avoid having hassles with the Australian law, since Ahmed was still married to his first wife. Amina's mother wanted her to marry a wealthy man like Ahmed, to make sure that her own financial future would be secured through her daughter's.

Everything was going very well, and eventually Amina had a daughter. Then, after only a year of her marriage to Ahmed, her world fell apart, and she had no power within herself to make things right. Back in India, Ahmed's relatives were arranging his third marriage, this time with an even younger woman than Amina. The bride looked very beautiful in her red attire which she only dreamed of before. Her parents couldn't afford anything and were at Ahmed's mercy. She was a model made so perfect that Ahmed's eyes fell on her. Only months later, his eyes fell on a Hindu model, Bina, who soon became his fourth wife. Amina's life was shattered to pieces. "It didn't stop there, Farah! He married Bina's half sister later on." She stopped. I could see her face, perturbed and filled with tears. My heart ached to comfort her. Her voice quivered, "I am no longer married to him, but I don't have to worry about my financial condition for life. I have a luxurious apartment, my parents got a mansion and we are all well taken care of by Ahmed. I do envy you because you can marry for love. As for me, I had to give in to my mother's wish. I also didn't want to be a poor man's wife." Her voice faltered and the web cam screen looked blurry, filling my heart with sadness.

Farah Butler comes from Bangladesh. She is planning to be a teacher.

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Why don't you grab your pot lid, instead of a wheel?

By Jawon Park

Jipsaram. This is a word which means “wife” in Korea. To understand the exact meaning of this word, it needs to be analyzed. The first three letters *Jip* implies “house,” and the rest of word *saram* implies “person.” So, the word *Jipsaram* is translated “house person” in English. This specific one word shows us the paradigm towards women in Korea, which sounds not only anachronistic, but also provocative nowadays.

For hundreds of years, Confucianism was the predominant principle in the Far East countries, and Korea was not an exception. Even though Korean society was modernized rapidly after the Korean war, still many Korean people have oppressive attitudes toward women, on the pretext of “cultural difference” or “cultural heritage.” It is fair to say that compared to the past, Korean women’s rights have improved gradually, yet they are neither stable nor equal to men’s so far.

In old times in Korea, a woman had always to obey her husband, was forced to give up her opinion, and was never to complain about anything. All she had to do, and could do, was take care of her family and her husband and prepare daily meals. It was also not allowed for a woman to show her feelings on her face or express herself. If she did, it was considered as defiance to man, so a man could beat his wife to give her a lesson. Because many people believed - not only the man, but also the woman - the gentle submission of woman to man was the basis of the social system, the husband was hardly blamed for his physical or sexual abuse to his wife. Also, women couldn’t get any opportunity to be educated at all, so they were easily

brainwashed and resigned themselves to the “Man-Centrism” lifestyle without judgement.

Today things seem to be little changed. Like many other countries, in Korea, women can also receive the same education like men, and it is not impossible anymore for women to get a job. Actually, many researches have already proved that a woman is capable enough not only to do a low level job, but also to do the job which requires extraordinary ability. It ensures the fact that women are not born inferior to men. Nevertheless, in reality, even if a woman gets a job, her salary is usually much lower than a man’s. What makes matters worse, a career woman can’t easily expect her husband to do household matters and take care of their children evenly. TV or many other media inundate people with dramas or show programs which plant distorted ideas about women in people’s minds.

Obviously, in Korea, there are still many people who are none too pleased with the changed situation. They are the people who don’t consider her ability, but consider only her gender when they hire employees. They are the people who try to give a sarcastic twist to their words when they see or hear a woman who insists on making her own decision, and struggles to be independent. Also, they are the people who put too much emphasis only on her appearance and make fun of it. These people tend not to accept the new situation and insist that no matter who she is, she should follow so-called “traditional” rule in any case. In the Confucian sense, a true decent woman should be obedient to man, and should be more shy, grateful, and generous than man. No matter how things are changed, they still expect “every” woman to keep these virtues, and if she doesn’t, they believe they can scold her with a sense of “superiority.” In fact, almost every year, newspapers in

Korea keep reporting about women who were beaten by men for every absurd reason. One girl was beaten by a totally unknown man because she smoked in the open street. Another woman was beaten by her husband because she disobeyed him and grumbled a reply. Moreover, when a woman makes a mistake while she drives, she faces down a sexist insult from a man. The insult varies, but the most common one is this: “Why don’t you grab your pot lid, instead of a wheel? Get out of the street right now!”

Apparently, it seems very far away for us to accomplish the goal of equality between the two sexes in Korea. Some people paint the present situation in bright colors; all problems concerning sex discrimination are completely solved and women in the present age should be grateful for this new changed situation. But they are wrong or, at least, too naive. In Korea, there is a saying which goes, “Woman and a dried walleyed pollack need to be beaten once every three days.” Just as we know all human beings are created equal, and society is not a place only for men, Korean people should face the issue regarding sex discrimination without bias and favor. Not only a person, but a society can make progress when the people admit their fault and try to correct mistakes. As a woman, I hope not to hear the ridiculous word *Jipsaram* anymore.

Jawon Park is studying cinema. She plans to transfer to RIT to complete a 4-year degree.

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Christmas

By Galina Kusmiy

On December 25, I was driving home from a church and almost crashed into a small truck that came out of nowhere. I was looking around at the houses decorated with colorful Christmas lights and did not pay much attention to the road. Christmas trees, Santa Claus, sleds and deer were a beautiful distraction. An older guy climbed out from the truck and asked me if I was all right. A holiday spirit filled up everything around so I could feel it.

As soon as I got in the house, my mother asked me to help her set the table. We were waiting for the rest of the family to come in. We spread a white tablecloth over the table and put out the best china. A Christmas tree was standing in a corner, lighted with candles; wrapped gifts were lying under the tree. The smell of food made my stomach growl. A couple days before the Christmas, I had bought a few boxes of candy and on Christmas Day, I would give them to my neighbors.

Preparations for the Christmas dinner took the whole day, but cooking for Christmas was not a burden. To cook for people you care about is always pleasant. A couple hours later people came over with big-wrapped packages and warm smiles on their faces. It is such a joy when you are surrounded by your family and friends. That is what I like about American Christmas - it is to be together. On Christmas Day, we replaced all our worries with the hope for a better future.

At dinnertime, we were talking about the Ukrainian Christmas and different traditions. Christmas Eve in Ukraine is called Holy Evening or Holy Supper. People usually cook some tasty foods for this evening. There should be at least twelve different dishes on the table.

They should include *Kutia* - the ritual food that is prepared from cooked wheat and a special syrup containing diluted honey, grated poppy seeds, raisins and walnuts. For this evening, people decorate Christmas trees in their houses. Another tradition is to decorate the table with *Didukh* - a sheaf of oats or wheat to symbolize success for the next year. The dinner table has a little hay on the embroidered tablecloth to symbolize the manger of Bethlehem where Christ was born.

The father, the man in the house, starts the Holy Supper with a prayer. After that, he says the traditional Christmas greeting, "Christ is born!" Then, the other family members answer him, "Let Us Glorify Him!" At the end of the supper, the family often sings Ukrainian Christmas Carols. A bowl of *Kutia* stays overnight for the spirits of loved ones who have died.

Children this evening go around their neighborhood, spreading colored seeds. They wish people good health and a big harvest for the next year and ask for some donations; also, they sing Christmas songs. On Christmas Eve, people create *Vertep*. This is a scene from the Bible of Jesus's birth. They show little Jesus in the manger, Mary, strangers offering their gifts and the Bethlehem star in the sky. They display a *Vertep* at the church. At night, people put candles inside the *Vertep* so people who come to church for the night service, can see it. Young people go from door to door with the *Vertep* to collect donations for the church.

We talked about the Ukrainian Christmas and differences in traditions until dark. We exchanged our gifts and watched each other's reaction. That day was full of joy and happiness.

I left my family inside the house and went outside. The street was bright from Christmas lights and decorations.

I inhaled the winter air and looked around; everything was so peaceful and beautiful. I did not have the same Christmas as in the Ukraine, but I carried the same holiday spirit and that was all I needed.

Galina Kusmiy is interested in a career in Health Care.

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Gone at the Train Tracks

By Jesus Duprey

I remember bicycling-trips in Puerto Rico with a bunch of guys from the neighborhood. We used to go to other cities, but it wasn't through the street-route or sidewalk, but through the mountains. We were fifteen to twenty young boys having an adventure over the hills. I enjoyed it so much, jumping above the rocks, racing. We were a herd of wild wolves behind their prey.

Miguel, my cousin Tony, and I were best friends. We raced one behind the other showing who was the best on the bike. "Ha, ha! Did you see that?" That was always Tony trying to be the best. In my case, I didn't want to jump too much because I was afraid of getting hurt. Then there was Miguel, whom we used to call "Arnold" because he was the dark skin color and same shape as Arnold from the TV show "Diff'rent Strokes." He was always all over the ground; he didn't care if he got hurt. He was a brave boy, always ready for the next fall.

An hour later the bunch of us, twenty guys, arrived at Arroyo's downtown, all sweaty and dirty. Some were bleeding, just a little, because they had fallen jumping on the way. When we stepped into that little park downtown, it was like when Columbus stepped on the shore of

the island; it was a glorious feeling, and we were thirsty and fatigued. Some of the guys were really good. Without taking any break, they kept jumping all around the park, over the benches, down the steps, everywhere, almost getting caught by the police. It was amazing how active we were when we were younger.

Tony, Miguel and I were always together 24/7seven, but we were so different. Miguel dared to do anything. He was brave, without any care or any thought. Well, nobody called us “The Three Amigos,” but people used to say that we were like nail and flesh. We really were good friends. Sometimes we argued about the future. “Hey, what are we going to do ten or twenty years from now? Would we stay together?” Quickly my cousin said, “Us, we will be friends forever; I’ll see your kids and you guys will see my kids.”

Miguel loved to do crazy things. He used to spend time jumping on the trains, getting rides to other cities and then coming back. He loved that so much that he used to go almost every day. One day we planned to take another trip on our bikes, but Miguel didn’t want to come with us. He said, “I have a train to catch.” He repeated again and again that one day he would take a train and go far away.

The evening when we came back from our bike ride, we saw a group of people in front of Miguel’s house. The police was there also. Automatically, I said “Ha! What trouble is Arnold up to now?” I saw his mother crying. In my mind I could swear that Miguel was under arrest. When we got to the house, I could feel the soft cold wind entering the dark hallway. All the family was seated on the sofa quietly, and Miguel’s little brother was on the floor with his head between his knees. “Miguel is dead.” I couldn’t contain it and I burst out crying. My cousin Tony couldn’t believe it, so

he ran out and started biking like crazy to nowhere.

Miguel died trying to catch a train, when he fell down and the train passed by over him, splitting him in half.

I will never forget my friend Miguel. Who would think that his far away trip would be so soon. But I know that one day he will be at the heaven train station waiting for us.

Jesus Duprey is planning to become a film maker and photographer in Los Angeles.

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The Right Directions

By Sthefanie R. DeSouza

After hours and days without knowing whom to interview for an essay I needed to hand in in a couple of days, I decided to go to a chat room and find someone that had an interesting story to tell. After about ten minutes I found a person that said he could maybe help. I gave him my screen name and we started to chat.

Hugo at age fifteen, just like any other teenager, had his own problems. Every teenager has good problems and bad problems and sometimes can end up with no direction of where to go and how to travel along with life. Hugo was a seminarian at a Catholic school in the south of Brazil. Being a seminarian was his main purpose in life until one day he found out that that wasn’t what he really wanted to be and that he didn’t think he really wanted to be a priest.

At age seventeen, he quit being a seminarian and troubles came along. At that time he met a girl, and they dated not too long. He was young at the time

and didn’t know what to do and what he felt. He made many mistakes, and one of them was leaving everything behind to move a long way from home.

Hugo was passionate about music and loved playing bass and guitar. He left home with no direction and traveled everywhere through Brazil, playing his music. He went from city to city. During that time he drank a lot, but only drinking wasn’t enough for him. He needed more to satisfy himself and that was when he started going into drugs. He did drugs for about five to six years non-stop.

During his trip, he went back down to the south to a small village to play just like every other place he had been before, but this place was where things changed. After the concert was over, he got off the stage and in between talking to people he met a girl, one who really liked him. “How did you meet her?” I asked. “Musicians are very extroverted,” he chuckled. But since Hugo didn’t want anything serious with her, he left. “I only wanted to hook up and disappear,” said Hugo and he did. “But I couldn’t forget her, so after two months I went back looking for her.” There was one problem however. She had a boyfriend.

Hugo told her he really wanted her and that he would do anything and everything to have her. After a while she broke up with her boyfriend. She said she would be his only one if he gave up everything else, and that’s what he did. He gave up drugs and gave up music, his passion.

They got married, and now they live in a small town in the south of Brazil near the place where they met each other. Hugo graduated from Physical Education University in Brazil and is now the owner of an academy, and a successful business man. He still plays guitar, but only at the studio. He has been clean for five years now and is

happy about it. Basically his wife was an angel that came along to help him find the right direction of life, the direction of love and success.

Sthefanie R. DeSouza also comes from Brazil. She is interested in Photography and Business.

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The Replacement

By Svetlana Butova

People of all different nationalities and ages love to celebrate New Year and Christmas. This winter holiday is one of the greatest celebrations on the Earth. Who would ever guess that the celebration of the New Year and Christmas might be different in other countries? For me, personally, it was a big surprise how different the traditions are between two countries such as the US and Russia.

In Russia, because of all those years of communism, Christmas became just a religious celebration only on the calendar. A very small preset of the Russian older generation was trying to follow the ritual of these holy days. The government was trying to stop such “enthusiasm” by putting people in jail because they were too religious.

Year after year, Christmas was disappearing and the New Year became the most significant celebration for Russian people. They transferred all their love of the old family traditions from Christmas towards the New Year. December 31st became the biggest and the most important holiday for the whole country.

Every year, one month before the celebration, every single city, big or small, goes through a terrific transformation.

The trees outside are wrapped with millions of small lights; all the houses and store windows are decorated. Starting approximately from December 26th or 27th, people’s activities increase. Everybody is running from one store to another, trying to get everything ready for New Year’s Eve. Some are carrying big and fluffy Christmas trees to their home, and you can hear on every single corner congratulations about the coming celebration. People are greeting each other with respect and wishing happiness to each other for the coming New Year.

The week before New Year is truly unique. If you entered any house, you would feel something special in the air, especially the smell of the Christmas tree. It seems that the air is full of magic and happiness. Maybe it is not in the air, but in everybody’s hearts.

Kids of all ages have a lot of different activities during this time as well. They get dressed in special costumes and go to the theater. All theaters have special programs and shows, which include many different characters from fairy-tales, the legendary Santa Claus and his granddaughter and, of course, the beautifully decorated Christmas tree. At the end of each performance all children get special presents, which are full of candies and other delicacies.

Finally, everything is ready. All families cook very delicious salads and of course the famous tradition, duck, which should be stuffed with sour apples and prunes and then baked in the oven. A few hours before midnight is just the perfect time for all friends and families to gather around the table. The clocks keep moving and the long-awaited midnight gets closer and closer. Everybody gets so excited and tries to think about some special wish which they should ask for exactly one second before the hands of the clock will show us midnight.

Fortunately, Christmas is slowly coming back to the Russian people’s lives. During the last several years there have been a lot of different TV reports about the church celebrations and many productions about Christmas. Everyone is trying to build back the traditions we lost during the seventy years of communism. It is really a long and difficult process, but I do hope it will happen and that the next Russian generations will celebrate Christmas like everybody in Europe and US.

Svetlana Bukova is a professional ice skater from Russia.

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