
ESOL VOICES

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

We wish you success and happiness.

The Staff



The Last Wedding

By Faiza Mohamed

There are three important stages in human life: birth, marriage, and death. People in different communities mark these stages in their own way or according to their culture or values. In Christianity and Islam, the funeral, which is the last stage of human life, is marked in different ways.

In Christianity, when a person dies, the body will be taken to the mortuary or funeral home where it will stay until the family members will come and plan the funeral. Funeral directors will prepare the body. The family will also arrange for the funeral. The type of the funeral will depend on the family.

On the other hand, in the Islamic religion when a person dies if it's not an accident, the burial arrangement will be done immediately and may be done on the same day the person died. It's against the religion to keep the body. There are several things to be done before the person gets buried. First of all, when a Muslim dies, all parts of the body, beginning with the exposed parts, receive ablution. This means that the body will be washed a few times with soap or disinfectant, and cleansed of all visible impurities. This is called *ghusul*. Men should wash a man's body while a woman's body should be washed by women. A child's body will be washed by either sex.

When the body is thoroughly cleaned, it's wrapped in one or more white cotton sheets or *kafan* covering all the parts of the body. The sheet is white and made from the cheapest material. Cotton wool will be used to close all the orifices of the body to prevent the body fluids from coming out. For the women, their hair will be combed and sprayed with perfume and the body decorated with jewelry made from the cotton wool.

The body will be decorated as if it is their wedding day. Muslims believe it's the person's last wedding on the earth. No shoes will be worn. Every Muslim, rich or poor, will be buried in the same way.

When the body is ready, it will be placed in the *janaza* or coffin and carried to the place of prayer, a mosque or any other clean premises. The body is put in the position with the face towards the direction of the kaba, a special building in Mecca built by Abraham and his son Ishmael. A special prayer for the deceased will be performed. After completing the prayer, the coffin will be taken to the cemetery. Mourners will walk in front or beside the bier. During this process, silence is recommended. The body is lowered for the burial with the face resting in the direction of kiblah. Mecca. Everything at that time will be done very quickly. The grave will be marked in a simple way.

Men are the only people who are allowed to go to the graveside. Women will stay at home with the family who lost their beloved one.

On the Christian side, the body is dressed in his /her best clothes with jewelry, shoes and some personal items which the family will choose. The body will be cleaned by the funeral home attendants and dressed. The body will be placed in the casket which the family can afford. There will be a special service for the deceased performed by a cleric. The family will attend the ceremony. There will be friends or others depending on how well the deceased is known. The body will be placed in any direction. The grave will be marked according to the family's wishes. Men, women, and children will be allowed to attend the burial. Everything is done very slowly. Silence is also recommended. All the mourners dress in black clothes.

In conclusion, there are many

differences between the funerals of these two religions, but what matters is the last respect which the deceased receives. Even though death is painful, we should accept it.

Faiza Mohamed comes from Somalia. She plans to pursue a career in Nursing.

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A Miracle

By Uzma Din

It was 6 A.M. My wristwatch alarm was gently beeping. I couldn't use the regular clock because I didn't want to wake up anyone else. I got up, staggered to the kitchen, and put on the coffee. I turned on the radio to listen to the news... for the weather to come on, but I couldn't wait, so I looked outside. The sky and sea were truly blue. The bright sunlight of northern California made everything vivid. The weather was celebrating its own warmth. Humming birds were singing and enjoying the sweetness of the day. It was a beautiful and happy time. I decided to go to my friend Tina's house. As I stepped out from the house, a soft breeze touched my face like it was congratulating me with its gentle kiss.

"What is in the air?" I questioned myself. As soon I started my car, one of my grandmother's favorite songs came up on the radio, one which we used to sing together. She is the one I respect the most. When I was a child, she used to read me stories before I went to bed. We were so close that she never ate anything without letting me eat first. She was so lively and brave, but after my grandfather's death she lost her eyesight and became weaker day by day. I loved her very much; I was her favorite grandchild in the family, which always made me feel special and important. Singing her song brought all the memories alive and a smile on my

face, which she always liked. Suddenly, I thought of going to my Uncle Sam's house instead of my friend Tina's. His house was not very far from ours. I wondered if my uncle would be in a good mood, because he is not a morning person at all.

I saw my uncle washing his car. "What a beautiful sunny day," he said to me, smiling. I was surprised. "What is going on Uncle Sam?" I asked. He looked at me and said, "Don't you know?" I moved closer to my uncle, gave him the soapy water and asked again, "What happened?" He smiled and gave me a tight hug. I saw tears in his eyes. I was all confused. "First go and have some breakfast. You must be hungry. Your aunty made potato bread," he said. He knew I always asked for it whenever I came to his house.

But today the very first thing I wanted to know was the news. I wanted to share the happiness which I felt everywhere this morning. I went in and my aunty came from the kitchen door. She hugged me and gave me a kiss on my forehead. It was unusual. "Come dear. Have a seat and eat," she said while setting the table. I couldn't wait a minute and finally asked her, "Aunty Ji is there anything you or Uncle need to tell me?" She smiled and said, "Why don't we wait for your uncle to come inside, and he will explain better." I kept quiet and started to eat my bread.

Finally, my uncle came inside and called me. I left everything there and in few seconds I was in front of him. He looked at me with a big smile. "Your grandmother can see us now," he said. As soon I heard this, I was shocked, happy and excited. I didn't know what to ask, where to start; I was speechless. It was something I never thought could happen, but that I had always wanted and prayed for. Today was the day; all of my prayers were answered.

It was a miracle that not only brought change into my grandmother's life, but to everyone in the family. "While grandmother was in the hospital, there was a lady named Alice. She knew your grandmother since her college days. They were really good friends and spent quite some time with each other. Alice was treated for liver cancer and knew that she didn't have much time left in her life. She decided to donate her eyes to your grandmother. Last week she died. Yesterday the doctors operated and your grandmother can now see with Alice's eyes. She is still recovering but soon she will be home with us, and then our happy times will come to stay."

I felt very sorry for Alice, but I was touched by her sweetness and thoughtfulness. She really proved that friendship is not just spending time together, but faithfulness that dwells within hearts. It's a special love, which you give, never expecting anything back. It's the most perfect gift from God. Even though Alice is not with us anymore, her love, loyalty and kindness will always remain alive in our hearts. In this world, where everyone is talking about land, bombs, fighting, and all the things which make distance between one another, there are still some people who really know what life is about. Today's morning brought blossoms, sunshine and a miracle.

Uzma Din comes from Pakistan.

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My Departure From Sudan

By Andrew Machok

My village is called Aliet de Ayual in the Upper Nile region in southern Sudan. We are known as cattle keepers and land cultivators. It was in April 1987 that I had to leave Sudan due to the attack on our village by the enemies. They

attacked during the nighttime while my family was sleeping. The sounds of the machine guns and bombardments woke us up immediately. Everyone ran in different directions; my younger brother and I took the same route toward Ethiopia. I was 7 years old.

That day life was in critical condition. I thought that the whole world had come to an end. I didn't know that the attack was just on my village, not on the rest of the region in southern Sudan. We were in a hurry to escape the tragedy. Fortunately, we met a neighbor who recognized us. He escorted us to the arid desert of the Sahara, where we heard the sound of the thorny shrubs whispering like the birds. When we reached the middle of the Sahara, we all felt thirsty. Our population was very big and mostly children. When we met with other children near the paths, they would say "Please! Please! Give me your urine or urinate now." If we refused, they demanded it with force whether we liked it or not! If we asked them, "Where can we get the urine? We are in the same boat as you?" they would surely hit with us whatever they carried.

On our long journey, we ate the leaves, roots and fruits of trees. We were able to survive the four weeks of our bitter and miserable walk to Ethiopia. When we reached Ethiopia, we stopped at a place called Punyindo in 1988. The United Nations agencies, especially UNHCR, came to Punyindo with food and clothes. After UNHCR was there, an American Embassy delegation arrived. I remember very well the day, they came. We had a big assembly at our refugee camp. It was the day that the name "America" got stuck in my mind because the camp manager taught us the following quotation to welcome them: "Welcome! Welcome, American congressmen!" We didn't even know how to write the English alphabet, and yet it was compulsory for each and everyone to pronounce this

exactly as it was on the paper and sing it as a song for their coming. Shortly after they left, a lot of clothes, food and furniture reached us very quickly without any obstacles.

We stayed in Ethiopia for four years and then in 1991, we were forced to move back to southern Sudan for a second time because the soldiers came and chased us terribly with open gunfire. They forced us to cross the Gilo River back to our country, Sudan. Some people didn't know how to swim. They drowned right away. Others jumped on the backs of those who could swim, hoping to be carried to safety and they both disappeared into the water. Others were cornered by crocodiles, hippos and eaten by them. Wild animals came to us on all sides, and it was hard to escape them. My younger brother and I made it safely to Pochalla in southern Sudan. We stayed there in that area for a couple of months. Luckily, the Red Cross and the UNICEF agencies provided us with our basic needs.

We were forced to move again when the enemies bombed the camp. We passed through Pakok, Buma, Magoth, and Kapeota and on to the Narus Displacement Camp in the Sudan. The enemies attacked us again, so we crossed the border to Lokichiokio, Kenya and finally to the Kakuma refugee camp where we stayed for many years.

Now, I praise God, the government of the United States and the ministry of churches, especially Catholic Family Center, for bringing me to America.

Andrew Machok is studying Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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The Day I Will Never Forget *By Deng Agoth*

It was fourteen years ago. I was just a village boy. I was sleeping in my bedroom. I heard the roaring of machine guns and the bombing of the village. Everything was on fire and the brightness of the guns made it look like mid-day when it was really midnight. I was scared to death, but I had to get up and go to my parents' bedroom.

I rushed out calling, "Father! Mother!" No response. "Daddy! Mommy! Where are you?" I cried. There was no reply. I entered my parents' room. Oh! God, there was nobody inside the room. I ran around the room. There was no sign of my parents, and I only heard the guns. Within that moment, my heart was beating like someone who had been running around Mount Kilimanjaro. "My God, where are my parents? How am I going to survive among these enemies?" I questioned myself. I was only seven years old when I ran out into the night.

When I ran out of the compound, I fell and fell as if I were a drunken man. I was unable to run, and that is when I was shot. I was shot first in my hand, then my thigh and leg exactly at the same time. I believe it must have been a bomb. But I didn't recognize what kind of bomb it was because there were so many bombs falling around me. These enemies didn't shoot me intentionally; I ran into it by mistake. They wanted to kidnap me and take me with them as a slave. Shot, I crawled into the bush and stayed there for two days.

The following day, some strangers from my tribe came and took me with them to a hospital. It took eight days to get to a hospital at Lokichiogio in the northern part of Kenya. Whenever I remember those eight days I spent

in the bush without medical attention to my hand, thigh, and injured leg, I feel persecuted to have been born in a war torn nation. I feel horrible when I remember what the doctor told me, "Your hand is totally damaged, and it should be amputated. You need proper treatment, and that is what I want to do." But I refused to let him amputate my hand.

In general, what put me in this mess was the conflict that has existed among our people of Sudan with the Bagaras since 1956. The Bagaras are well-trained militias from Northern Sudan. They were organized by the Khartoum government and called the NIF, National Islamic Front. They were to clear us and force us to go to cities to be used by the government against our brothers and sisters in the south.

Our war with the Bagaras is a chronic war in which about two million lives have been lost. It is somehow called a religious war. For instance, little boys and girls were abducted and taken to northern Sudan to Islamic school. Meanwhile parents, young and old men and women were killed. Sincerely speaking, my people of the south are dominantly comprised of Christian and animist, but these Arabs wanted to change our identity to whatever they wanted us to be. However, our people couldn't accept that.

Sometimes I feel sick when I am sleeping or doing other things because of the difficulties I have been through. I dream about death, yet I am in America. I recall the burning of our mud huts along the Bhar el Gazelle River in southern Sudan. I can see exactly the lion dragging the bloody corpses into the bush, bodies scattered on the ground, tanks shooting and soldiers hunting me like an animal. During this disaster, I was just a village boy. I took care of cows for my father. And then came the day I will never forget.

Deng Agoth, a student from Sudan, is studying Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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Jealousy Is The Destroyer.

By Michael Ayuen

Do you know how angry a hungry dog is? In southern Sudan, especially in my culture, dogs are not considered as one of the family. What they eat is what has been thrown away. They have to sleep outside all their life, and because they sleep outside in the cold and dark rainy seasons, most don't complete their life. They can either be attacked and eaten by hungry wild animals or they may end up starving to death because of the difficulty of getting food. Most dogs choose to hunt deer, and when they catch the deer, they eat it there in the bush and hide the unfinished parts of the deer for the following day. Therefore, most dogs in this culture grow up wise about how to take care of themselves, but unfriendly.

In 1986, my father had a dog named *Cintilwot*, meaning jealousy is the destroyer. I played with this dog every morning. When it was time for lunch or breakfast, I would leave it alone and go to eat with my parents, then come back later and resume our play. Every time I left it for lunch, it watched me; I thought it liked me, but I was wrong.

One morning, I tried to create a fun atmosphere in order to make the dog feel at home, but it didn't respond. When I was trying to call its name for the second time, "*Cintilwot, Cintilwot, Cintilwot,*" it wouldn't sweep the floor with its long white tail the way it did when it was happy. Instead, it immediately jumped on me. I thought *Cintilwot* was trying to create another style of playing, but I was wrong. A very hot stream of red blood ran down my arm. "Did the dog

bite you?" asked Father. There was no answer except the running water of the Nile River on my face. A few minutes later, my sister brought me the news that *Cintilwot* had been killed by my father. Immediately, I ran and hid in the back yard. I didn't mean our dog should be killed. This was my fault, why did I keep disturbing it when it was resting? Why didn't I even give it any food? The wind bellowed the sound, "Michael, Michael *wuei baba*, where are you?" asked Father, "*lox rokich* meaning, I went to the bathroom," I replied. "Let's go to the hospital." "Okay, Father."

I was taken to a traditional doctor who gave me some medicine that he had prepared out of the bark of a *pith tree*. I got better, but I had a big wound on my arm. Now, I don't like dogs. Every time I see a dog I think it is going to jump on me. Never ever be aggressive or abusive to a dog. If you do, there will be a day when you will understand that playing with fire is dangerous.

Michael Ayuen is a Liberal Arts and Sciences student.

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Mrs. Waterman

By Abraham Chol

Entering the Jewish Home of Rochester is like entering a well-equipped library full of resource books. An African proverb says, "The death of an elder is like a library that burned down." Working at the Jewish Home of Rochester as a nursing assistant, I have a conversation with the residents every morning. They are my library resources.

"Good morning, Mrs. Waterman." "Good morning," she said. "Is breakfast ready?" she asked. "The breakfast will be ready in about a half an hour," I replied. "Senior 2002," reading the front of my T-shirt, "What does it mean by

senior?" she asked. "A student in his/her last year of high school, older in age," I answered. "You are my senior." I added. "I am senior to you, but junior from my heavenly father," she said. Walking with four legs and my hand under her armpit, we reached the dining room and sat down.

"Mrs. Waterman, may I interview you please?" "Scratch my back please," she requested. I got up and walked to the refrigerator, and then offered her orange juice. "Thank you," she said. "What's your name again?" she asked. "Abraham." "Oh that wonderful name; I remember it from the Bible, the father of nations." Recalling her memories as a choir singer, she started to play the table as a piano, la-la-la la.

Dorothy Waterman was born on May 30, 1903. She has two children. She worked as Assistant Dean of Students at SUNY Brockport. She was active in the Unitarian church, choir and newspaper, founded a memorial society of Rochester, and sang in Gilbert and Sullivan productions. Interested to learn more about her, I started my interview.

"Mrs. Waterman, when is your birthday?" Looking around, she started counting her fingers as if she was an actor acting on the stage. "I was born in 1903," she said. "Do you remember what month?" I asked. "Could you please give me a minute?" she requested. Bending and moving her fingers on the table as if she was reading Braille, "It was May 30th," she reminisced.

During her childhood, she lived with her parents in a small house. She attended high school in Rhode Island. After graduating from high school in 1922, she stayed at home for a year. She started to work and save money for her college tuition. In 1924, she went back to school and finished her four-year college in 1927.

"Mrs. Waterman, could you please tell me more about why your father did not put you through school?" With many difficulties she encountered, she was not interested in narrating her father's stories. The only thing she said was her father died at an early age, and at that time there were not enough jobs like today.

"Mrs. Waterman, do you remember how many of you children there were from your mom?" "We were only two," she said. As she looked very tired and had no more interest in talking further, I just asked her for a piece of advice. "Mrs. Waterman, do you have any piece of advice you want to give me?" I wanted to give her a chance to see if she had a good memory. "Well, what I would say to you is that you are a smart person and will have success in the future. You came to me and listened carefully to me. If I talk to some people, they look at me and walk away like a person taking his girl friend to the movie or a sexy woman," she commented.

I enjoyed talking to Mrs. Waterman and had learned more about her experiences in the past. Interviewing the elders is very important to us, especially the young generations. In the modern world of today, we young people have not passed through many difficulties, but if we learn more stories from our elders, we will feel as if we had the same experiences they faced before.

Abraham Chol comes from Sudan. His interests are medicine and engineering.

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My Birth *By Michael Ayuen*

My name is Michael; this is my Christian name. I was born in Makuach, Sudan in 1981. I am the eldest child and the firstborn of my family. My father survived the death of his parents, three brothers and only sister. He was the last one of his family.

When I was born, my father was not there. In our culture, the firstborn should not be born in their father's house. My mother gave birth to me in her father's village. Two days later, my father received the news of my birth from one of his clan.

This man, named Daniel, was looking for his lost cow and had stopped at the house of my mother's father to say hello to my mother and her family. My mother's father shared the exciting news of my birth with him. Daniel asked my mother, "Martha, is it a boy or a girl?" My mother said, "It is a boy." In our culture we believe that it is good to have a girl first because a family without a daughter is like a stream without a source. But Daniel said it was good that my mother gave birth to a boy since her husband was the only one left of his family. "He will inherit all of his father's wealth, but still, he is going to be called "Parach," meaning unlucky family because the baby wasn't a girl. A daughter would bring wealth into her father's family when she marries."

After he heard the news of my birth, my father came with a gourd full of milk and a ram. He waited at the door to be invited inside by his in-laws, as was the custom. We are very formal in our culture. When he was taken inside to my mother's room, my father said, "How are you doing with the baby, Martha?" Mother said, "We are doing fine. And you?" "I am doing well, thanks," said Father. The ram was killed, and

they had a big party to celebrate my birth. My father left after two days of partying with his in-laws, but without eating or drinking anything at all. To eat with his in-laws at this party, my father would have had to be given a live cow by his in-laws as a symbol of respect, but he wasn't given one. They loved him, but couldn't afford to give him the cow.

One year later my sister was born, followed by my brother. At last they were able to give him the cow to take to his home in the nearby village.

Michael Ayuen, from Sudan.

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Essence of Love *By Michie Watkins*

"Bang." The sound was much louder than I could imagine. My husband and I felt fear inside the car. The next moment, "thump," I heard another sound, a little bit lower than the last one. In those few seconds, thoughts flashed by one after another. I wanted to make sure about our safety. First, I thought, "We didn't hit a human, so my husband won't be a criminal." Next, I thought, "Are we okay?" When I caught a glimpse of a big brown shadow over my left shoulder, I closed my eyes as tightly as I could, and I put down my head. I knew what it was.

It happened the end of summer around 4:00 p.m. on Route 31. It was a nice day for a drive. Outside it was still bright, and many trees were still green. Nature is so beautiful in this area. We were going to my mother-in-law's house, just two miles farther, when we had the accident. My husband pulled over on the side of the road very slowly, then stopped completely. I opened my eyes timidly, but I kept my head down. I could only see the car floor carpet. I was frightened to see how much damage we had received. I could feel innumerable

tiny pieces of glass all over my body, in my hair, face and hands. I was frozen with shock. I whispered, "I said it's a deer..." hopelessly. We had hit a big doe.

"Are you okay?" Suddenly, I heard my husband's frightened voice above my head. "I think so because I don't have any pain." I tried to check my body for any injuries. Fortunately, I didn't feel any pain. The next moment, I looked at my husband; he stared at me with wide eyes. I saw blood on his face. It was dripping near his left eye, down the chin, to the driver's seat. It was very clear that my husband had received an injury. I nearly panicked. "Are you okay, Chris?" "I don't know," he answered in an anxious voice. It was a horrible moment for me. We were planning to see the balloon festival with Chris's mother. However, I was gripped by an unbelievable fear. This was a nightmare. "Would you call my mom, Michie?" I grabbed my purse to search for my cell phone. My hands were shaking heavily. "Mom! We had a car accident!" I cried.

"Are you guys, okay? I called 911," said a tall middle-aged man who came over to our car. He looked at us anxiously. "I can't believe it!" he cried. He had been driving just behind us. My husband tried to stop the bleeding with a towel. Every time I moved, tiny pieces of glass stuck me. Still, both of us were dazed. I could see many cars stopping around us. Most of the people didn't know what was happening there. They were concerned about us because the condition of our car was very bad. I saw the driver's door mirror next to me. The mirror had jumped into the car. The glass on the driver's side was completely crushed. Now the front glass was opaque because there were so many cracks in it, and the front window was pushed deep inside. The roof had a big wide dent.

I could remember the minute before the accident. We were enjoying a pleasant conversation. When I saw the female deer on the other side of the road, I told my husband "Shika shika" in Japanese. He didn't understand at the moment. Probably two seconds later the deer dashed across the road. Then she tried to jump over our car. If I had warned him in English, maybe he could have avoided the deer. I regret using Japanese.

A moment later, a police car, an ambulance and Chris's mom arrived. We were getting calm slowly. While they were trying to figure out what was going on with us, I was still wondering why I was in such trouble. That accident scene flashed back to me over and over. I could see our car from outside. Compared to the driver's side, the passenger side was shiny. We hadn't started even our first payment on this car. We had bought the car three weeks before. Poor car and us! The policeman asked me simple questions about the accident because nobody could find the deer's body. She had run away. I explained the circumstances to the policeman. He was not surprised. Hitting a deer was not rare in this area. However, usually deer are not active during the daytime. How unlucky we were! Now I could see the dazzling lights from the police car and the ambulance and many people.

In the ambulance, we found out we didn't have any serious problems, but we still had to go to the emergency room. Even though my husband was strapped down on the ambulance bed, he already could tell a joke about our accident. He tried making me relax. "I'm sorry, Michie," he said sadly. He felt very bad about having this accident. "I'm glad you don't have any injuries." He looked at me with very warm eyes. I had believed in my husband's kindness towards me ever since I moved to the USA, and this accident proved his true

feelings for me.

Michie Watkins is from Japan. Her major is Accounting.

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Lost

By Lino Hernandez

It was the most beautiful day you had ever seen. And this is the saddest story you will have ever heard. It was one of those days that you wake up full of energy, and you think that nothing can turn that power off.

We're talking about the 70's; to be more specific the year was '79. This was the time when Angola was fighting against South Africa. Did you care? Nobody did but Fidel Castro. Pretending to be the good person who he actually is not, he volunteered to send Cuban troops and equipment to help Angola. He did not ask anybody if they wanted to fight this unnecessary war or if he was right or wrong. He just called a draft, and everyone with military age was drafted. That beautiful and full of energy day my door was knocked on and I was, I can say, obliged to go to war.

I was taken to a boot camp to get prepared to kill, and to learn how to keep myself alive. There was a big group of young guys. Many didn't want to go to war, but we couldn't do anything about it. If we refused to go, we had to go to jail. The army was the least worse thing that could happen to you. One month later we were ready to kill. They took us to Havana. There was a big ship waiting to take us straight to heaven or hell. It all depended on how well or badly you behaved before that day.

The first couple of months in Angola weren't that bad. There were a few battles and I wasn't involved in many. Most of the time I was writing my dairy and writing letters to my family, trying

to keep them updated with my point of view of the war. One day my platoon was ordered on a risky mission. That day my journey started!

We started moving toward our mission in the jungle, and the more we got into the jungle, the more dangerous became the mission. Hours later we were very alert but it wasn't enough. The rebels set us an ambush and in a flash started a crossfire which lasted about half an hour. I got separated from the platoon, and I got lost.

I didn't know what to do, where to go, what to think. I started yelling but I could only hear my own voice. I started running back to where I thought my platoon was. But the more I ran, the more I got lost.

I didn't stop running. I ran for an hour I think, but everything was in vain. I didn't understand why because I hadn't walked that far from my platoon. Then I fell down, and for a moment I stayed in the same place. I decided to stay there, and I really didn't want to move. I was so tired already that I decided to lie down on the natural mattress made of the leaves on the jungle floor.

It was already dark and I was laying on the grass, thinking about everything. Why did this happen to me? I was alright until I started thinking about my family. I started crying, a non-stop cry like a tropical rain. The stars were stuck on black wallpaper that we used to call sky, but that did not stop the rain. The water was cold and salty, and my heart drowned because it was raining right into it.

The next morning a weird noise woke me up. When I opened my eyes, I looked up, and there was a big orangutan. I did not move. I think that I didn't even breathe for a minute. I was there with my rifle, but I didn't want to use it. I started walking without a specific place

to go. The only thing I wanted was to be found by someone.

One week later, I was still lost and thinking about my family. I was thinking about when they would receive the news that I wasn't found, neither dead nor alive. "How would they react? What would they think?" I asked myself. At the same time my family was crying about my own death. Everyone was crying, even the dog was crying. They buried an empty box with one of my pictures. That was the saddest part of everything!

I was lost for more than six months. In those days, months, I didn't see anybody, only animals and weird big and small creatures. I had to survive somehow or other, and sometimes I didn't have anything to eat. I ate leaves, worms, and sometimes I had to drink my own urine and taste my own body waste. Many days I stayed in the same place for hours because I was so tired, specially the first days because in the night I couldn't sleep. I think wild animals don't sleep. You could hear every kind of sound; some were very scary. The good thing about it was that when I felt sad or lonely I sat and listened to all those sounds. I think that any orchestra in the world would be envious of this music if they listened to it.

One day I was so sound asleep. In those days not even the roar of a lion could disturb my sleep. But that day I heard a "pow" very far away in my dream. Instantly, that sound became a crossfire between the Cubans and the rebels. I stood up and listened for a second to locate where the crossfire had come from, and I ran toward it.

I ran for about twenty minutes, without even thinking about stopping. Every time I got closer to the crossfire, I increased the speed of my legs. When I finally could see people, I realized that they were South Africans. I hadn't seen

a human in seven months and they were the ones that I didn't want to see, but that didn't stop me. I started running again, and I ran two kilometers. Then I made a ninety-degree turn toward the Cubans. I saw a Cuban and in the middle of the battle, and I made him talk to me. He recognized what I had left of the camouflage outfit and didn't shoot me. When I told him who I was, he asked another soldier to take me to a safer place.

They took me to a boot camp where I spent five days. They made many tests on me to see how I was doing. The only thing that I had wrong was that in those months in the jungle my mind had got transformed, and I couldn't talk fluently. That still happens today.

Finally, the moment that I was waiting for came, perhaps the happiest day of my life. That day I would see my family again. I dreamed many times how I would feel when that moment happened, but the feeling was very different. When my family saw me, they were shocked. Imagine seeing someone that you had already buried!

It was a very happy day. I know that it was for my family too. That day even the dog was happy. That day it rained salty water once again, but my heart didn't drown this time because everything was happiness. All is happiness.

Lino Hernandez also comes from Cuba. His major is Visual Communication.

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When the Sky Turned Dark

By Faiza Mohamed

The sun was shining. The birds were singing their sweet melody. "Faiza, Faiza," I heard my name. Who is calling? Suddenly there was a long shadow behind me. I jumped up yelling "Oh! My God!" She was there laughing. "Are you scared?" There was a long silence. "I have a surprise for you," she said.

"Today is Friday; let's go to Nairobi and do some shopping." "I don't want to leave this house. Can I just baste in the sun?" "Please, let's go," she answered. "Aren't you tired of being in this house? You have to change the climate," she said.

I started to prepare myself for the journey. Soon we were in the Matatu, a Nissan van, heading towards the city. Everyone was chatting to one another. Before we knew it, we were in the center of the city. I was a bit scared when I saw the crowds of people and many cars. It had been a long time since I was in the city. Trying to act like a city person, she said, "Don't be scared." We walked from one shop to another until we were tired. We must have visited at least twenty shops in the shopping center.

It was too hot and I was starving, so we went to one of the well-known cafés. We had a plate of biriani, a special type of rice. From there we went to the Garissa shopping center in Eastleigh. While we were in Eastleigh, suddenly, I heard a sound. Boom! Boom! The earth was shaking tremendously. People were scattered and suddenly we were lying against each other. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Terrorists have attacked us," she said. "Run for our safety." We ran as fast as we could. People were lying down in pain and crying for help. Some were under the rubble, helpless.

That's when we found out that the terrorists had attacked the US Embassy. The FBI and the Kenyan Army surrounded the embassy. The entire route in and out of the city was closed down. I couldn't believe my eyes. Hundreds of people were all dead. Most of them were innocent, homeless children who are always in the street begging for their daily bread. Everyone was crying for help, yet no one was ready to help because the situation was unbearable like a natural disaster had hit the earth.

We knew the city like the palm of our hands, but because of our shock we didn't know if we were in the east or west side of the town. We became stranded. As I was standing helplessly, I saw some people trying to save others from a burning building, one which was between the US embassy and a cooperative house which had collapsed. There was a secretarial college in one of the buildings. Most of the students were girls. They were all dead.

One of the things which I'll never forget was when I saw a lady without a head. "Why? Why?" I yelled. That's when a US marine came to rescue us. He took us away from that area and asked us where we were heading. He gave us directions to the bus stop. It took me almost six months to forget what had happened that day.

After six months in the USA, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center. That is when I started to have the nightmare. I was very scared. I began to dream about what had happened in Nairobi. The terror was very similar to me and that made it even harder for me to be able to forget my past memory. These events have become part of my life whereby I'll live to tell the story.

Faiza Mohamed comes from Somalia. She has chosen Nursing as her career.

A Lost Boy

By Michael Ayuen

The present war in Sudan, which began in 1983, is basically a war between Muslims who came as traders and settled in the northern part of the country and Christians living in the southern part. As a result, my Christian community was displaced and in 1987, I, along with other boys who lost their parents, escaped to neighboring Ethiopia. Most of the girls stayed behind because only the boys were being killed. We faced a lot of difficulties on our way to Ethiopia. Many of us died because of no water and food or from attack by wild animals - lions, hyenas, or leopards. At that time, I was six years old; my three elder cousins were taking care of me. By 1988 we settled in Panyudu, Ethiopia.

Life there seemed to be okay, and we started school. We had no paper or pencils and had to write on the floor. But in 1991 war broke out again in Ethiopia. The enemy forced us out and chased us across the Gillo River. Many of us did not know how to swim and were drowned in the river. By the time we arrived in Kenya, our total had dropped from 30,000 to 17,000 boys.

In 1992, I was able to go back to school in a refugee camp in Kenya. That is where I began to learn to speak English. Life there was not better though. Security in the refugee camp was not good. The enemy was able to send hit men into the camp during the night to kill some of the refugees. And, the only food to eat was maize. Many died there from anemia; there was no blood for transfusions.

In 1998, United Nations officials visited the refugee camp and spoke with us about our situation and all of the hardships we had endured. They asked me if I wanted to be taken to the United States. I was enthusiastic because, from

what little English I could understand from the BBC news, I had heard that the United States was a land of freedom and opportunity, which is exactly what I found it to be.

In June of 2001, I came to Rochester, NY. I was sponsored by the Catholic Family Center, which provided for all of my needs for the first four months. Since then I have attended ESL classes to improve my English and eventually got a job at Kodak. I cannot speak English very well yet, but usually understand what Americans say. Last fall, I enrolled in Monroe Community College. I am hoping to improve my English while studying here. In my spare time, I read as much as possible to learn English on my own. My counselor is advising me to pursue chemical engineering because I am good in mathematics. I also want to become a United States citizen. Since I do not know where my family is, I hope to some day find them and bring them here to live with me in this country.

Michael Ayuen is studying Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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The Only Son *By James Uchan*

It was 5:00 p.m. when I ran into an old lady named Bea Schantz at the grocery store. I was stocking cases when she showed up. It was one of my rough days at work. I was very tired, exhausted and discontented. I decided to work very quietly and not to speak to anyone. Then she appeared at my back. "Excuse me. Maybe you can show me where I could find tomato sauce." I turned around looking very disappointed and with an angry face. When I saw her, I tried to look happier so she would not notice my disappointment. I felt sorry for acting so rudely. "Are you okay, son?" she asked me. I told her that I had had an argument

with my supervisor for making me work on Sunday. I took her to the section with all the sauces, and I gave her what she needed.

"You know I had a son with a bad temper just like you." When I looked at her face, there were tears in her eyes. "My son used to work at the grocery store before he graduated from college. He had the same problems as you had." I felt depressed when she began her story like that. Instantaneously, I remembered my English assignment to interview someone I didn't know and I began asking some questions.

"He used to argue with his supervisor all the time at work, but the good thing about him was his industrious work and that kept him from being fired. He helped me in any circumstances whenever I needed him." I walked along with her through the aisle, absorbing the story while she was talking. "He died in a car accident the day before we were to have a family dinner together."

"I was in the living room when the phone rang. I was anticipating a telephone call from him before he came. It was summer time, and he liked riding his motorcycle. He took it to work with him that day, and he was going to call me when he got out of work. To my surprise, the call was from the police asking me whether I knew what had happened to my son. I definitely knew that something was not right.

"I almost collapsed when the police told me that there had been an accident! I rushed to my car. I could not even walk. I drove to the place where the accident had occurred, crying and screaming without even knowing what I was doing. I felt like I was not the one driving my car. I arrived there, and he was already gone. There was nothing I could do, but cry. He was the only son I had, but now he is gone. I will remember him in my heart, and I know he is safe in God's

hands."

He was riding on a slippery hill road when his motorcycle collided with an on-coming car. Both the driver of the car and Bea's son didn't see each other when the accident occurred. It was a sad moment of my life, not that I didn't heard a similar story before. Her feeling and the way she was telling the story was really sad.

I was speechless when she finished talking. I didn't know what to say to her. All I could say was that I was sorry about her son. I didn't know I would hear such a sad story when she began to answer my questions.

I took her groceries outside, accompanied her to her car, and helped put her groceries in the trunk. After that sad moment we had together, she told me one thing that made me happy and I'd never forget it. "You can lose whatever you have, but nothing can take away your smile."

James Uchan is from Sudan. He is studying Business Administration.

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Patriots of the Country *By Aliaksei Palianski*

"Ay-ay, sir!" I heard while watching one of my favorite serials on TV, JAG. This serial is about military lawyers in the Navy, about their lives, their problems and happiness. It immediately reminded me of the story of one of my best friends, when he was in the military in Belarus.

Andrey and I became friends just in high school. He was a regular student, lazy and full of challenges as we all were at that age. He made his choice not to continue his education in high school

and became a student at a two-year college. His laziness had played with him a bad joke. After three semesters in this school, he was out of there.

In my country we have a law for military service. It says that every man at age eighteen should be a soldier for two years. It's not optional for you as here, in America. In Belarus you just have to. That is your duty.

Andrey went into the military right away without any questions and problems. He was like fresh meat for the army. They wanted him so hard and so badly that they didn't find any problems with his health. He had and actually still has chronic bronchitis, but nobody even pointed it out to him. So he was in.

In a couple of days we, his friends, were sitting in his home and accompanying him as he reported for duty. It was very scary for us, thinking he was never going to be back home, but we could do nothing about that. It was too late. We all had heard a lot of bad stories about the military and were so scared of being in the military. I will never forget that night and that feeling that I had at that time, never in my life.

Six months later I met him for the first time after that night just when he was going to his basic training. Basic training in our military is a very hard thing to pass. Once it happens to you, it will never be forgotten. You have to survive every second there so as not to be killed or beaten up, or humiliated by your commander. Young men who go through this in their lives can never forget that fear.

"We were in drill base when it happened to me. Actually I was in the base hospital because of my bronchitis." That is how Andrey started his terrifying story. I still remember my feelings about him. He was different from us; he was the man, a real adult, who knew how

valuable life was.

"I was very sick at that time; my bronchitis had turned for the worse, and I wasn't even able to speak, only mumbling or just whispering. It was night time and I was asleep. There was no one in the room except three sergeants and me. They were drunk at that time and yet also on duty! They were playing cards and drinking liquor, but it didn't seem enough for them. They woke me up. At first, for a couple of seconds I didn't understand what was happening and why they had woken me up.

"After a few dirty jokes about me, they ordered me to speak as loud as they did, but I couldn't and they knew it. Then there were a few more jokes and after that they decided to be "doctors." They took off my shirt; my chest was now naked. They pushed me to the floor. Two of them were like two cupboards, strong and big with very stupid faces. They held me, so I wasn't even able to turn my head to the side. I was inside their grip.

"The third sergeant had been preparing the iron. Until the iron was hot enough, they discussed what was going to be next, but I didn't realize it. I couldn't prevent it from happening to me.

"The iron was ready; it was half a meter from me, but I could feel how hot it was. One of the sergeants took the iron and with the phrase "Now you will be able to speak," put it directly on the right side of my chest.

"If you have ever heard how a pig cries at the slaughterhouse before she dies, so that was I at that time, but even worse. After that night I never went back to this hospital and after a week I was out of the base and even military because of my bronchitis. Even now, a month from that night, I feel how it hurts..."

He didn't tell the truth inside the base,

when the major asked him afterwards what had happened. If he had, he would have been killed by other sergeants on the base. He lied to the major, saying that he had slipped on a wet floor and accidentally hurt his chest.

That is the regular thing in our military and everybody is scared to tell the truth. The whole system of the government works on one side all the time and you can't go against it. How can you protect your country, if the country treats you like that? I'm not going to serve in any army in the world!

Aliaksei Palianski comes from Belarus. His major is Accounting.

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The Final Minute Gift

By Abdulhakim Omar

I ran into my room, slammed the door behind me and jumped into bed weeping. "Why can't he buy me new clothes?" I asked myself. "It's not that expensive." It was the time that I should have had my new clothes ready. It was Eid-ul-adha.

As we all know, there are many religions on the earth and each and every one of them has at least one or two days to celebrate holy days. In Christianity, people celebrate Christmas, while in Buddhism there is Nirvana Day and in Hinduism, Maha Day. The fastest growing religion, Islam, has two holy days, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-adha. Both are extremely important to Muslims. One can not afford to miss either of them because it is the day that the prayer becomes part of the society and everybody celebrates with great joy, rich or poor, young or old. Some say it is an equilibrium day because happiness is shared by all people. During both these days work and school are closed.

The first Eid is celebrated right after Ramadan. We call this Eid “a small Eid.” This is because people don’t slaughter their animals during this Eid. All we do is go to the mosque and ask for forgiveness and to go to heaven hereafter. The next Eid is the most important one; this is Eid-ul-adha. On that day every Muslim should slaughter an animal and give Zakat or charity to the poor people around the village and to those in need. However, kids celebrate differently from adults. These two days are the days that Islamic children love and dream about - just to awake from sleep so that they could celebrate. We have to have a new set of clothes and a new pair of shoes!

It was the year 1995; I was only thirteen years old. My family and I were living in Mombassa, the second largest city in Kenya. At the time I lived with my mother, two brothers and two sisters. Like the rest of the kids, I loved to celebrate holy days.

It was January of 1995, and the Eid was adha, the last Eid of the year, the most important one. Personally, at the time all I needed was to shine, so I could represent myself, like any other Muslim kid around the area. All my brothers and sisters were already prepared for the day. When I looked at them I wanted to cry because I wasn’t sure if I was going to be ready. However, I had faith in my father. I knew that he was going to come home with something special just for me as he had promised.

At 10:00 p.m., still he wasn’t home. I was tired of waiting and lost patience. Now my eyes were heavy; my head drooped. I was about to forget him and just go to sleep. Suddenly, someone knocked at the door; I knew it was him, my father. I jumped out of bed and ran to him; all the sleeplessness went away. He had brought me a pair of shoes and clothes, brand new ones for our Eid-ul-adha.

Abdulkhikim Omar comes from Somalia. His major is Business Administration.

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Tears

By Aliaksei Palianski

He was a big guy, approximately six feet tall, with a bald head, wearing a security officer’s uniform. He seemed to me very tough and strong. If he was looking at you, you would feel as if ants were crawling all over your body and automatically you would be ready to do whatever he said

I had been hearing a lot of scary stories about him and everybody who worked with him was afraid of him. I was standing right in front of him and needed to work with him a couple of days while his partner was sick.

We became friends right away. It was easy to talk to him. He was joking around, telling stories about his army life and his family; he wasn’t that scary.

He originally was from Italy, but right now he can’t speak any Italian and he has been there just two or three times. He came to the US with his family when he was five years old, but the memory of Italy was still fresh in his mind. His family still carries Italian culture in his family.

I decided to ask him for an interview on another day, and he was very happy that I had chosen him. With sad eyes, he shyly began.

“I was fourteen years old at that time. My family had marriage problems so I spent my weekends at my grandmother’s place. I enjoyed it, and looked forward to going there all the time.”

“How did your grandma look?” I

asked him. “My granny was a wonderful lady, very shiny like the sun and open to everybody. She was a short woman, four feet tall, with long black hair and very big blue eyes. She was a very good cook. She cooked so well that I couldn’t say no to her even when I wasn’t hungry. She cooked usually Italian food – all kinds of meals, pastas, lasagna.”

It was a tradition. Every morning at the same time she made me breakfast, baked eggs on top of toast with a wonderful sauce. And she made me coffee with milk. All the time it was the same breakfast; it was still very delicious and enjoyable for me.

One day I woke up and came to the kitchen, as I usually did every morning, but what did I get? – no breakfast. I was very surprised, because it was routine, a tradition – breakfast in the morning. I came to my grandma and asked her what was wrong, where the breakfast was. She replied to me that I had already had breakfast. I started arguing with her, but she became mad. The same thing happened again the next morning. Later on, my parents and I found out about the disease when people lose their memory, Alzheimer’s.

With time she got some other serious diseases and after two years she died. With her death, I lost a real friend and listener with whom I could share my problems, without any secrets. I still remember her smile and her care about me.”

I looked at his face and there were tears on his cheeks running from his eyes. He was crying; this strong and tough man from whom everybody was scared was crying. He looked like a baby who was looking for protection and help.

Aliaksei Palianski, from Belarus, is majoring in Accounting.

A Frightening Conversation

By Lino Hernandez

Have you ever been frightened by anyone you don't know, someone who tells you things that perhaps you are the only one who knows? I have! I grew up in Cuba, a country that has a very strong African culture. In my country the people believe in spirits. Many say that they can communicate with them. These people can tell you what has happened in your life, and what will happen to you. I believe in this African religion, but I have not practiced it because it is a kind of black magic or *brujeria* (sorcery).

Everything started on December 22 of 1997. I was in the National School of Sports, and I was about to have my Christmas holiday. To get back home I had to travel 300km, and the best and fastest way was hitchhiking. After waiting for someone to give us a ride in the middle of nowhere, and showing our thumbs to every car for an hour, finally a big truck stopped.

In this truck there was a group of construction workers who were also going back home for their holiday. After twenty minutes on the truck, one of the workers looked at me, and we said hi and started chatting. He asked my name and where I lived. I immediately realized that this guy was a spiritis or a holy saint because he had all those colored necklaces that represent every saint of the African religion. He was a tall, very skinny man, and had long, two-toned colored hair like when the gray hair starts mixing with your natural hair. As I said, he had necklaces that represented every African saint. Let me explain to you more about this. To become what we call a "saint" you have to have all the necklaces, and every necklace has a different color or combination of colors.

After a while, he asked me, "Are you an athlete?" "Yes, but how do you know that?" I replied. "It is easy to know," he answered. We kept chatting and he told me with an exclamation tone, "You know what! You have to return to school January fourth." "Yes," I said in a frightened voice, thinking inside of me, who is this guy? How does he know all these things?

I'll tell you what. For some moments I was afraid of him, but I kept talking to him. Then he stopped talking and looking straight into my eyes told me, "When you come back from your vacation January fourth, start thinking about something that you'd like to do or be." "Why?" I asked him. "You won't have a future as a water polo player," he told me. "I don't know why you're saying that; I'm in my best moment as a player right now!" He replied, "It does not matter. You won't succeed as a water polo player, so in the new year choose something different. I'll tell you more. In the upcoming month you will have to choose between two things."

I was frightened, not of him, but of the things he was telling me. Then I looked at his wife who was also on the truck, of course. She told me, "Don't believe him. He is drunk." He looked at her and said, "I'm drunk, but I know what I'm saying. If you want to know more, come to see me at Reyna 126." (his address)

After that day I never saw him again, and I did not even think about him or the things he had told me. But January 26th my parents told me that they had won the US lottery visa, and I had to give them an answer, whether I wanted to come to the US or not. It was hard for me to answer at that moment because if I had said no, we would not have come to America. But minutes later, when I put my head on the pillow, the face of this drunk man came into my head, and I remembered the words that he told me.

I said to myself, "He was right when he said that I had to choose between two things."

After that day I have started believing more in those people who can see the future or guess it. I'm thinking about going to see one when I go back to visit Cuba again one day. For those that don't believe in this kind of thing just let me tell you that it is true that some people have the capability of seeing the future. Also, I want to thank the man, the spiritis who made my decision easier, because if it was not for his words, perhaps I would not be here now.

Lino Hernandez is interested in Photography.

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An Experience with the Unacceptable

By Clarivette Gonzalez

Since I was ten years old I have had a fascination with strange things and stories. I finally found a different and an unknown person. His story is interesting and you'll question yourself at the end.

Every month Benjamin went to Philadelphia to buy things for his store. On those trips to Philly something happened. Lonely streets are scary especially if you are alone. The day was beautiful, but it was going to rain later on. His wife was waiting for him because he was going to pick up his car to buy things for his store.

In 1998, Benjamin and his wife owned a store near North Clinton Ave. It was very popular in the Hispanic community. "Those were my best years," he told me. One day he went with a friend to Philly to buy some things for his store. "Even though I had a feeling something was going to happen, I continued my trip,"

he said. On the way to Philly everything went well. There they bought everything they needed. But on the way back to Rochester, they passed through a lonely street; he does not remember where the street was, but he does remember what happened.

Their car was the only object moving in that street. Suddenly, they saw a big bright light behind them. While he was telling the story, his eyes were getting bigger. "It was like a giant flashlight," he explained. That light continued for several seconds. When it disappeared, he realized that they had passed the exit to Rochester. He was lost for a couple of minutes. He told his friend, "I don't know where we are; I think we passed the exit." His friend was confused because they actually travel in that area every time they were going to buy things for the store.

They stopped at a gas station and asked where the exit to Rochester was. An old lady told them that they had passed it two hours ago. He couldn't believe it. Even now, he's still confused about everything that happened that night. "I do not want to imagine what it was," he told me. He believes in everything, especially in aliens and UFO's. While we were talking, he was shaking. "Sometimes I feel that someone is behind me while I'm driving to my job." He believes that during those hours which he doesn't remember something happened to him, because he feels strange sometimes. "I do not want to see anyone going through what I went through. Since that day I'm not the same person," he points out.

"I don't remember what happened; I just remember the light behind us. I know something weird happened that night but I don't remember what. God knows what it was and I'm still afraid of it."

Benjamin is the kind of person who when he is telling stories gets serious and begins telling more details. While I was there, I saw that his daughters were watching him and they were surprised because they didn't know that story. His wife and son were the only ones who knew it.

Now every time he has to go to Philadelphia, he takes another street because he's still confused about it and doesn't want to see that light again. When I looked up and saw his eyes, I knew that he had passed through a lot of experiences. Sometimes I feel that most people in our world have had strange experiences.

Clarivette Gonzalez comes from Puerto Rico.

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My Sudanese Friend

By Nebi Adane

In Ethiopia, my homeland, I used to see many Sudanese, but I didn't know why they were there. I knew that they had enough land in Sudan that could hold all Ethiopians because Sudan is the largest country in Africa. When I came to Rochester, I saw a bunch of Sudanese students. I was wondering how they got here. Is there a female Sudanese? Since I was in Ethiopia until now, I usually only see males. Most of the Sudanese here know each other and they are so helpful to each other. We, Ethiopians, are not as united. Their faces shine with happiness. I have always been curious to know more about them.

The beginning of the semester, I saw a tall, well-dressed young man walk with a smiling face into my ESL class. My heart was filled with happiness to have a Sudanese classmate. We became friends. Once I asked him if he could

tell me about himself. He was happy to talk about it.

His name is Abraham Chol. He was born in 1984 in southern Sudan in the town of Pan Piol. He is about six feet tall. He has about fifty siblings. His dad passed away ten years ago. He speaks four languages. You can't imagine all the suffering that he passed through before coming to the USA. All that suffering gave him a deep trust in God.

I asked, "How come you know all the Sudanese students?" He replied, "Because all of us are lost boys." Why are they called lost boys, I kept questioning myself. Do they forget where their country or village is located? Why are they named boys? When Abraham told me about his life before coming here, I straightened up my ears towards him.

In southern Sudan in the year 1987, there was a civil war between Arabs in the north and southern Sudanese. The Arabs were killing innocent young boys. Everybody was scared. Mothers were worried about losing their sons. The Arabs kept bombing and shooting innocent people. Sudan wasn't even their homeland country. Afraid of being killed, boys started escaping, running away from their homeland. Mothers kept weeping. There wasn't any transportation, so they started walking. They were about 17,000. Abraham was about four years old. His elder brothers were with him. Can you imagine a four-year old boy walking? They walked to Ethiopia. It took them about one month. A mother's heart was pounding, waiting to hear about the death of her son, and wives were crying for being alone without their husbands.

After arriving in Ethiopia, life was terrible. They stayed in an area called Gambella. There wasn't enough food. They built their own houses and school. The Ethiopian government

provided them with teachers for their school. The Ethiopian government also gave them military training. Abraham learned when he was seven years old. Can you imagine how strong he should have been, knowing how to handle guns by this age? Then another bad situation happened. In Ethiopia, civil war started against the Derg regime. The Sudanese were forced to leave. They had come to find peace, but they found another war. They didn't know where to go. They couldn't go back home because the Arabs would kill them.

For five months they stayed on the border of Sudan and Ethiopia. They were without any food. They started walking to Kenya. They hid during day time and walked during night time so as not to be seen by their enemies.

It was a long walk. They passed through dessert and forests. Their stomachs were grumbling, asking for food and their throats were dry. They were chased by wild animals, and some were eaten. "What did you do when you saw a lion? Did you run away?" I asked Abraham. He said, "You shouldn't run away. You should treat them friendly." Many were dying of hunger. They couldn't stand it. Then they started hunting animals for food. Abraham ate elephant, deer, antelope and others. They also ate plants. Once when Abraham was unable to handle his thirst, he drank his urine. Have you ever thought how sad it would be to see your friend dying of hunger and thirst and being eaten by wild animals. That was what Abraham experienced at the age of ten. It took them one and a half months to reach Kenya. They arrived on June 1992.

In northern Kenya, life was still a hardship for them. The weather was so hot. It got up to 106 degrees, and they didn't even get water to take a shower to cool themselves. While they were there, the UN was helping them, but they still

didn't have enough food. They received six kilograms of food for sixteen days! When that food finished, they stayed for three days without food until the UN brought some more. Most of them got sick and were taken to hospitals. After all that long walk, 10,000 were left from 17,000. They stayed in Kenya for nine years. School was not fun for Abraham in Kenya because his stomach was empty. I know how hard learning is when I feel hungry. Finally, the United Nations gave them an opportunity to come to the USA.

Abraham arrived in America on April 3, 2001 and entered high school. On June 2002 he joined MCC. He is a strong person and also encouraging. He has trust in God. From him I learned that everything will happen with God's will. He always thanks his God with his prayers. He has made it up to this point just because of God. Now he is studying to be a medical doctor.

Nebi Adane is preparing for Health related programs.

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Kouevi Kokoe's dream about America didn't come true.

By Peter Kpor

"The farther a man wanders away from home, the more his prestige diminishes." There are many immigrants who held high positions in jobs in their countries, but are now working in low-class places in order to make a living in the United States.

A Togolese lady who works at Wegman's food warehouse in Chili does not mind working in a place like that. "As long as I am living in peace, that's fine," says Kouevi.

Kouevi was, born and raised in the countryside in Togo. She attended college and obtained two bachelor degrees in Public Administration and Teaching, and one associate degree in Communication. In 1980 she went to Nigeria and taught French in a high school for seven years. Then she returned to Togo and worked as Assistant Director for Public Welfare. Kouevi also worked with many newspaper companies.

Kouevi's expectations about America haven't come true. Upon her arrival, she got her first job with Corporate Woods on E. Henrietta Rd., across from MCC, "only to know that I was a cleaner." When I asked her about her current job, how she feels working in a place like that, she responded, "This job sickens me. I don't have a formal conversation on the job; in fact, there is nothing to enjoy. When I was in my country I used to talk to friends on the job, but now I am quiet. The basic expression here is "Are you crazy? Your mammy!" When I heard this for the first time, I was embarrassed because expressions like this are vulgar. Meanwhile Kouevi is trying to find a public administration, teaching, or communication job. She realizes that it is difficult. She cries, "I have met some African friends, and they told me similar horrible stories like mine. They told me that it is not easy for an alien to get a professional job in the United States unless you have attended school here."

When Kouevi graduated from high school she decided to major in medicine, but her parents told her to study Public Administration. When I asked her why she took their advice, she replied, "Usually in Africa our parents tell us what to major in, in college. Their advice wasn't bad for me. In many African countries we prefer working in the government to a job in technical engineering. I worked in public places and realized that the career I chose

was a good one for me. I saw myself prospering.”

Unfortunately, civil war swept Togo in the 80’s while she was serving as Assistant Director for Public Welfare. She was targeted by the rebels and arrested, striped poor, and beaten; eventually she lost her brother. “I don’t want to explain this because it makes my mind reflect on the torment.”

After several months she fled to Benin with her children, Ehui and Prescott, to another hard life. They survived on cornmeal and beans and faced so much suffering. Living in Benin was another unforgettable story for them. There was no source of income for the family. Sometimes she used to interpret for those who were in the resettlement program in order to make some money for living and to send her children to school. In spite of their financial plight, Kouevi managed to have her son complete high school.

She came to the United States in 2000 with three children, a daughter, a son, and a grandson. “Due to the language barrier, I can’t envision myself working at a job like those I had in my country. However, I am resigned to living here for my children.”

Peter Kpor is a student from Liberia. He plans to enter the field of Nursing.

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I’m still feeling guilty.

By Turhan Bektas

I can’t forget the thump of his small head hitting the ground. I felt the thump in my heart. It was my brother’s stubborn head which started the whole story, which ended when he found himself unconscious on the ground on a marble floor, four feet from my mother.

It was one hot summer. It was too hot to stay inside, or outside. A hot breeze was coming from the south, bringing the bad smell of wastewater from the canal, located one house down the road. We were used to the smell, but it still bothered us. We lived on the second floor. Our house didn’t have a roof like American houses have. We had a flat roof, which was made from cement and sand. We used the roof as our playground. Also, we had lots of wires strung across the top of the roof which were used for drying clothes and drying foods. We had a solar heating system which heated our water. In one corner we had a grape vine, which came from the ground and reached up to the roof of the second floor. It covered one third of the roof and was about six feet above the roof’s surface. It had six iron columns so you could walk underneath. There were fresh grapes hanging from its branches. It made you want to taste one grape from each bunch. Underneath the grape vine there was a little coop for two chickens and one rooster.

“Don’t open it,” I said to my brother. He replied, “I want to hold him.” I repeated again, “Don’t open it.”

He was four years younger than my nine years. He was our youngest family member but he dominated the house with his big desires. My mother and father loved him very much because he was the youngest. He had black hair and brown eyes with ears like dishes. My mother tried hard to make his ears flat, but it didn’t work. When he got older he became goat-minded and wanted everything he saw. His name is Ilhan, which sounds like “Yilan,” the word for snake in my language, Turkish.

He did what he wanted on that day and we both had to pay for it. He had already put me in trouble when he let the chickens loose. I knew that he was going to be afraid of the chickens and wouldn’t touch them, even though he wanted to.

He opened the coop and chickens got out and were running wildly on the roof. The rooster wasn’t scared that much, but I knew he would have gone wild if someone got near him. He was putting his feathers up and getting ready to fight with his enemies. In this case, my brother was the enemy. Trying to bite Ilhan, the rooster jumped forward at him. I grabbed a broom to make the rooster stop attacking my brother. This time, the rooster was scared and ran to the side of the roof, jumped down from second floor and flew until he landed outside on the street.

“Why did you open the coop? How can we get the rooster inside now?” I yelled at my brother. He was almost going to cry. I ran to the street to catch the rooster. I had help from my friends and finally we got him. I was on my way back, to put the rooster into the coop. Ilhan was still insisting on holding the rooster; he was even screaming at me. After a while, my mother couldn’t bear our fight. “Don’t make me come over there. I don’t want to hear your voices again. Don’t play with it. Put the rooster in the coop, and give him food to eat, water to drink,” said my mother, who was sitting under the shade of the stairway with my big sister and our neighbors who rented our other house.

I walked passed them through the stairway. My brother was walking in front of me, but he was walking backward. I went up to the first landing and tried to pass my brother who was sitting on the next steps, insisting that I not pass him by without giving the rooster to him. “Let me go up to the roof. You stand up and don’t grab my pants. I will not let you touch the rooster, but follow me. We are going to put the chickens together in the coop. The rooster is dangerous; he will poke your eyes out. Now you calm down and let me go to the roof and catch the chickens,” I said. He said, “No, I will not let you go

up if you won't let me touch the rooster. Why won't you let me touch it? I promise not to hurt him. I swear I won't. I will tell mother that you are not letting me touch the rooster."

"All right. Okay. Whatever. But this is the last time you are going to play with the chickens. If I see you play with them again, I will show you my anger another way. There you go. Hold him, but don't let him loose, okay? I'm very tired of this fight." I knew there were no other options. "I will," he said.

I stretched my arm out to hand him the rooster. I didn't know that Ilhan was going to panic that much. He just jumped over the side of the stairway, where there was no railing. The rooster was in my hands and Ilhan was not there anymore. There was no more sound from him. "Oh my God," I thought. He was lying unconscious. I heard the strange sound of his head hitting the marble floor. My mother shot from her low chair, picked him up in her arms, and ran to the street. I don't know how they found a taxi, but they did. I was still sitting on the stairway and holding the rooster. I burst into tears when my big sister told me I had killed him. My other older brothers were looking at me like a stranger. At that moment I didn't want to stay alive. Everything looked like a huge mountain covered with deep snow that I had to cross over in one day.

I didn't go home that night. I spent my time on the roof. I was out on the street at 10 P.M. and still waiting for my little brother to show up healthy. I walked down to the corner where I could see whoever came down the street. I sat under the street lamp. I was reliving the accident, every moment in my head. I was dreaming when I woke up to the noise of the street market doors slamming down. "Hey! What are you doing over there? It is 11 o'clock. Go home. You see anyone playing outside except you? It is dangerous to stay

alone," the market owner yelled. I said, "No. I'm waiting for my mother!"

I used to get frightened when I was left alone, but today I didn't even think about the fear. I was praying to God to have my brother back. Also I was thinking, "Why did everyone think that I was the one who was responsible for this accident?" I knew that I was acting like a goat, not letting him touch the rooster in the first place, although the accident could have happened at any time.

After a while, my friend came out from his house. He had seen me from his window. He asked me what was wrong. I started to cry and told him about the accident. He invited me into his home. His parents were still awake and drinking coffee. They asked me what had happened. I again cried. They told me everything was going to be okay and I didn't need to cry. They sent my friend to my house to tell my brother that I was with them. It was 12:30. I was exhausted and sleepy when my brother rang the bell. Finally, he told me that little brother was fine.

The result of this accident was damage to my heart; it worried me to death. The other result was a big crack in my brother's head, which healed shortly afterwards. It was his first big accident, and he still remembers it. He said, "I was afraid of the rooster, and I lost my balance. You shouldn't have given it to me that fast. I thought he was going to bite my arm."

My mother, who was really angry, hugged me and kissed me on the forehead. She told us that she loved both of us. She didn't want any bad things to happen to us. This was a small argument, she said, and it brought a terrible accident with it. She didn't want to have any more arguments that could cause problems.

My heart still hurts when I think of that accident. I feel guilty. It was the one of my worst days, one that I never want to live again. I knew I had been acting as stubbornly as my brother. I can't forget the thump of his small head hitting the ground. I felt the thump, but in my heart.

Turhan Bektas, a student from Turkey, is a Computer Information Systems major.

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Death in My Arms

By Volodymyr Sushko

I lifted his head and yelled his name, "Sharik!!!" He didn't respond; his eyes were slowly closing and his body shaking in deathly pain. I felt warm liquid on my hands, and streams of blood reached my feet. His hair was soaked with blood. I felt so desperate and helpless. My dog was dying in my arms, and I couldn't do anything because too many bullets had gone through his body.

I can say that I grew up in a bad neighborhood in my village back in Ukraine. My neighbors, even though they were my friends, had a really bad influence on me. From them I found the truth about where children really came from. They taught me how to smoke and say all the bad words that exist in Ukrainian.

And once they started doing another, a really dangerous thing that I was involved with. They created their own guns, ones that could kill any living thing, including human beings. My friend told me that they had a lot of fun with their weapons. He said they had already shot two wild dogs, a cat and a lot of different birds. And the most exciting thing was that you felt as if you were a real hunter. So I made one for myself. The principle of that gun was

the same as those old guns that you see in the movies because you have to reload it with the gunpowder and bullets after each shot.

One of my neighbors was taking care of horses at the nearby collective farm. His son and I used to take the horses and ride them whenever we wanted to for long hours in the fields really fast. Horses can go eighty-five kilometers per hour.

It was a nice August afternoon. The air was filled with the birds' noises and the smell of the rain early in the morning. Sharik, a present for the New Year five years ago, was really excited that day. He was jumping around, swinging his tail with an expression on his face as if he was smiling. The poor dog didn't expect what was going to happen to him.

That day my friend and I took his Dad's horses and went to the farm. Sharik was following us. We were galloping through the village and when we reached a pond my dog saw geese. He started attacking them, happily barking to make them go into the water, while he continued following us. We went to the stable and were relaxing for a while, but then we were bothered by my dog. Now Sharik was barking at us, playfully biting and jumping around. Suddenly he ran from us for about twenty meters. At that moment he stopped and started observing a man who had appeared from around the corner. We looked at him too and saw that he was carrying a real shotgun. He quickly threw the gun into position from his shoulder, and I heard an explosion. Sharik was howling. After two more shots, there was a moment of silence. I yelled, "No, why did you kill him?" "Your dog is not supposed to be unleashed," he said and walked away. A bullet had gone through the animal and landed in the wall of the stable with bloody splats. I buried my dog right there next to the stable.

Later I found out that an old woman, the owner of those geese, had sent her son who was visiting her to kill my dog. He did it for fun because he had just got a new shotgun. I wanted to get him back, but in a while my anger went away. Instead, I realized that I was the same kind of fellow who shot my dog because I had a gun at home, too. And I was ready to kill any kind of animal for fun, not even asking if it had an owner or not.

I went home and broke my gun down and threw it away. That was the end of a friendly relationship with my friends because they wanted me to get revenge, but I wouldn't. I won't ever forget this day!

Volodymyr Sushko is studying to become a certified Emergency Medical Technician.

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My dream comes true.

By Tuan Tran

I can't believe four years have passed by. Before I left Da Lat, I thought I would never have a chance to go back to visit my homeland where I was born and raised. Now, I was so nervous, nervous because I was afraid I wouldn't recognize my relatives, especially my nephew. I left Vietnam when he was only three years old. I bet they all must have changed a lot. At the end of October 1994, my family and I had flown to the United States to search for the country of freedom, and for a better education.

Now, as I closed my eyes, I couldn't believe that I had lived in a strange world for four years. Tomorrow was the day that I was always dreaming of. That night, before leaving Rochester, I couldn't sleep. I went to bed at 11

p.m. and kept thinking of Viet Nam, wondering... What are they doing right now? Do they think of me like I'm thinking of them? Suddenly, I heard a terrible low tone of voice shout next to my ear. "Stop dreaming and sleep tight, will you?" my brother Phat yelled at me. We shared the master bedroom together.

When the sun had risen and streaked through my window, I heard someone knock on my door and say "Good morning, Vietnam." At the time, my eyes were still closed, because of the sun. I stood up and jumped out of bed like I had just sat on a thumbtack. A minute later, I rubbed my eyes. Then I realized my mom was trying to fool me. I went to the bathroom, got dressed and headed for the airport. From Rochester to Vietnam it took me about two days.

On the way, we stopped at Singapore for six hours. I used this time to find gifts for my relatives. The money in Singapore was a whole lot cheaper than American money. The wine was even cheaper than Vietnamese wine. Almost everything was cheaper yet of high quality. After spending a couple hundred bucks in American dollars, I headed toward a small propeller airplane and flew straight to Sai Gon. I was very nervous when I got out of the airplane. The humidity was very high, and the air was polluted. As I walked out the exit gates, I saw my family.

My sister was so happy that her eyes filled with sparkling warm tears. I mean happy tears. We hugged, and hugged. In my head, I said to myself, "This is the best day of my life." I was so happy to see my sister and my brother again. I had thought I could never be with them again.

My friends and relatives, we all fit in a Toyota van. We chatted the whole four hours until we arrived home. We passed through a narrow dirty road lined with

trees and plants. When we got home, our neighbors were already waiting in front of my house. As I stepped down from the van, my cousins greeted me with warm hugs and kisses, and I could hear from the distance my next-door neighbor shouting out, "Welcome home" in a friendly voice. We invited everyone into our house to enjoy the fresh food, all kinds of grilled meats such as chicken, beef, and pork.

While in Vietnam, the best part of the whole trip for me was riding on the Honda motorcycle. Scooters, bicycles, and motorbikes are the main transportation in Vietnam. The traffic was amazing. The road was always crowded and very dangerous. I saw people riding in the opposite direction because there were no laws in my small town. No one would follow the law and we did not have a speed limit like we do in America. If you had bad luck and ran into a policeman for speeding, you would just bribe him with money. In Vietnam, money is very important. If you have money, you could do almost anything. Children can ride a motorcycle as early as 13 or 14. As long as they know how to drive, then there won't be any problem. You don't need to have a driver's license to drive.

I stayed in Vietnam for one month. I spent more time with my friends than with my relatives and siblings. I hardly stayed home for a day. If I was not at my friend's house, I would be at the market or at the café. I loved spending money there. Everything was so cheap. I could take my friends to eat a good seafood dinner and it cost about 50 bucks for the whole group. That included shrimp, clams, oysters, fish, you name it. My family and I also went to visit the famous waterfalls, the Prenn Falls and the Dambri Falls.

In my second week, good news came to me. A friend told me that my long lost classmate had arrived home the day

before, from California. I had not seen her for almost ten years now. She had changed dramatically. Before she was so skinny, my friends used to call her "toothpick girl." She had tanned skin tone, and talked very fast. Those were just the memories left behind. Now, she was a totally different person. A caterpillar had turned into a butterfly. We used to be best friends when we were in third grade.

The life during my month there was very free and very comfortable. The weather was great, about 75 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit then and all year long. Every morning, I drove the motor scooter down the peaceful country road lined with palm trees. In the morning, it was breezy and the air was filled with the scent of flowers. If you listened carefully, you could hear the birds singing on tiny branches. I pictured myself in the middle of a tropical rain forest. When I have finished with college, I will go back to visit Vietnam again.

I still can't believe my dream came true after all. The first time that I had settled in this strange country, I thought I would never have a chance to even think about going back to Vietnam. I did not speak English fluently, I did not know anybody, and my family couldn't find a job. Four years have passed now and we own a house in Fairport. Now I have become an American Citizen, but deep down inside my soul, I will always remain a young Vietnamese at heart.

Tuan Tran is studying Visual Communications.

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Mrs. Daniels

By Lin-Yan Chiu

Wearing her usual bright orange jacket, she waves to me with a smile full of vigor. "Good morning," she says as she walks past me while I shovel snow in my driveway. "Good morning, Mrs. Daniels!" I reply. Watching her walk by so energetically, I feel a warm glow as if a bright orange sun has just passed me by.

The first time I met Mrs. Daniels was the day that I moved to my neighborhood. She came over to welcome us from her place a couple of houses down the street. She told me she is a retired teacher. Almost every morning, I'd see her walk past my house. I'd see her mowing her yard and shoveling her driveway routinely. Whenever I saw her doing her chores, I knew it was time for me to do my chores too. Mrs. Daniels seemed to me to be a person who always had a well-organized routine and a warm friendly smile.

One snowy morning, the air was alive with dancing snow. I decided to join Mrs. Daniels in her daily forty-five minute walk around our neighborhood. As we walked, the snow fell on my eyebrows, nose, and lips, and the wind was so cold that it made my nose start to run. I took a peek at Mrs. Daniels to see if she was suffering like I was, but the weather didn't seem to affect her the way it affected me. She just seemed to concentrate on going forward. Then I said to her, "Cold, isn't it?" She answered with a smile, "You'll get used to it. No matter what the weather, you'll feel good all day, after a good walk." All of sudden I became very curious about this elderly woman who was always so full of energy and vitality. I decided to ask her if she would mind if I interviewed her for my class assignment. "Oh, you don't want my story!" She giggled in a high voice.

“Yes, I do!” I replied with my hands together as if begging her, and that same afternoon I was in her house listening to her story.

She started telling me about her childhood and handed me a photo of a black lady. “This is my mother,” she said matter of factly. I was surprised because I thought Mrs. Daniels was a white person. Seeing my confused face, she said to me, “I am mixed, half black and half white.” Her eyes reflected the bright shiny light, but her voice was low and shaky. She began to reminisce. She told me that she had been born in the small southern town of Rockingham, North Carolina in 1933. At that time, the Civil Rights Movement was still far away. Most black people suffered from poverty and often had to endure hunger. “My mother was raped by her white employer,” she said with tears hanging on the corner of her eyes. She told me that white men often took advantage of black women back then. Even though her mother was married to a black man, her white father caused her mother to have three additional children. Can you imagine the hatred and shame her mother’s husband felt towards her.

“As a little girl I loved to sit in my mother’s husband’s lap. One day though, I overheard him say to my mother, ‘I should have gotten rid of you when you brought home your first white child.’ I never sat in his lap again from that day on.” She wiped away her tears after talking. There were a couple of minutes of silence between us. Then Mrs. Daniels told me that during her childhood, people had always looked at her funny or made rude comments whenever she went out with her dark skinned mother.

“How was your daily life back then?” I asked.

“When I was young I had to walk about 12 miles every day to school.

Black kids had to walk, but white kids rode buses. My brothers often got into fights with white kids along the way. We were very poor too and seldom had enough to eat. We used to steal fruit from the white farmers’ trees just to get by each day. I also had to learn how to take care of my younger brothers and sisters while my mom worked. I always stayed home after school doing the laundry, housework, cleaning, cooking, and feeding the chickens, so my brothers always called me “Mom” too. Sometimes, I had to kill chickens which made me quite nervous because when I chopped off the chicken’s head, it would run right towards me.” We both laughed thinking about that. I noticed her face had begun to come alive with pink cheeks.

Next she told me a bit about her college life. When she was in her university, she joined a sorority. For the initiation, she was made to smoke a cigarette and she could not refuse. She took a puff and soon passed out. After that, the sorority never asked her to smoke again. I learned that Mrs. Daniels had an excellent memory too. When her class had plays, she would memorize everybody’s lines, so if someone forgot his or her lines, she could tell them what to say. It came as no surprise to me to learn that Mrs. Daniels graduated valedictorian of Livingston College.

When I asked her why she had become a teacher, she told me that at the time, teaching was the only field open to blacks. She said that she had been interested in other fields but that she later became a good teacher and she enjoyed her career. When she got married she moved to Rochester. She stayed home taking care of her four children and finished her master’s degree in education. When her children were all in school, she started her teaching job in the city school district. She taught in a junior high school for

21 years and she thinks she taught at least 3675 students! “Somebody would always call out to me when I went to the hospital or to Wegmans, and they’d turn out to be my students. I am happy to have been a teacher and I am happy now to be through, having got out with my retirement,” she said to me with a sigh of relief. She also mentioned that some of her friends who are working in the school now told her that they wanted to be retired like her now, but that they still had a long way to go before reaching retirement age.

“What is the job of being a teacher like?” I asked.

“Teaching is not easy. It is stressful struggling to teach students, some of whom have no interest in school whatsoever. Working with students like this causes teachers to be stressed out by the end of the day. Then when students do poorly it is always the teachers who are accountable, never parents or students. You know, I used to get up at 5:30 a.m. and come home at 4:30 p.m. If I was lucky enough to come home early, I would change clothes and go for my walk. At night, I would correct a lot of papers. Time passed quickly though, especially my last couple of years when I knew that I was going to retire. Now I enjoy my life because I worked hard my whole life and now I don’t have nearly as many responsibilities.”

Mrs. Daniels told me that she is really happy being able to volunteer at the Red Cross helping people since she retired. She also said that her life values were strongly influenced by her mother. She said she always remembered what her mother said, “Finish all of your work first before you go out.” She thinks of herself as an achiever and she believes forethought results in happiness.

Through talking with Mrs. Daniels, I discovered how lucky I was never to have suffered from hunger and

discrimination as a child. I also saw how her positive attitude radiated like the sun. It guided her through life, providing energy to those around her. Tomorrow the sun will rise and so will Mrs. Daniels. They will energize us all and provide warmth all around.

Lin-Yuan Chiu is a student from Taiwan interested in Nursing.

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Dream Life in America

By Mika Hasegawa

If you were asked if you wanted to go to America, how would you respond? I guess many people want to go to America for a trip. America is now the leading country of the world and there are many places to visit, New York, Florida, Las Vegas and so on. On the other hand, if you were asked to live in America, what would you do? I guess many people cannot answer the question immediately as they worry about the differences in culture and in daily life such as language, job, and food. It is not an easy decision.

When my husband told me he wanted to study in America, I wasn't so surprised as I had noticed his interest before. But it seemed like a dream and I hadn't thought about it seriously. Now that his company had offered to send him to America for two years, it was time to think about it. At first I thought about my job. I had a job as a computer programmer and I thought it was a good career. Actually I got a good salary so I didn't want to quit my job. In Japan, the lifetime employee system is still popular and it is difficult for women to get a full-time job. So if I quit my job, it would be doubtful whether I could get a job as a specialist after I returned to Japan. Then, I thought about life in America. America is still a dream

country for many Japanese. New trends come from America. Life in America seems exciting. I would make friends in America. They would give me a new way of thinking. I would not have a job in America, so I would have enough time to do anything I liked, cooking, knitting and other things as well. And I thought about English. I have studied English for more than 10 years, but I cannot speak English fluently. This would be a good chance to improve my English. I thought and thought for several days about going to America. Finally, the thought of the wonderful possibilities made me decide to quit my job. After that I dreamed of life in America.

The first thing I remember in America was shopping. My husband took me to a supermarket the day after I arrived here. I thought shopping was not difficult. But it was. I didn't know the product names, so I needed to read every label to know what they were. The supermarket was so huge that it took a long time to look for things I wanted. After I finished picking up the things that I needed, I went to a cashier. I knew I needed to exchange greetings with the cashier. This is not common in Japan. I waited in line wondering when to say hello. When the customer in front of me finished checking out, I looked at the cashier and said, "Hello." She replied, "Hello." I felt relieved and waited for her to finish the checkout. When she finished, she told me something very quickly. I didn't expect to be spoken to, so I was puzzled. I tried to pay by credit card. "What information is needed?" I wondered. She told me several times but I could not get it. I noticed she became upset. A customer behind me watched curiously to know what was happening. It made me upset, too. I began to panic. Then my husband noticed it and said something to the cashier. I became sad. I could not go shopping!

From the next day, my husband went

to school. At that time, we didn't have a car or a computer. I didn't have any way to communicate with others. My husband was the only person I talked to. But he didn't come back from school until 7:00 p.m. To distract myself from loneliness, I tried to devote myself to housework. But most of our luggage had not arrived yet. I finished the work quickly. I walked around my apartment to find something to do. But I could not find anything and I noticed the rooms were still unfamiliar to me. So I turned on the TV. I understood some, but I didn't understand most of what was being said. It made me feel that I was a stranger here.

The quiet days passed without any noise. Then, the phone rang. It broke the silence of my days. I answered the phone, "Hello." The speaker said something quickly. It sounded like a salesperson but I was not sure. I said, "Could you repeat it more slowly?" Suddenly the phone clicked dead. Before I answered the phone, I was delighted to be able to communicate with others. But maybe because of my English, I could not get it. I could not answer the phone. It made me feel sad. Things that I could do without difficulty in Japan were so tough now. I felt that I was becoming an incompetent person. I gradually sank into despair. I wanted to talk with someone. I waited for my husband to come back home. I didn't want to listen to English any more. I turned off the TV. The time I waited for my husband seemed silent and everlasting. When the doorbell rang, I jumped with joy and rushed to the door. While we had dinner, he talked to me about what happened at school. He told me names I didn't know. He talked about the shopping he did. I thought he was already accustomed to a new life while I stayed at home and did nothing the whole day. I could not go shopping or answer the phone. I felt left behind. Maybe I was a bit depressed. I thought about every thing in a negative way.

For a few days, I spent time in a blue mood. I had thought that if I came to America, I could get accustomed to a new life quickly and make new friends. But I couldn't. I stayed at my apartment, as I was afraid to know what I could not do. I shut myself up and wondered why life in America was so different from what I had imagined. Then I realized I needed to do something by myself to change the situation. I remembered that there was a brochure of free English classes at the apartment office. I went outside after spending days in my apartment. It was late summer. The sky was blue. I felt a cool breeze. On the way to the office, I practiced greetings several times. "Hello. How are you?" When I opened the door at the office, I said loudly, "Hello. How are you?" A woman replied, "Fine. How are you?" It was a really small conversation, but it made me feel good. I picked up the brochure and dashed back to my apartment, as I could not wait to read it. As soon as I arrived at home, I looked through it and called the number on it. This time, the person who answered the phone spoke to me patiently and I could make an appointment. That day, I reported it to my husband with joy.

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Five months have passed since I came to America. Now I go to school and have made some friends. I know specific phrases for shopping and the phone. I have learned about basic life in America. But still, I sometimes feel loneliness and powerless feelings. However, I don't feel despair like before because I think of them as a natural thing for people who live in a foreign country. Life in America is different from what I imagined. To experience new life means I need to accept alien customs. Sometimes it is an eye-opener and sometimes it requires tolerance. Life in America is not easy for me. But every morning when I wake up, I wonder what I can experience today.

