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# ESOL VOICES

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NOVEMBER 2002 VOL. 10, NO. 2

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## Contents

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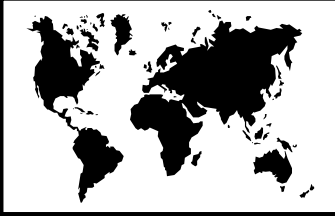
The Cherry Orchard, *Jaroslav Straka*  
Chris, *Alex Kulikovskiy*  
Belief in Life, *Katrin Tihomirova*  
The Accident, *Tin Sang Cheung*  
Autumn Leaf, *Yuri Shyshko*  
Unforgettable, *Ya Lin*  
Fish's Head, *Jing Jing Sun*  
Warn Light-Gray Eyes, *Andrey Belyablya*  
Love, *Jing Jing Sun*  
Helping People, *Siu Ching Li*  
Taking Leave, *Jaroslav Straka*  
Money - It's Not Everything, *Mustafa Kapalici*  
I Was Frightened, *Katrin Tihomirova*  
The Dam is Breaking, *Cuiqin Li*  
Grandfather, *Enid Ayala*  
A Survivor, *Eun Lee*  
A Journey to Find Herself, *Estere Dizhgalve*  
Sila, *Andriy Sushko*  
Finally, *Renle Xia*  
Thank You Lord, *Jullio Decius*  
The East Meeting the West, *Mindy Cen*  
The Moment I Don't Want to Go Back To, *Renle Xia*  
A Good blending: East and West Cultures, *Mindy Cen*

**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





**T**his semester the students in the ESOL program come from these countries:

Congo, Macedonia, Lithuanian, Sri Lanka, Belarus, Costa Rica, Germany, Greece, Iraq, Romania, Ghana, Cambodia, Brazil, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Afghanistan, Laos, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, China, Haiti, Myanmar, Turkey, Morocco, Bosnia, Pakistan, Iran, Columbia, Korea, Sudan, France, Latvia, Ethiopia, Somalia, Puerto Rico, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Hungary, Taiwan, Japan, Liberia, Chile, Cuba, Philippines, and India.

They speak these languages: Swahili, Macedonian, Lithuanian, Tamil, Byelorussian, Spanish, German, Greek, Arabic, Romanian, Goa, Khmer, Portuguese, Creole, Thai, Dari, Laotian, Ukrainian, Russian, Chinese, Haitian, Burmese, Turkish, Serbo-Croatian, Urdu, Farsi, Korean, Dinka, Nuer, French, Latvian, Amharic, Somalian, Vietnamese, Bulgarian, Albanian, Hungarian, Japanese, Gio, Tagalog, Gujarati, and Hindi.

## The Cherry Orchard

by Jaroslav Straka

Slap!...Whack...Ouch! “Dad, I am just joking!” I said to my dad. When I said that, it was too late because he had slapped my face. If I have a son I will slap his face as my dad did to me. It was a perfect whack.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. My dad and I went to that cherry orchard to pick some cherries for Mom. The tree was so old and my dad was worried about me, if I was old enough to climb up the tree. He brought a ladder, but I did not need it; I was so excited. I was the kind of kid who would try anything to reach a cherry, and I scrambled up and down the tree without any fear.

The funny part was that I had to pick the cherries and put them into the basket, but it never happened. I just picked and ate them. My mouth was all red and my face too. Dad was standing on a ladder under me and it was his best place to reach the cherries, but he always took a look at me to see if I was ok. When he asked me if my basket was full, I always told him “almost.” I remember his big smile because he knew that I was lying. My red face told everything.

After one hour I was full, and my basket was empty. I figured out that I should do something, make some plan to make that basket full. That moment my dad asked me, “Do you mind if I go for another basket?” because his was already full.

He asked because he wanted to know that I was ok if he left me there by myself for two minutes. I said, “Sure, don’t worry about me,” so he left for the car. When I saw that he was far away, I approached his full basket of cherries

on the ground. “I’ll get it.” The idea of taking half of the cherries from his basket and putting them into my basket was just perfect. I slowly climbed down from the tree. When I put my foot onto the ladder, I saw that my dad was coming back. “It was too late to take his half,” I thought. So I made another plan to deceive him and to make a joke!

I threw my few cherries around the ladder, and I lay down under the ladder so that it looked as if I had fallen down from the tree. I was waiting for him without any movement. When dad saw me on the grass, lying down, he almost had a heart attack. He started to run to me to help me. When he was close to me, I just hopped up on my legs and told him that I was ok. I thought that it was funny, but then I saw dad’s eyes...I figured out that it was not funny at all. SLAP!... “Ouch!” He started to holler at me, I just stood there frozen in my tracks.

Now, I understand what I really did and how much I scared him. Children never figure out how lucky they are and how often they do bad things as I did! That time I saw how much my dad loved me, and that whack was deserved! I miss my dad so much. I would always like to remember every time that we spent together. I wish he were still alive, but he passed away when I was fifteen years old.

*Jaroslav Straka, from the Slovak Republic, is majoring in marketing.*

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## Chris

by Alex Kulikovskiy

Yesterday she told me something that I had never heard from young people. “Alex, I’m going to die in five years.” I didn’t react seriously because most of the time she was joking. But this time her voice and attitude were different. She noticed a smile on my face and replied, “My doctor said that my lungs have been destroyed by smoking and even though I could quit smoking, there is no chance to survive.”

Her name is Chris. We met when I started working in Pizza Hut; she was the person who hired me. When I asked her if she wanted to be interviewed for my essay, she nodded her head ‘yes’ and we started our conversation. I consider her my manager and friend because she is so friendly and only six years older than me. Her positive attitude and innocent character make her a special person. Usually employees complain about their manager, but on our team nobody has ever said even one bad word about her. I have never seen her angry for more than five minutes. Of course, sometime she can use the “b” word if I or other employees come late to work, but she is no longer mad in five to ten minutes. This is the best thing that I like about her. She is great!

I was very surprised when she told me about her lung problem. In fact, she smokes every 30 to 50 minutes. It is just a habit like you drink the water. I feel sorry for people who smoke and cannot quit. Then their children watch parents who are smoking and often they do the same.

If there is free time, Chris is always ready to teach me some English words. She also learned a few Ukrainian words like “what” and “why.” She is

incredible! She also told me that she has worked in Pizza Hut for 13 years. She never went to college for a boring education. I asked her whether she was going to keep her present job as a career. She shook her head and said, “I thought about switching jobs to another store or company, but I don’t have an education, and it is difficult to find a good job.” She added that she doesn’t want her daughter working until she gets an education. When she was 15 years old, she got pregnant and that was the reason why she got married to her “bald-headed husband.” Just after marriage she started working to support her family. Her youth had gone and life started so early, without vacations and fun. She had to forget about school and education. Chris is one of the people who express their thoughts loudly, and very often she doesn’t care if someone is trying to be bad to her.

Sometimes I don’t understand what people consider as the most valuable part of their life - money, health or family? If I knew that smoking might cause cancer or another disease, I would never start smoking. I feel sorry for Chris that she is one of the million victims, and I respect her as a person. Every time I come to work, I see in her always happy eyes, and I can feel more desire to work hard. She is always optimistic. No matter what happens she is friendly, and I believe she will always be the same.

*Alex Kulikovskiy is studying Dental Hygiene.*

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## Belief in Life

by Katrin Tihomirova

I can see only his back. He is sitting in the shade by the pool and doesn’t look very comfortable. The hump doesn’t seem to make it easier for him. A sudden painful cough disturbs the happy atmosphere filled with kids’ cheerful voices and splashes from the pool. When he can breathe again, he lets his lined hands with long fingers that only artists have rest on his chest calmly. I hear a question, “Are you OK, Grandpa?” And two thumbs rise for the answer. Suddenly, he turns his head, and all I can see now is his big friendly smile and wise gaze in his eyes.

His name is Jack Ruda, and he is in his sixties. It is always a pleasure for me to see him. I treasure his talent to make me feel like an old friend and joke around.

He gets tired quicker now than a year ago when I first met him by the pool. His voice is a soft whisper that could be an autumn leaf falling or a wind playing in the reeds. He gets help from the oxygen machine, to make breathing easier, and the tube follows him everywhere. “I am co-existing with cancer.” These are his words. You don’t hear him saying, “I am terribly sick” or “I am going to die soon.” He takes it as a way of life, and everything that can make life longer is worth trying. His power of living is held up by three columns - his sense of humor, his family and his belief in life. He is a man with a thousand dreams and his attitude could get flowers to bloom in the middle of the winter.

Eleven years ago he was told by many doctors that he would never live long enough to see any grandchildren. He is happy to say that at this time he has lived to enjoy and see four. Because of the diagnosis of a rare form of

cancer (mesothelioma), he was given a short life expectancy of no more than two years. This was back in 1991. Since there is no known cure for the disease, he has received almost no therapy. He had to learn to live with, or better still, to co-exist with the disease on his own. He believes that he has done something right in this.

Jack has been a performer since the age of thirteen. And beginning with his very first public performance, comedy has always been a big part of his life, especially since he got into magic. He believes that all by itself, magic, just performing tricks, can get pretty boring. That's why he says that the total presentation is what counts and entertains. He has a little magic factory in his basement where he creates his magic tricks.

While we are talking, his hand finds a way into his pocket and pulls out a set of cards with a skill that only magicians know. In the beginning, I try to guess how he does it, but it is not worth trying. So I just sit back and enjoy the excellent living room performance.

After graduating from Syracuse University's School of Communications, he became a consultant, producing and directing industrial stage, film and video productions. He especially appreciates the old musicals from 1930-40 and the Broadway shows.

He has three children: two girls and one boy who are parents themselves now. I can just imagine what difficult times all of them have gone through.

"Why are you sitting in the dark?" Jack's wife has come home from the grocery store, and I realize that it is time to go now. I get a great big hug from both of them to send me home safely. As I am walking to my car, I think about Jack's last words. "Where there's hope...there's

life. Don't allow anyone or anything to take that away from you." Suddenly, I feel happy and secure – there is hope for everybody as long as they live!

*Katrin Tihomirova comes from Estonia. She is studying Liberal Arts.*

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## The Accident

by *Tin Sang Cheung*

"I thought it could fly out." I had been making paper birds in the back of the restaurant while everyone was working. I wanted to see if my bird would fly. I ran around, throwing it in the air. Then it fell into the machine.

In one moment, I was in such excruciating pain I couldn't call for help. I tried to pull my arm out of the machine, but couldn't. Then I was screaming for help, but without any luck. I kept on trying to pull myself free. For the last time, I called for help and my mom, dad and my sister came running in the back to see what was wrong. My sister immediately called an ambulance to "come to the Chinese Restaurant on Ringwood Avenue!"

When the emergency medical technicians arrived, they both tried to pull my arm free, but they realized my arm and hand were twisted inside. They couldn't lift the heavy machine into the ambulance, so they took apart the bottom piece and we were on our way to the hospital. At the hospital, the doctors examined me, but they didn't have the equipment to help me. I was air-lifted by a helicopter to the University Medical Center in New Jersey.

It was a long trip to the hospital; it took twenty minutes to get there. When I got there, I was immediately sent to the examination room, where so many

kinds of doctors talked to each other about me. The machine weighed a ton, and I couldn't keep my eyes open for another hour. Finally, they decided to use a saw to cut through the metal of the machine. After an hour they got off me, and I was happy. I had been in the hospital for six hours.

The doctor said that they couldn't save all my fingers because the skin was mashed up and my bone was crushed. He told my mom and father that he could save a thumb and middle finger. Twenty minutes later he discussed it with the other doctor who said that they were wrong about saving my middle finger. Next they tried to save my pinky finger, but they couldn't. They tried my index finger to see if they could save this one. When they said it could be done, I was filled with joy. But I was scared about the operation I was going to have in an hour. My hand was a little numb because I had three needles in it, to keep my blood pressure up. When the time came I was immediately put to sleep. I was knocked out for five hours. My whole family was waiting in the lounge.

The doctor walked into the lounge and said the surgery went well. I was in the hospital for fifty-two days. My father helped me every day to change the bandage on my hand so it could heal. I shouldn't have been playing around in the back because there was a lot of dangerous equipment I could get hurt by, but I was only eight years old when it happened. I'm still trying not to remember what happened twelve years ago.

Many people I know always ask me what happened to my hand. I have a difficult time when I have to explain what happened August 14, 1989. Some think that I was in a car or fire accident or even a fryer. I tell them that my hand was caught in a meat grinder.

Some think that I am broken or disabled because I don't have ten fingers. I can still remember the day in high school when three of my friends made fun of me because they had found out about my hand. "Count to ten. Can you make two fists? Show me a peace sign or even snap your fingers." These friends turned on me because I didn't blend in with them. I just hope that when people see my hand they don't see me as handicapped but as a normal human being.

*Tin Sang Cheung was born in New York City. His major is Computer Technology.*

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## Autumn Leaf

by Yuri Shyshko

"Whoever survived in Berdychiv will never be scared of Buhenvald!" These were handwritten words that I read on the wall when I entered the military base in the small Ukrainian City, Berdychiv. I was only nineteen years old, but I knew that Buhenvald was a concentration camp in Germany. Thousands of people had died there during World War II. I didn't know who wrote the words on the wall, but they scared me to death.

"Wake up! Faster! Faster! You've got thirty seconds to get dressed!" It's 2 o'clock in the morning. Me and fifty other soldiers are trying to get dressed fast. "Too bad! Now 20 seconds to undress!" I didn't sleep that night.

Six o'clock in the morning, we see our commander. "Everybody must remember that you are all soldiers now! You don't have names anymore! You're just a number in line. Your number and blood type are on your wrist! Do you understand?"

"Yes, Comrade General!" It was the general's "welcome" to the Berdychiv

military base.

It was summer 1983. I was a student at the Ukrainian University. I was just like everyone else my age. I was having a lot of fun, and I thought that nothing was going to change in my life. I was building a career plan for myself and planned to follow it. But one day everything changed. It was a day when a new law came out requiring every student to go into the Soviet army for two years.

I remember the train station, where there were one hundred young people like me waiting for their train to come. I remember the tears of my mom and the words of my father, "Become a man." It was the day when I left my house. From this moment until today, life is throwing me like an autumn leaf around the world, sometimes raising me up, sometimes making me fall and Berdychiv Military base became only one small part of my saturated life.

It's hot, a thirty pound tank machine gun on my shoulder. I had already run five kilometers, and it was only half way to the base. I fell down; the heavy sergeant's boots pushed me in the stomach. "Wake up, soldier! It's not time to relax!"

Finally we were back at the base. The sergeant had a box of matches. We all stayed behind the tanks.

"Soldiers! You got until the match burns out to get in the tank, close the hatch, turn on the stabilizer equipment and put the tank's gun down and right 32 degrees."

I tried to do my best because if you make everyone slow down and not do it in time, everyone will suffer doing the course again. Almost everyday I was hungry. All soldiers ate junky and greasy food. The good food was only for officers and sergeants.

Six months at the base. I will remember this forever. Almost everything reminded me of jail. You couldn't go outside of the base. All you could see was the high brick walls with barbed wire around the base. I could write a whole book about the life taught inside Berdychiv base. I was trained to be a tank commander to fight in Afghanistan. After six months of training, my brain was completely washed. I was dirty, hungry, and angry as hell. I felt like a hungry wolf searching for prey. I was ready to kill or die in the fight.

I was lucky at this time. Along with ten other soldiers, I received an order to stay in the city. I spent the remaining eighteen months in the headquarters staff, between high-level officers. It was a completely different life. You could call it heaven if you compared it to the Berdychiv training base. I saw hundreds of drunken officers, parties that would never stop and a lot more things. One day I saw a drunk general on duty, the one who controlled the missile button. "Everyone in the world should be scared of the Russians, I thought"

I am older now, and I have different material and spiritual values. Berdychiv military base will live in my memory. It was my first life teacher, the first time in my life I started to ask myself, "Who is it that I intend to be?" I changed so much inside. And I found that I had a lot of growing to do as a man. I returned home a different person. And no matter how hard it was for me to survive there, I will always say, "I'm so lucky that it happened to me."

*Yuri Shyshko's major is Computer Information Systems.*

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## Unforgettable

by Ya Lin

Time crawled extremely slowly. I was sitting in a bus with a group of people on the highway near Batavia. Our bus had broken down almost an hour ago. All of us seemed to be in big trouble.

It was yesterday morning, on the Labor Day weekend. With forty-seven passengers on the bus, we left the Big Apple and headed north. "Welcome on board. This is a two-day trip to Niagara Falls. I am your tour escort..." I announced as we passed the Holland Tunnel and got into New Jersey.

We checked into the Hilton in the late afternoon. Everyone was eager to see the falls, so we rushed to the wonderful scenic site. Niagara Falls is most attractive sightseeing destination for tourists. It is famous all over the world. People can experience the beautiful views from different angles. From the sky, we can see the falls looks like a horseshoe where the Niagara River crosses between Canada and America. From the observation deck next to the America Falls, water suddenly drops down seventy meters. It is grand to see tons of water pouring down from the rim and to hear the roar of nature. The next morning, we rode on the "Maid of Mist." Everyone was happy and tired.

By the time we headed back to New York City, almost everyone was sleeping. I secretly started to count the tips I could earn from the group. The hotel had been great, the trip wonderful, and the meals delicious.

"Boom," I suddenly heard a big noisy sound. The bus slowed down and pulled over onto the shoulder of the highway. Everybody woke up and looked around, wondering what had happened. Our bus driver got out of the bus. I closed the door right away for people's safety, and

announced, "We have some problems with the bus, but our driver is fixing it. This may take about an hour."

Some went back to sleep again, but others started to chat about the bus problems. Inside the bus, the temperature was heating up without air conditioning, even though two small windows on the top and one window on the side were wide open. It was getting unbearable inside. Two hours later, a police car approached us. All of us were transferred off the highway. It was a nice day, so, some people sat on the grass, while others walked around.

As more time slipped by, the driver was still working on the problems. He refilled the tank with some diesel, but the bus sat there, unmovable. I made many phone calls, but couldn't find any qualified bus mechanics or any buses available within two hundred miles. People started to get anxious and lose their tempers. I knew that I probably would get no tip from my first trip assignment.

I continued to talk with every group member and paid special attention to the elders and youngsters. By 4:00 PM, my firm notified me that not until 11:00 PM could a bus come and pick us up. My company decided to pay for rooms and meals for people at a nearby Holiday Inn. Meanwhile, I tried to accommodate the special needs of different individuals. We finally got back to New York City safely around 2:00PM on the next day. Everyone on the bus knew that I had done my best, and they generously tipped me after all.

Now I understood more about my responsibilities as a qualified tour escort. I had also learned more about communication skills. My first trip assignment was unforgettable!

*Ya Lin comes from China. His major is Computer Technology.*

## Fish's Head

by Jing Jing Sun

"Honey, it's dinner time!" my mother shouted. I could tell we were going to have fish for dinner tonight. I ran into the kitchen immediately and started eating the fish's head.

"Why do you suddenly like to eat the fish's head?" my mother asked.

I smiled and told her that I just liked it. "It reminds me of a lot of things in my mind, especially grandmother and my family back in China."

I grew up in a small town of China near the ocean. People went fishing in the ocean at dawn. My house was located near the public market, so I could hear sellers yelling for customers, and I became familiar with the smell of fresh fish from the market. One day, my grandmother came to our house to join us for dinner. She brought some fresh fish along with her. She used to wake up early in the morning to buy it in the market, and she would come join us for dinner frequently. She brought fresh fish along because she was aware that fish was one of my favorites.

Every time I came back from school, I could tell my grandmother had once again brought some fish and was cooking for me. I could smell it when I was standing outside my house. My mouth watered as I ran in. "Just in time!" I said to my grandmother. She had set up everything and had been waiting for me to come back from school. Then I enjoyed the fish's body only and always left the head. Later I was curious about my grandmother's habit of eating fish head every single time. I asked my grandmother with childish eyes, "Grandmother, why do you enjoy eating the fish's head?"

"It is the most tasty part of the fish," my grandmother responded with an amiable smile and elusive eyes "That's why I like it so much," she added.

"I tried it before, but the taste was so bad I didn't like it," I replied. My grandmother just smiled and didn't say anything. "Grandmother likes the fish's head." I thought. "Why don't I leave all the fish's heads for her?" After that incident, every time we had fish for dinner, I always had the fish's body and my grandmother was left with the fish's head

One day, my grandmother went to the city to visit my uncle, so my aunt cooked for me. She cooked the fish that my grandmother had bought before she left. I ate the bodies as usual and left the head. I helped my aunt clean up the table when we finished the dinner. I cried when my aunt was trying to throw the fish's head into the garbage can. She was surprised by my over-reaction and stopped what she was going to do. I explained that grandmother enjoyed eating the fish's head, and I had to leave some for her. My aunt burst into laughter, telling me the reason why my grandmother liked the fish's head. It was because I liked the fish's body. I suddenly realized my grandmother's intention was to leave herself only the fish's head, letting me have the body all the time. I felt guilty that I had been so insensitive, and I was deeply touched.

After my grandmother came back from the city, I decided to have the fish's head before my grandmother. Strangely, the taste of fish's head was not bad at all. My grandmother was surprised and asked me why I had started eating fish's head all of a sudden. I didn't want to tell her that I had discovered the truth, so I simply answered that I wanted to exchange my fish's body for her fish's head. Of course, she knew what I was thinking because she was

very understanding of me. She knew everything about me and loved me. I was so proud that I had a grandmother like her. In her life, she gave away everything to her grandchildren, and she didn't buy anything for herself. When she had something good, she always kept it and gave it to us.

Now, I always have a special feeling when I eat fish. I miss my grandmother, the noises and yelling of the sellers in my hometown and the smell of the fish in the early morning. When I grew up, my taste also changed a lot but I still liked fish, especially fish that were cooked by my grandmother.

She never said that she loved me because Chinese people are more reserved and do not show their inside emotions. But I could tell my grandmother's love for me through the incident when she always saved the fish's body for me.

*Jing Jing Sun, from China, is in the Computer Information Systems program.*

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## Warm Light-Gray Eyes

*by Andrey Belyablya*

I often see my grandmother in my dreams recently. I walk with her, talk to her. I'm a little boy and feel myself safe and cozy next to her. After awaking, I feel her presence for some time. I feel her eyes on me... her thoughtful, anxious eyes watching me, trying to preserve me from danger... warm eyes of light gray.

You might ask me, "How could the gray color be warm?"

"It's possible," I reply to you, "when

it is heated up with the warmth of a human soul."

She passed away nine years ago, but she hasn't faded away from my memory. Very often I recall her smiling wrinkled face and hear her familiar tender voice.

My childhood memories are closely linked with my grandmother. She was the closest person to me at that time. While my parents were at work, we spent a lot of time together. Whatever happened to me - whether I was upset or happy - I went to her with it, and she was always ready to share my sorrow and my joy.

Every day grandma was busy around the house. She was cooking meals (even now I can smell the terrific odor of her just baked pastry), washing clothes, cleaning up the apartment, and finding a lot of other household work. But when everything was done, and she settled down to her knitting, I was around because that was a time for stories, stories from her life.

Granny had lived a very hard life. Sometimes the fragile shoulders of this small woman had to lift an unbearable weight. During World War II, she, with my just born mother, was evacuated to Russia. When they returned home, she found out that the war had taken her son, husband and brother. And her brother's wife had died recently, leaving her four children. It was a horrible time of post-war collapse, when she, without any support, brought up five children that called her "mother."

Very often grandma recalled the beginning of the war. She was at the last month of her pregnancy. Her husband went to the front in the first days. Her son was 17 years old and it wasn't enough to be due for call up, but he lied at the recruit office that he was

18, and ready to struggle. “My father’s gone to the front, so it’s a shame for me to hide in the rear,” he told his mother. Grannie begged him to accompany her during the evacuation.

The German army occupied town after town, and many people were leaving their homes on their way east. Roads were crowded with refugees. Gray, sullen people shuffled in the dust carrying their goods, and passing each other the stories of the fascists’ brutality. On one of those roads, my mother was born.

They traveled in a tractor trailer in the hot summer of 1941. Ahead there was earth burned by the sun - behind, towns, villages, peace and calm were set on fire. From now on sunsets didn’t cause admiration with their beauty. They looked like a gigantic fire glow somewhere in the west, where war was going on.

That morning began like many others during their evacuation. A big, bloody sun rose above the grimy road when they were on their way to the east. It seemed like they had traveled for ages, and it wasn’t going to finish. A tiny daughter cried she needed to be changed. Grandma had already unswathed her when a roar of airplane engines suddenly became audible. There weren’t any doubts – those were Germany’s bombers. The sound approached rapidly. Three planes became visible flying along the road and shooting the refugees. People rushed, running in all directions. The air immediately was filled with crying and moaning sounds. In the middle of this chaos, a woman with a child’s nappy was standing in the trailer; next to her a little naked girl was crying. It looked like she didn’t realize what was happening and what she had to do. Suddenly somebody tugged her by the sleeve, “Mother, hurry!” her son Nicolas pulled her to the beet field where they could hide from

the bullets in the furrow. Only there she realized that her baby was left in the middle of the road, open to the Nazis’ machinegun fire. Without delay, she rushed to her daughter when a missile exploded next to her. Unconscious, she fell down to the ground.

When she woke, everything was over. The bombers were gone. People came out from the shelters and mourned over dead relatives. The tractor was standing on the road, all covered with bullet holes. But the trailer wasn’t damaged, and the baby was alive.

At this point grandma always stopped her story. Tears dropped from her old eyes, and it seemed to me that tears had bleached her eyes during the lifetime, making them a light gray. Fifty years spent from that moment, but she couldn’t forgive herself, that she had left her daughter alone under fascists’ bullets, and she told us this story again and again. And tears dropped from her old eyes again and again, washing away the rest of the gray color.

*Andrey Belyablya is from Ukraine. His major is Business Administration.*

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## Love

*by Jing Jing Sun*

“Excuse me, miss.” I looked up when I was writing the check.

“How can I help you, sir?” I said. The voice was coming from a man who was about thirty-five years old. He was not that tall, and kind of strong. He looked a little funny because he was missing a front tooth and had a moustache on both sides of his mouth.

“My name is Tony Nguyen. Today is my first day to work here. Did the boss

tell you that I will come here today?”

“Oh yes, the new waiter. Nice to see you, Mr. Nguyen.”

“Just call me Tony,” he answered straightforward.

The job of hostess was hard. I didn’t have chance to talk to Tony until our lunchtime when all the waiters, waitresses and hostesses sit together for lunch. “Hi, Tony. How’s everything?” I asked him in Chinese.

“What? Are you talking to me? I am sorry, but I don’t speak Chinese,” he said, smiling.

“Oh, really, so where do you come from?” I asked.

“I am from Vietnam, and I came to America when I was fourteen years old.” He spoke English without any Vietnamese accent.

Suddenly, one thing became very clear in my mind. I stood up to go to the cashier’s station and took a piece of paper and a pen and then came back to the table. He gave me a not understanding look. “You are a person I want to interview. Can you do me this favor?” I asked sincerely.

“Of course. We have a lot of time. What do you want to know about me?” he said.

“Some specific thing you will remember forever or something you want to share with me.” I tried to make him comfortable talking to me.

Tony’s love story interested me. Tony immigrated to America with his parents, five brothers and two sisters. When he came to America, he went to high school where he met his wife. “Because we are both Vietnamese, that’s why we

get along very well. She has long hair, a sweet smile and big eyes." His eyes twinkled. They had a good time being together.

"There is one thing that I will never forget in my life when I was seventeen." Tony looked pained when he wanted to share his own story with me.

"What happened?" I asked very quickly because I couldn't wait to know.

On a very cold snowy day, he was awoken by the urgent sound of his doorbell. He tried to brush away the sleepiness and went down the stairs to open the door. The police, his girlfriend and her parents stood outside the door. "Something happened?" he asked his girlfriend. She didn't say anything, and the tears rolled down her face. The police told Tony that the parents of his girlfriend had called them to arrest him because they said that he had raped their daughter and made her pregnant. Everything was messed up in Tony's mind. He didn't understand why it was happening to him and he forgot everything he could say to explain to the police. "I was really scared at that moment because I didn't know she pregnant." The police asked his girlfriend about the truth. Tony's body was freezing as he was just wearing a T-shirt and standing outside on a snowy day, but his heart was even colder than his body. Tony's girlfriend's answer was most important. It would influence his whole life. "I trusted her all the time even through I was scared, and I didn't know why. Maybe it was our true love," Tony explained. They looked deeply into each other's eyes. "I trusted you." Tony blinked his eyes at her with a smile

He didn't rape me. He is innocent, and we want to be together. I love him and our baby," Tony's girlfriend shouted. "Dad and Mom, I love him and he didn't know

I was having his baby. Please, please, let us be together." Tony's girlfriend's words made Tony know that she was the lady he wanted to be with his whole life because they trusted and loved each other so deeply. They hugged for a long, long time, and Tony felt he was not cold anymore. He had many responsibilities towards her and their baby. The police left. Everything became so peaceful in their world.

"Did her parents say something?" I forgot to eat my lunch when he was telling the story.

"They didn't say anything because this was their daughter's choice."

"Love is everything for me, I learned a lot of things from it but I also gave up many things because of it," Tony said. At seventeen, he had the chance to get good education and a good job; instead, he went to work when he finished high school and didn't go to the college because he had to support his family and take care of the kid. Now, Tony has four children already, and everything is going fine. He is happy to be a daddy. "I try to give them the best place, the best things and the best education because I know education is really important for a person. I didn't get a good education, and I don't want my children to be like me."

"How's your wife?" I asked.

"She is a really good lady. She also goes to work and does the housework and takes care of the children. I think I am a lucky one. Love is everything for me," Tony said and smiled deeply.

Now, it was dinnertime, when it would start getting busy again. We stopped talking and went back to do what we had to do, but Tony's story still stayed around in my mind and didn't go away.

*Jing Jing Sun comes from China. She is studying Computer Information Systems.*

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## Helping People

*By Siu Ching Li*

The first time when I met Don, my family was looking for an apartment. Don was helping his sister-in-law to sell some furniture and fixtures to us from that apartment because she had just lost her husband and wanted to move to a nursing home. He lived in the same building. When we moved in, he helped us to fix all the fixtures. Also, he knew we had just immigrated to America; he helped us to adjust to our new environment. Later, he and his wife also became the babysitter of my children. They treated my children like their own children. Sometimes they took care of me, too. For example, when my husband was out of town, they found some activities for us. Now they are my best friends.

When I asked Don to help me to do an interview, he was very happy to do so. Actually, I knew he would help me because he has never refused people asking for help, as his wife said.

We started to talk about his parents, his father who emigrated from Italy first, and then his mother. Don was born in America. He had four brothers and two sisters. He was the second youngest in his family. When I asked about his childhood, he replied with a little embarrassment, "Trouble." We both laughed, and then he explained. When he was young, his family was very poor. Although his mother had a job, they still did not have enough money to support their whole family. Therefore, he resolved to earn some money to help

them. He started to sell newspapers on a street corner, and his brother on another street. Once a couple of big boys came to his brother and asked for the money that they had earned from selling newspapers. He went there to help his brother to fight with those big boys; he just wanted to protect his brother. Except for this trouble, he was happy to have his business because he could earn two cents for each paper. (At that time, the price of a newspaper was five cents.) On the average, he could earn thirty cents every day, which he gave to his mother to help his family.

Next we talked about his school life. He loved to be involved in everything in his school. For example, he was a school crossing guard to help the students cross the road. When the teacher needed help to clean the blackboard, he said, "I was always a volunteer." He also had a difficult time in his school life, in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of middle school. When he took a history examination, he was crying because his mother had died. The teacher let him go home and take the test the next day. After his mother died, he had to work hard to support his family. Thus, he did not join any after-school activities when he was in high school. By then he had found a job in a grocery store so that he could earn more money.

After we had talked a long time, he lost his voice. I suggested that we could talk another day, but he wanted to continue his story. After he graduated from high school, he worked in a grocery store which was bigger than the one that he had worked in before. Later, he changed his job when he met a man who usually came to the store to put some bread on the rack for sale. Don asked him for a job helping him sell his bread.

He had to start to work at 5 o'clock in the morning. One cold winter morning he saw a man walking on the street, so he stopped his truck and offered the

man a ride to work. After that day he took him to work every day. I wondered whether this was too dangerous to give a stranger a ride. He explained that there was not much crime at that time. Also, he would feel warm inside his truck, and he would not walk in the cold weather.

When we talked about his job, his eyes opened wide, and he said, "I was good at selling bread." He remembered that there was an Easter Contest in which he won a prize, a pound of chocolate. He was overwhelmed. But he saw his co-worker, who stood next to him, was a little disappointed because he had wanted to give a surprise to his four children. Don decided to give the prize to his colleague. "He might want this prize more than I did because I only had one little girl," he said.

He showed me a picture of a good-looking young man with a military uniform on who looked just like a movie star. His wife said this picture was taken during World War II. He was sent to South Korea for two years. He was a sergeant and worked as a mechanical engineer. His duties were fixing all the military trucks, cars, jeeps and tanks in his division. Meanwhile, he was a volunteer to deliver some bags of rice to the people who lived in the "Leper Colony" (all these sick people were isolated from the outside because the government did not want to spread the sickness to the whole country). I questioned whether he might have gotten sick too. But he only thought if he had not delivered the bags of rice, they would have been very hungry. Sometimes he saw some children and women trying to walk. He stopped his truck and gave them a ride although he knew this was not permitted. Also, he cut the soldiers' hair for free. When they gave him some gratuities, he could send extra money to his wife.

As he said, he has been an usher in church for fifty-three years. He has to go

to church early every Sunday to prepare everything before people come. During the service, he will pass the basket to the people for donations. Sometimes he helps the people at a funeral. In addition, he is a member of the Knights of Columbus Council. They do a fund drive every year. Most of the donation will help poor people to pay their rent and heating costs. A part will be given to the priest to repair the church.

Since he retired, he has been a volunteer in the post office to sort out the undelivered mail, which includes children's books and magazines. He takes the children's books to the Al Sigl Center, and the magazines are sent to hospitals and nursing homes. "The children and the sick people are very happy to have these books and magazines," he said. "If nobody sorts out these undelivered mails, the post office will destroy them."

"What is your motivation to help people?" I asked.

"My religion makes me do this, and I can spread a message of love to everyone," he replied. He hopes this message will continue to spread to the whole world. Actually, I am the one to get this message and want to continue his spirit. If everybody gets this message, the world will become more beautiful.

*Siu Ching Li is from Hong Kong and is pursuing a major in accounting.*

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## **Taking Leave**

*by Jaroslav Straka*

"Hi, how are you Grandpa?"

Grandpa: "Jari...! How are you doing my eastern Russian friend?"

“Grandpa! I am not Russian!”

Grandpa: “I know. I am just joking!”

It was our meeting, when we saw each other for the second time. I felt like an old friend. After a few minutes I told him that I would like to do an interview with him. We took a seat in the kitchen, and Grandpa started talking.

His face looked serious as he started turning the pages inside his mind. He was born in Buffalo in 1932, but he didn’t remember his childhood because it was many years ago. He told me that he remembered when his parents worked very hard, and at that time they didn’t have too much money; they had just enough to survive. When he was older, he went to high school, but he didn’t finish because he decided to join the army with his friend. “We thought that we were cool and tough guys!” he said. After a few months they went to the Vietnam War. He stopped talking for a few seconds. He didn’t recognize that, but I did. I really wanted to ask him many questions about the war, but I discerned that he wanted to switch this theme, so I stopped asking him questions. He changed the topic like this, “Wait a minute! I recall something unbelievable! Listen to this!” His face became so excited.

When he was twenty-five years old, a good friend passed away. This young man was the kind of person who was loved by everybody. When he died nobody still wanted to believe it. But then all his friends found a way to take their leave of him. “We stole his dead body from his parents’ house and we made a party for him. Just for him!” They put him on a chair, behind a table and they put a bottle of beer in his hand. Grandpa had the biggest smile I had ever seen on him. “He looked as if he was sitting on a chair and drinking a beer with us. Everybody who was at the party

came to him to say, ‘good bye, take care’ by clinking bottles.”

“When the party was over, we returned the body to his parents’ house. Everything happened during the night so nobody had any idea of what kind of party we had had. The next morning my friends and I felt as if he had moved to another city and we were never going to see him again. During the funeral ceremony we stood there with tears and with big secret smiles inside us, about what we had done the night before.”

When grandpa finished his story, I was so excited because I had never heard anything like that. I forgot that I was interviewing him. I think that it was the greatest thing, what friends did for him. I know that people can think that it was a little crazy, but I still think that it was the best example of how friends care about each other. If I die, I would like to have the same “good bye” with my friends as Grandpa’s buddies had for their friend.

*Jaroslav Straka is a Marketing major from the Slovak Republic.*

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## Money – It’s Not Everything

*by Mustafa Kapalici*

When my mother was a little girl, her grandfather came to Turkey from Greece and at that time my grandfather was rich. But he was more than sixty years old and sick. All his children thought when he died, they were going to be rich. After a couple of months the doctor found out that my great-grandfather had cancer. So all his children wanted to take care of their father, and they were literally fighting for that. Everybody thought they were going to be rich soon. When he was on his death bed he said to his

children, “All my children, you think I’m rich, but when I came to Turkey, I lost almost all my money at the casino. What I mean is, I’m a poor man now.” After what he said, all his children left the room except his neighbor. But he was actually tricking his children. When he died, he left all his money to his neighbor because when he needed help he was there for him. I believe if my grandfather had taken care of my great-grandfather, his children, like my mother, would be rich right now.

This story is sad, but also funny. The purpose is to teach me no matter what, if somebody needs my help, I have to be there for him or her. Money should be not important at this point. That’s right. I should be rich now, but hey, I’m still thinking I’m rich because all I need is with me - my family and my friends.

*Mustafa Kapalici is planning to study Radiology Technology.*

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## I Was Frightened

*by Katrin Tihomirova*

My heart was fluttering from running. I could still hear their voices. I held my breath and listened. Nobody had noticed my escape. Finally I was alone, and I did not have to hide my tears anymore. I wanted to cry, to let everything out and quickly. One tear, another one, and soon they were just running over my cheeks, down on my neck. I did not wipe them away. I needed them.

What happened? It was homesickness – maybe, missing something that you cannot even describe. My tears are dried now and like after every rain, the sun is shining again.

It had been a nice American family picnic, and everybody wanted to know

something about my family, my first impressions, and me. I was overwhelmed and there it was, the simple question that just kicked me in the stomach. “Have you told your parents that you love them?”

After my “no,” I felt so sorry for my mom and dad because they had never heard me say that. But at the same time I was sorry for myself too, for not hearing it from them. I feel much stronger now, and what gives me strength is my memories about my family.

I could hardly walk. It looked like the bag that I was dragging had grown strong roots and was impossible to lift up. “All right, one more time! I can do it! One, two, three.” Oh, I almost lost my balance. I had been too busy convincing myself that I could do it that I did not even notice my mom’s helping hand.

“You don’t have to help me. It is too heavy for you. You could hurt yourself.” I looked up, and I saw in my mom’s eyes that she was flattered that I wanted to help her. I looked at her, and she was so beautiful that day, in her summer dress and sandals. Also, she was wearing my favorite pair of earrings – two tiny simple hearts. You could not miss them because they were like two dewdrops in the grass, reflecting the first sunbeam in the morning. And her gray eyes with a little green. But wait, my mom’s eyes looked blue to me that moment - blue, like...the summer sky. I raised my eyes, and I will never forget the color of the sky that day. It was so blue that you could fall into that deepness and lose yourself. I closed my eyes and even then I could see the bright blue.

When I next looked at my mom, her eyes were gray again. “Katrin, do not forget this moment!” And I have not forgotten it. When the sky happens to be blue, like it was that day, I find myself standing and looking into its infinity. It

always reminds me of my mom, who caught a piece of summer sky in her eyes.

Homesickness does not frighten me anymore because I know that whatever happens my family will be always with me – in my heart.

*Katrin Tihhomirova, a student from Estonia, is a Liberal Arts major.*

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## The Dam is Breaking

by Cuiqin Li

I have forgotten many things from my childhood. But there is one event that I can’t get out of my mind. In the summer of 1986, it rained day and night; it kept on for three weeks. The fields and mountains were oozing with water. All the lakes and rivers in the area were rising. And a dull gray sky promised more rain before the end of the day.

One of the elderly men in our town was anxious. “This is a dangerous situation having such high water levels.” He was right. There was a river flowing around our small village. At the beginning of the river, there was a big lake on a small mountain which was not very far away.

Many people in our village didn’t even know that the dam had broken because they were sleeping. The water in the lake all poured down into our village. This happened suddenly and unexpectedly. The whole village was submerged in the flood all at once.

“The dam is breaking! The dam is breaking!” The shouts spread rapidly.

My anxious parents hurried us three kids upstairs because they were afraid

that my sister and I would go out together with the neighbors to see how the water was in the river. They were preoccupied with saving the TV, the only one in our village. They used the basket pulley system to help lift the TV to the safety of the second floor, as well as some food and clothing. Our chicken, duck and pig were taken to the balcony.

We kids climbed onto the roof of our house. We were not frightened, though. We were very excited because we hadn’t seen a flood before. One of my friends ran back and forth on the roof, just like he was playing on the ground. Our house was on the highland area, so only half of it was covered by water. We could look down at the whole village from our roof.

When the water was flowing down the streets and into our house, I was afraid. I held my father’s hand very tightly. At that moment I heard the radios from the village offices broadcasting, “Villagers, the dam is breaking! Please move your families quickly to higher ground!”

Some of the village people used boards as their beds. When they awoke, they found themselves floating on the water, as the boards had become boats. Besides them, there were various objects floating: tables, chairs, basins, clothes and boxes. Even animals like oxen were swimming and floating.

Two families from the lower part of my village saved themselves by making it to our house. I remember that one of the women was an aunt of mine. She gave birth to a baby in our house, and my father had climbed onto the roof to call the neighbor to help.

On the morning of the second day, the rain stopped. But the flood was still there. I thought it was the end of the world because the flood was all around us. Even though we were in the safety of

our house, we could hear water lapping against the walls below. Sometimes we heard the crash of a nearby house as it collapsed into the flood. I wondered if our house would be the next one. I didn't know what would become of me.

Suddenly, we heard the crying of a small girl outside in the water. Two strong men leaning from our roof caught the child with the help of her struggling father. "OK, we got her, we got her," they shouted. The girl was cold and tired and covered with mud. Most of her clothing had been torn off, but she was safe. All of us cheered.

The flood lasted for a night and a day. Before the sunset of the next day, the water receded. Many houses collapsed. Hundreds of dead animals littered the muddy streets and floated in the swollen river. Cows, mules, cats, pigs, chickens, and dogs all had drowned.

Many people died in the flood. There were people both dead and alive floating down the river. Some corpses were hung up in the trees. I was dazed and frightened and filled with horror.

It would take a long time to clean up the destruction as well as a long time to heal the pain of loss of so many loved ones. This traumatic time in my life will remain forever in my memory.

*Cuiqin Li, from China, is a Liberal Arts major.*

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## Grandfather

*by Enid Ayala*

My 60 year old grandfather Felix Vazquez lives in Puerto Rico. He grew up in a small town named Sabana Seca with his mom, Maria, and his father, Elias. He also grew up in a very poor

house where the bathroom was outside. Five sisters and six brothers slept in a small room all together. It only had one full bed for the boys and one full bed for the girls. His dad and mom slept in a small bed. Since he was a young boy, he had to work hard to help his dad to support his family, washing cars and cleaning shoes.

At the age of 18, he met my grandmother, who was 14 years old. He told me that her mother didn't like him because he was dark-skinned. But the funny thing is that she was dark-skinned too. This problem made my grandmother run away with my grandfather. He built a little house for the two of them. She was 18 years old when she had her first baby, my mom. Now they have been together for 39 years. After his dad died, he got the right to keep his house because since when he was a little boy, he had always helped him. He and my grandmother worked hard to build the house a little bit bigger in case they had more children.

My grandfather had great hands for working with wood. He built things like beds, cabinets for the kitchen, doors and even a roof. When I was seven years old, he made my first big bed for my sister and me. He also worked for the cellular phone company, which wanted him to travel all around the island and outside of the island to St Thomas and Santo Domingo.

Now he is a little bit sick because he has diabetes, but that doesn't stop him from anything he wants and working hard. My grandfather has always been a mirror for all the men of the family. He is an example of what a real man is. My grandmother said that he is a good father and a good husband.

If I ever get married, I wish I could marry someone like him. He is a tough man, one who never gives up despite

his sickness. His sickness for him is like fighting with the wind of a twister; he is always powerful.

*Enid Ayala is studying Interior Design.*

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## A Survivor

*By Eun Lee*

"Breast cancer." Probably that is the scariest word to women. We believe that it is curable in an early stage, but it is often hardly recognized by early symptoms and when you have found it, most cases are too late to cure.

My interviewee was diagnosed with breast cancer three years ago, but she was cured and she lives her life as a cancer survivor today. Her name is Sunhee Lim, and she is forty years old. I have known her for ten years and see her at the Korean Methodist Church in Penfield almost every Sunday. She is a nice person and likes to help people. She is especially nice to elderly people, and they like her very much. Sunhee is a very energetic person. She walks and talks fast, and she likes to say she is busy. In the church she is one of the people who always lead and show their positive thinking. She is also a choir member; she is happy about her service.

For this interview, I visited her house. That time she had just returned home from her work, but she welcomed me. Her house was clean and neatly organized. She invited me to sit at a table, and she brought two cups of tea for herself and me. She started to talk about how she felt when she had the first symptoms. "At first, I thought it was a caffeine clot or a calcium deposit. I never thought I could have cancer. I wasn't concerned about it, and I thought it did not relate to me."

I asked her how her family reacted when they heard about her situation. She said her two teenage boys and her husband seemed shocked at first, but they tried to show her their sincerity. Her first son, Jimmy, started to collect lots of information about breast cancer, so he could help his mother. They prayed to God harder than at other times. She said that her family was strongly connected to each other.

Sunhee said she was lucky because her surgeon was a competent doctor. Before she had the operation, she had to take chemotherapy. It was needed to reduce the size of the cancer. She said it was the hardest treatment for her. During chemotherapy, she was enervated because it killed cancer cells, but healthy cells too. Also there were side effects like losing hair, losing taste, weakness, and vomiting. "I was humiliated when I started to lose my hair and had to wear a wig. Sometimes I wanted to give up, but I wanted to live, also. I was not afraid to die, but I did not want to leave my loving family. I knew they needed me." She fought hard against the cancer. The doctor told her that seventy-five percent of cancer patients might have symptoms again within two years. Now this year is the third year for her. She keeps following her check-up routine. Until now, they haven't found any sign of cancer any more. Ultimately, she survived.

I asked, "How has this significant experience affected your life?"

She said, "I believed in God's way and I still believe in him. I feel God helped me and I am sure he will help my family and me until I spend my time that was given for me. I thank God first, then my family and my friends. My family is closer together than before and I understand how important this time of my life is. I will do my best." When I

looked at her face, it glowed and there were tears in her eyes. I believed that those tears were for a winner, not for a loser.

When I looked outside through the window, just like the day before, the sky was colored with the glow of the sunset. It was beautiful, and we know the sun will come back tomorrow and forever without ceasing. However, we know that human life is short, and we will not get it back once it is gone. We should live our best and I will do so too, because it is worthwhile to live.

*Eun Lee, from Korea, plans on a double major: Computer Information Systems and Accounting.*

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## A Journey to Find Herself

*by Estere Dizhgalve*

Like a book, one's life has numerous chapters in the journey of life and one of these chapters Vita opened by leaving her home where everything was at her fingertips. In a journey to find herself, Vita has chosen to start a new chapter in her life.

All of us seek answers in lives and some of us find it, some maybe not. Vita is a nineteen year-old girl, born in Estonia, but unlike me, she moved away at a very young age. Basically, she grew up in two different cultures and looks at life with very open and accepting eyes. She is a person who doesn't accept life any way it goes. She is looking for her own way, to find herself and the meaning of her life.

To find what she is looking for, she decided to move away from her home in Seattle to New York. "At a time

when people were moving away from New York, I was being drawn nearer." She points this out with sarcasm in her voice and a sigh of sadness and homesickness.

Vita is a person who doesn't run away from her problems; she does her best to solve them. Many people choose not to change; they are afraid of something new and different, but Vita strives for something more and different in her young life. She searches for adventure and a new beginning. For a girl who never lived away from home, this was quite a change. Now she will start to grow up and handle things on her own.

One of her best experiences was finishing her senior project where she chose to compare cultures. She had the chance to travel to Latvia in her senior year in high school, to see and experience the life of teens her own age. She compared cultures and the lifestyle of young people in both countries: Latvia and the US. This project, Vita pointed out, was one of the few treasures in her life; I heard pride in her voice when she said this.

Her accomplishment is that she graduated from her local high school in Seattle, and was accepted to the University of Washington. To her it was a dream come true, but because of financial status, she couldn't continue to attend UW. Her goal in life is to pick a career that she will enjoy. Her love for children and people in general will hopefully someday help her make the choice.

All of us seek something special and deeper in our lives, but not always are we strong enough to handle it and we often give up. Now Vita is looking forward with hope to find herself in this race of life.

*Estere Dizhgalve comes from Latvia. She is planning to study Nursing.*

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## Sila

by Andriy Sushko

To interview for my assignment, I chose an old man about 75 years old or more. He is a small old man with gray hair. His name is Sila. Also I want to underline one thing: his hands are all scarred, and one little finger on the right hand can't move.

When I came to him and asked his permission to get an interview, he said, "I will be glad to, but now I don't have time because I am going to church." Instead, he asked me to come to his apartment early in the morning, and I agreed.

The next day when I went to his apartment about 7:30 a.m., he was already eating his breakfast. He invited me to sit down and have a cup of tea, but I refused. During his breakfast I sat on the sofa in the living room and began to look over all the apartment. It was very different from an American one. In his apartment everything reminded me of the Ukraine. On the windows were curtains not blinds. The pillows on the bed had very beautiful Ukrainian embroidery. Also my eyes caught sight of one thing on the table, a Bible. It was old with very damaged pages. It seemed to me that he used it all the time.

After he finished his breakfast, we began our interview. My first question was: "Can you tell me a little bit about your life?"

When he began his story, it was so interesting that I was listening to him with my mouth open. He told me everything about his hard life from the beginning to the present period. He

began from his childhood. His family was very poor and he didn't go to school, so he learned how to read and write by himself. Then he told me about his youth, that he started to believe in God when he was about 19. "I gave my life in His hands. And He always was with me, all my life." Also, he told about his life in the war period, how hard he had worked with his friends, and what job he had after the war.

To my question about the hard things that happened to him in the war, his answer was that he didn't fight in the war because he didn't want to take up a gun in his hands because he believed in God. The Bible says, "Don't kill anybody." And for this the government sent him to prison in Siberia for ten years. There he worked in the forest for seven years. He chopped down trees. They would work in any kind of weather whether it was warm, cold or raining. In winter when there was too much snow about his neck, he worked very hard to keep his body warm because the temperature was about -60C. And all that time when he was in Siberia he prayed to his God.

To my question, "What job did you have?" his answer was that he was a carpenter. His friends and he made roofs or attics for buildings in his village. He told me that three of them did their job with their hands all day. When I asked him how his hands were scarred, he told me that all his life he worked with sharp tools and wood and the most useful of his tools were an axe and saw. When he did his job, various things happened to him and he cut or hit his fingers or hands with the hammer or saw.

Sila's story showed me that he is a believer, someone who believes in God. I learned how hard his life was. He knows many things about life and can give advice for any problem. I also understand that God was with him all his life, and He is still with him now.

*Andriy Sushko was born in Ukraine and is majoring in Construction Technology.*

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## Finally

by Renle Xia

"You got mail." My AOL Internet access told me.

"Dear nephew, I was glad to hear your voice. Sorry about waiting for me."

As soon as I turned on my net connection, a familiar voice from thousands of miles away arrived in my speaker. "How are you doing at school, Lou?" Then, a smiling face appeared on my screen. He is about fifty, with gray hair that couldn't cover all the surface of his head and many wrinkles on his face, the result of years working outdoors.

"I am doing well at school, thank you. I need you to help me to finish my homework. By the way how is your business doing recently?"

"I can handle it. Everything is in order," he replied.

"You must be putting a lot of efforts into it."

He fell into thinking and there was a long silence. "Yes, I am working hard to keep up. Now the world is about education; everything is related to the computer and mathematical analysis. You must study hard and not waste your golden time."

"I won't waste my golden time. That's why I want to know more about your life."

“Oh, boy! You don’t want to know about the past. It’s too weird” After taking a deep breath, he started to dig into his memory, to the things that he didn’t even want to remember.

Uncle Lou was born during World War II in a small village near the Pacific. His poor family couldn’t take care of him, so he was sent to the family of a distant relative. Life was harder for him there. He had to help his relatives while his second cousins were playing around. At the age of ten, his relatives put him on a cotton-picking team. His skin was burned under the cruel sunshine, four hours a day, and until now he suffers in the hot sunshine.

He started thinking about his future at an early age. Besides working on the cotton-picking team, he found another job for himself. “I wanted a better life in the city where I could work indoors and have my own house. I saved every penny that I earned from the second job. Studying was not important for me at that time. Moving to the city was my only dream.” One day, his dream came to true...

It was an early winter morning. He picked up his little bag that he had prepared earlier and left “home,” leaving behind a hard letter on the table. The life of adventure began as he stepped out of the house. The train brought him to a southern city. His dream began.

“I thought life would be easier without anybody pushing.” He lighted a cigarette and continued. After few weeks looking for a job, the money that he had saved from the second job was running out. He was kicked out of the motel, starving and suffering in the cold in the following days. He couldn’t get a government job because it required at least a middle school diploma.

Finally, he got a job carrying boxes for

a delivery company. For a fourteen-year-old boy that was a very tough job, but he accepted it without another choice. Hundreds of boxes had to be carried from the trucks and hundreds of them had to be put back. What he earned could barely cover his basic living expenses. But he was still determined to keep this job until he had the chance to get another one.

“One day, my exhausted body couldn’t support the heavy boxes any more. I fell on the ground; I fell on the ground with my body and my hopes. I didn’t want to get up again, no matter how hard my boss was screaming at me. All the noises were fading away and everything seemed so quiet and so peaceful.

“Wake up, boy!” I was awakened by a strong voice and a face filled with worry and tension. My uncle explained to me this was how he met his godfather who was working at the same company as a truck driver. His godfather saved him and trained him to drive a truck. Then he was accepted in another company as a truck driver too. Life hadn’t changed very much. However, it was easier to be driving a truck than carrying boxes. He started wondering why his life was more difficult than the others, and for a long time it was a puzzle.

“One day, I saw a young man come to look for job. I wondered how he could survive in the company with such a skinny body. But the man was accepted and made ten times more money than I did,” he continued. “Finally I found out what made my life so hard. Having higher education is one of the basic survival needs. Therefore, I decided to go back school,” he emphasized.

His godfather helped him to pay the tuition fees, and my uncle worked harder to cover his expenses. He put a lot of effort into his studies and finished college with a construction engineering

degree.

With real life experience and knowledge from books, he began to work at a construction company and developed his skills to a higher level. Years later, he began to run his own business. “I made it. I couldn’t have been so successful without having higher education and my godfather’s help,” he concluded with strong determination. “I hope this real story helps you, and I hope you can understand it.”

“Thank you! I will do my best,” I replied to him.

He smiled and waved at me. “Don’t miss your opportunity.” His face now looked happier, and the words that came out from his mouth were so true and so clear. I realized that it was late for my uncle to go to bed as I looked down at the right corner of my computer. It was noon in Rochester, but in China it was almost midnight. “Have a good night, uncle!”

*Renle Xia is majoring in Computer Information Systems.*

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## **Thank You Lord**

*by Jullio Decius*

It was in October 1994. School was just starting. Every student already had their supplies but me. We didn’t have enough money. My father had six of us. It was not easy for him to get a good job in Haiti then because of the economy. It was up to me to figure out a way.

First, I decided to work on a farm. Maybe this would help me make enough money to buy the school supplies. Why farming? I knew I could make good money by planting peanuts, rice, vegetables, and selling them in

the market. After a year on the farm, I got clothes, and nice sneakers. Now I was able to buy so many things, it seemed to me that maybe school was not important.

But when I thought about how difficult farming was, I changed my mind. Now I made another decision. If I couldn't go to school this year I would get married. I tried to do everything I could to do that, but it did not work out for me. I went to my best friend's house and talked for a long time. Everything I said he disagreed with. I remember he said, "If I can't go to school, just pray to God to help you out. Don't get upset with your parents for what they don't have."

I said, "I don't think you really like me! Just leave me alone. Let me think about what I really want." To go to school in Haiti is not easy. Why? Students must wear uniforms. Parents need to pay \$125 every month per student under the age of fifteen. I was frustrated about my education. Without school it would be impossible for me to have a better life.

On Tuesday morning I walked down the street of Rue the Lama, and I met a preacher. I said, "Good morning."

He answered me with a smile, "What can I help you with, young man?" I told him I had a problem to go to school. My parents didn't have enough money and couldn't afford my tuition bills. He continued to ask me a lot of questions. I met that man on a lucky day. "I'll see you around," he said.

On Saturday morning, I went to my grandmother's house. She asked me, "Why are you here?" I said it was because I couldn't go to school. "She said, 'You just want to get married.'" I explained to her the reason I couldn't go. She believed everything that I said. Now she tried to help me, telling me how I could get free

money to go to school. But the way she told me was uncomfortable. It was very difficult for me to talk with someone I didn't know. She told me go to the promo bank and ask them for a loan.

I said, "I don't think this will work, Mother." I prayed to God by myself, without going to church. I said, "My God, my Lord, why do I have this problem? My Lord, I beg you to show me a way to find some money so I can go to school." Finally, the Lord answered my request.

A week later the Lord sent a personal messenger to me. That man was the principal of the Seventh- Day Adventist school. He asked, "Where are your parents? How many children live in your house?" I answered his questions in an appropriate way. He told me to bring my transcript from last year to sign up for school. When I brought him my paper work, he said to me, "Jullio, you must be in school every day if I help you." He paid for my whole school year. I couldn't believe it! This was a dream come true. But I could never tell my parents that I got free money to go to school because the man told me to not to tell anybody. The reason why was because he had already helped a lot of people.

I was very lucky and surprised because the preacher had sent this man to me. That school year I never paid anything for the whole year. I was giving my testimonies about how God is good to me. Before that I saw my life like a boat heading away from Haiti to U.S.A. with no gas in it.

Glory to God almighty for everything you have done for me. Because of you, I was able to enjoy my life down there. It is not easy to go school in Haiti.

*Jullio Decius is a Human Services major.*

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## The East Meeting the West

by Mindy Cen

Someone once said that 'Just because a person doesn't love you the way you want, it doesn't mean he doesn't love you with all he has.' One day a Chinese girl met an American who worked at the U.S. consulate in Guangzhou, China. They fell in love and they were married. It was the East meeting the West. She called him Joe.

In 1995, a Chinese girl married to a Caucasian wasn't common in China. People looked at Joe like a rare animal when she walked on the street with him. Joe and the girl came from very different cultures. When their cultures clashed, they didn't talk to each other about it. They were afraid to hurt each other. They kept their love in a jar. One day the jar would break.

Let me tell you a few small stories. When the girl came to the States in the first week, Joe gave her a razor and told her that she should shave her legs everyday after she showered. In China people think if you do this often, the hairs will become thick so they don't shave their legs. The girl loved her husband so she decided to follow the American custom.

Joe didn't understand the Chinese language and felt out of place when the girl visited her Chinese relatives in America. Joe would sit patiently for hours as the girl and her relatives spoke in a language he could not understand. He sat politely and smiled, as was the custom in China. Joe loved his wife so he decided to follow the Chinese custom.

Joe loved to eat lobster. One day the girl bought four lobsters and brought them home. Before she cooked them, she

asked her cousin how to cook lobster. Her cousin said to hold its tail, put a chopstick inside and go through its body. When water began coming out of the shell, the lobster was ready because the water was urine. Then just wash them and steam them.

“What are you doing?” Joe said. “That’s not how to cook seafood. They have to be cooked alive. When she started to put the lobster into the pot to steam, Joe said, “We can’t eat them.”

“Oh, baby”, the girl, said, “they were still alive before I chopped them up. See, the tail is still moving.”

Joe said, “If you eat it, you will get sick.” The girl decided she wouldn’t buy lobster any more.

Joe loved to wear Hawaiian shirts, but in China only poor people in the countryside wore shirts like that. The girl was embarrassed when he wore them. The girl loved to walk with an umbrella to keep the sun off of her. It’s common in Asia for women to stroll down the street on a bright sunny day with an umbrella but it’s not common in America. Joe was embarrassed when she did that.

Once they got a big fight on a trip to Thailand. The trip started off good. Joe bought her an expensive set of ruby earrings and a matching ruby necklace and ring. The girl and Joe went on tours of ancient temples and palaces and traveled down rivers by boat. One night as they walked on a street in Bangkok, the girl cried, “Look it’s a elephant!” It was the biggest elephant the girl and Joe had ever seen, and two men were walking it down a busy city sidewalk. The men offered to let Joe and the girl feed a stalk of bananas to the elephant for fifty bhat (the equivalent of one US dollar). One dollar for a lasting memory is pretty cheap to an American, but it

is the custom in Asia never to accept the first offered price. The girl began to negotiate with the men. “No! That is too much,” the girl said. “I’ll give you twenty bhat.”

The man with the elephant shook his head. “Fifty bhat!”

“Come on baby,” Joe said. “It’s just a dollar.”

“No!” the girl said. “It’s the principle.” Joe and the girl stood in the street and argued. The men with the elephant moved on. The elephant disappeared slowly into the darkness like the love between Joe and the girl.

The marriage lasted another year and ended. There was still love but no longer the passion that once was there. They were just going through the motions. The girl decided to live in America and Joe chose to live in Asia. They remain friends, but there are bittersweet memories that come back to haunt them like ghosts in the night.

In the end it doesn’t really matter how lobsters are cooked or how much bananas in Bangkok cost. It certainly doesn’t matter if you walk down the street with a Hawaiian shirt or with an umbrella. There might be a moral somewhere in this story, but if there is I haven’t found it yet. I think God wants us to meet a few wrong people before meeting the right one, so that when we do meet the right person, we will be grateful.

*Mindy Cen, from China, is an Accounting major.*

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## The Moment I Don’t Want To Go Back To

by *Renle Xia*

The wind seemed as if it was never going to stop. The trees were struggling to fight back, and some of them were too tired to continue on. Different noises came from far away; shouts passed my room. Suddenly, the lights in the town had gone and ever thing turned indistinct. There were beams far away on the horizon, bumping up and down. It was very unusual to see the lights from my room. The roaring wind increased as every second went by.

With the howl of the wind and the torrent of rain beating on the window, my father had turned on the radio to listen to the weather station. The radio signal was so weak that it was very hard to hear the weather report. I stared outside and tried to find out what was going on. I felt my eyes become heavier and heavier while the wind became stronger and stronger.

“Ha Lou, get up!” I was awakened by a voice from across the wall. Trying to find my slippers in the darkness with half open eyes, slowly I walked to the door. Then I heard something moving downstairs and my father was shouting at me, “What are you doing? Come downstairs immediately! Tell your brother to stay upstairs and not move until I tell him,” he added. I looked back at my brother’s bed. He was sleeping without noticing the noise.

“Here.” A voice came through the living room door when I reached the last step. Water squeezed into the room through the crack of the door from outside, and everything was floating. My parents were trying to get the most valuable things and carry them to the steps. My sleepiness faded away,

and my heart rose up to my mouth. The scene shocked me; I didn't know what I should do.

"It must be a dream!" I told myself. "This is just a part of the scary movie I watched yesterday," I was trying to explain. As I stood there trying to figure out whether it was real or not, something like liquid was climbing up from my feet to my ankles. I looked down and realized that this was real, and then my parents' voices came back to my ears.

"Get the drawer under the TV and don't lose the paper inside." My mother pointed to the TV set while my father gave her a lost lid from a box. She passed it to me with a short explanation, "Put it in my bedroom and come back as soon as you can."

When I returned to the living room, more things were floating there, and my father was struggling to get the important things. I jumped into the water, which was above my knees now. As I jumped toward my mother, I glanced at the window. Oh, my god! A fish just passed by!

My mother was too busy to try to remember where she had put all the important documents. "Watch out!" my father screamed. A collapsed window fell into the water, missing my head just by millimeters. Now the water flooded in and minutes later I could find cans, radios, the TV, plates, tables, branches, boxes and more in our living room. Taking a better look, I realized all of them were from outside. They did not belong to us. The TV belonged to one of my friends who spent a lot of time playing games with it. I guessed he would have a hard time without the TV the next day. A table from my neighbor, a box with a strange name etc.

The water filled the room. I swam

to my mother who was scared by the unexpected change. By the time I reached her, she already had tasted the salt water from the ocean. (She didn't know how to swim even though she had spent most of her life on an island.) My father and I took her to the steps, and we tried to go back to get something else. When we went back upstairs, my mother told us that we should get the rice. We hauled the container of rice, (a traditional container made by earth, so it could float in the water,) back to the steps with our heads almost touching the ceiling.

"We are safe now," I announced.

"Not yet. If the water raises higher, we will face a serious problem, the collapse of the house," my father said with a scared voice.

"Where is your brother?" my mother yelled to me from my room.

"He should be there. He was sleeping when I went downstairs," I explained.

"I told you to tell your brother to stay there and not to move until we came back," my father looked at me angrily and frightened.

"Where could he be? He doesn't know how to swim," my mother said with an even more frightened voice.

We looked outside and felt speechless. I was more scared than when I saw the flood come into my hometown. I would never forgive myself if anything had happened to my brother. Maybe he just went to the bathroom; I checked the bathroom, but he was not there. Maybe he was hiding under the bed; no, he was not there. Maybe he was in the guest room; of course not. My mother had checked there earlier. Maybe...

I couldn't know what I was thinking

and what I should do at that moment. "Mom, there are many fish swimming in front of our house," suddenly, an excited voice passed through the balcony.

My mother shot to the balcony like a bullet and grabbed my brother into her arms. "Never go to the balcony without my permission," she told him with a relieved voice. The tension in the room faded away when I saw my brother come back in. Good news always comes together; the water stopped climbing up and the second floor remained dry until now. What a night!

*Renle Xia, from China, is studying Computer Information Systems.*

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## A Good Blending: East and West Cultures

by Mindy Cen

It was Friday morning. Outside the window, snowflakes were whirling and the sky was gray. I was going to the house of Amy, a classmate of my niece, to meet her mother.

It was around 10:00 a.m. when I got to number 4 Meredith Rd. I paused momentarily in front the house and I pressed the doorbell. A lovely Japanese lady dressed in her kimono and wearing light makeup opened the door. She was smiling and said, "Come in, please."

I said, "I'm Mindy. Its nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you, too. I'm Kasumi," she replied.

She led me to a big sofa next to the fireplace. "'Take a seat, please Mindy.'" She told me she would make some green

tea for me. I told her I love to drink tea. She walked away to the kitchen and I started looking around the living room. There was a tatami in a corner. A tatami is a straw mat the Japanese use in their tea ceremony. I saw Kasumi kneeling on the tatami preparing the tea.

I chose Kasumi for my interview because she came from Asia and married a Caucasian. They had been married for more than fourteen years. Watching what she was doing I walked to the tatami. I began my interview with an obvious question. "Why do you keep so many beautiful Japanese objects in your house?"

She replied, "I don't have a special reason for keeping them. When we moved from Japan we brought them with us." I discovered my friends loved them.

"Oh, the tea is ready," she said. "Let's sit down and talk." We walked to the fireplace and sat down next to it. I asked Kasumi if her childhood in Japan and her daughter's childhood in America were different. She answered immediately, "Oh, it's so different."

"I have four sisters and two brothers. My mother is a very traditional woman. She taught us the key to success was always to respect elders and obey their orders. She thought girls should learn to play music that would help them become soft. She let all my sisters learn all kinds of music. She arranged a schedule for us and everybody had to follow it. We tried not to argue with her. My mother wanted us to be better. That's why she was very strict."

She continued, "Well, I can't use the same way with my daughter. I'm very flexible with her and I compromise on a lot of things. I never overly criticize her." She halted for a while and said that American kids always like to do things

their way. "Sometimes Amy likes to help me to cook but she never likes to follow what I tell her to do. She likes to try her way. When she makes a mistake, I never say she is wrong. I always praise her first and say something like "Your idea is nice. Maybe if you add something more, it will be better."

I asked her which way she preferred, traditional or modern culture. "I prefer the traditional way," she said. "All my sisters and brothers became very successful. My elder sister opened a restaurant. The second one has a cosmetics firm. My third sister has a beauty shop, and my fourth sister is a flight attendant. My two brothers also have their own businesses. It was my mother's contribution. "America gives children too much freedom," she added. "The children become self-centered. The individual always comes first and not the family. Children do what they want to do. They think they can do anything. Actually they can't. This country has moved too far away from its own traditions."

Kasumi continued, "We should set a limit for the children. Let them know what they can do and what they can't do. In society, they should obey laws. In school, they should obey the school's rules and regulations. We should also teach children to respect to their elders."

Next I asked her how she met her husband. She said it was just a simple story. "My husband was in the army at that time. He wanted to make extra money as an English teacher on the weekends. I met him there. After six months we were engaged. Then, two years later, we got married in Japan. When my daughter was two years old we followed my husband to the U.S."

"It must be hard to leave your country." I said. "Did you miss your family? Did

you feel uncomfortable when you first arrived in America?"

"I missed my family very much so I would come back to Japan to visit them every two years. I lived on a small inland, Miyako, not main land Japan. The weather on Miyako is always warm like in Hawaii. Rochester has too much snow and the winters are too long. I didn't like to stay home so I made a lot of friends. My friends are like magnificent jewels in my life. Only a few are my best friends. Some of my friends are for playing and some of them are for working."

"I understand Eastern and Western cultures are different," I said. "Can you tell me how you and your husband solve problems?"

"Well," she stopped a few seconds and said, "When we have a problem, we talk about the problem the same day. It might take us four or five hours to talk and try to solve it. Anyway, I think the most important aspect is compromise. I don't ever try to change my husband. I accept him as he is. I don't impose my opinions on him. We also give each other space. Sometimes he can't get in my space and I can't get in his either."

I looked out of the window. The sun was shining. I think Kasumi is a smart lady. I learned a lot from her, and she gave me much to think about. East and West - it's a good blend of cultures.

*Mindy Cen comes from China. She is studying Accounting.*