
ESOL VOICES

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This issue of ESOL Voices is dedicated to Christine Anthony, our first reader and proofreader, for her generous support and constant encouragement.

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

We wish you success and happiness.

The Staff



Message from an Immigrant

By Luis Vaillant

It is hard to leave your country, your friends and relatives, but when you run out of choices, you have to do it no matter what because life does not give too many second chances. To find the way out, you might want to know some of these tips:

When emigrating, rush your steps. Keep moving. Don't look over your shoulder. Just walk, and pray, pray and walk and never, but never ever ever, listen to the voice demanding to stay. Disguise yourself with a smile, even though little eyes staring at you touch your soul, making your heart saddened. Close the door. Keep going. Move, move faster, one step after the other. Hurry up and don't look over your shoulder. Just walk, and pray, pray and walk.

Bring your beliefs tied tight. Fill your pockets with your adorations, dreams or desires. Carry the music performed by the sea, the aroma of your land, and the flavor of your women. Hide a piece of your sky and shrink a shock of your sun in a can. Bring all your memories, your fights, your goings and gone. I brought with me a picture, my daughter in the arms of my wife, a laugh and some tears, a Bible, a palm tree and a hut. I even brought a flag, a book of Marti, a hug from Dad, and Mom's kiss.

But who talks about stopping? Never stop. Keep the rush. Walk faster. This is your race for freedom and you don't want to lose. Always remember rule number one: don't look back and keep walking, one step after the other. Leave the plane, one step after the other. Open that door hiding the light to the new, and go through. Rush,

rush, *andale*. Let's go. The new life is waiting. It will appear in a blink. Then take it all.

After your Odyssey, you are welcome to see and taste real life. Now you breathe, relax, and let your body calm down because you have landed in the promised land where freedom is for "free." Now, you will have to learn how to arrange yourself to the new life, where you will need to add some sugar to your memory because the new life might make you forget your past, your family, your hopes, dreams, desires, adorations, even the last time you were kissed by Mom and hugged by Dad. Maybe yes, maybe no. Only you know it.

In my case, it has been very difficult. I had difficult and wonderful days and nights that I can't erase so easily and even awake, those moments chase me. Probably for you it will be less painful. But what am I saying? Enjoy *Freedomlandia*. Open your heart to the new life and do not worry about the future because it has not been written yet.

Luis Vaillant comes from Cuba. He is studying Visual Communications.

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Who Is Your Enemy?

By Ilmee Song

"Call 911!" A man shouts toward his wife. His accented voice cracks with rage. His wife disappears swiftly behind the building's front door.

"Go ahead, son of a bitch!" The massive figure of a black woman roars while making a step toward him. In a flash, people gather around. The courtyard of the apartment is full of

noise. Some neighbors are watching through their windows that face the courtyard.

These apartment residents consist of low-income Americans and low-income immigrants. A number of foreign graduate student families are included in the immigrant group because this apartment is located near the university campus. That means this housing is not dangerous for bringing up children and the foreign student families are receiving a kind of benefit even though they are not permanent residents. Her family is one of these foreign student inhabitants.

"Go back to your country! Bitch." Someone shouted.

"Yah, go to the hell, stupid Chinese!" Some black kids made sarcastic remarks.

While she was watching outside, she felt goose bumps rise up. All yellow skin seemed to them to be Chinese, just as difficult as it is for me to distinguish a European from an American, she thought. She turned her eyes from the commotion. Beyond that she stared at the stream of passing cars unconsciously remembering her daughter's wrenching words. "Mom, kids always call me Chinese. I hate them." Her daughter's remark broke her heart. Her daughter was just a preschooler, but she had caught on to sarcasm. Sometimes she also met people who sneered at her when she parked among the junky cars in the residential parking lot, even though her used car had 80,000 miles and had been repaired because of vandals.

After a while, she saw two police cars and an ambulance arriving at the side of the road that faced the apartment courtyard. That day's happening had started as a trivial matter. Around four o'clock, as usual, kids appeared in the courtyard to ride the swing set and their

bicycles. Some little kids' mothers were watching them. Suddenly, a child's cries attracted the public's gaze. A little Asian girl was bleeding from her nose in front of the swing.

"Why did you push my kid? You should have waited until your turn!" The girl's mom who was famous as a fluent English speaker among the foreign students' wives was scolding a small black boy. He was standing in silence, but that moment the boy's mother was approaching them, rolling up her sleeves.

"What's wrong, honey? It's not a big deal."

"What! It's not a big deal! Can't you see all the blood? It doesn't stop. Where is your common sense? All right, you are just an ignorant... You..."

The black woman grabbed the Asian mom's hair and shook her back and forth. It was such a momentary happening, but the Asian woman's husband on his way home witnessed this scene.

After that day, the courtyard was surrounded in solitude. She couldn't see the girls who used to play hopscotch on the sidewalk near her unit. Sometimes a little kid appeared to ride the swing, but there wasn't any cheerful noise of children playing together. According to reports, the Asian family moved out to another place and then this unpleasant incident began to fade.

A couple of months later, she heard every foreign student family got a letter from the management saying without citizenship or green card, it would be impossible to rent an apartment there anymore. From that month, foreign student families who finished their contract started moving out on.

A decade later, now she is living in the suburbs. One day, she received an e-mail from her instructor and at the end of it she found a quote that said, "Human beings are not our enemy. Our enemy is not the other person. Our enemy is the violence, ignorance, and injustice in us and in the other person. When we are armed with compassion and understanding, we fight not against other people, but against the tendency to invade, to dominate, and to exploit." (Thich Nhat Hanh in *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames*)

It reminded her of this episode which she had observed a long time ago.

Ilmee Song comes from South Korea where she earned a degree in Korean Literature. Now at MCC, she is studying Accounting.

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Loss By Mohamed Gazali

Not seeing could be very difficult in our lives. Sometimes it feels like you're in a cage without bars, not seeing through the bars, and not being able to move in any direction when you want. Seeing is like being in an open field, to see when you want or move where you want. Seeing for yourself is better than needing someone to see for you. When you are visionless, you have to depend on people around you, a family member or friend to see for you. Not seeing is very difficult.

First, when I lost my vision, it was hard to adjust to the environment I was in, such as my school and friends that lived in my neighborhood. I was constantly thinking about negative things. The people that I was with could not understand what I was facing. Only my aide and counselors in my school understood. The first two years in high

school I felt like I was in a dark, locked room with no handle to let myself out. My grades would fluxuate. The city school district provided me with a stick to help me navigate around the school. I denied needing help because I was embarrassed. I only wanted to walk with my aide. Sometimes I felt like dying because things were so closed.

Second, being seeing means you don't have to be dependent on others. You are able to do as you like at the time that you like. Being seeing is like a door with a handle and light on it. When you can see, you can do a variety of things, play sports and video games, and drive yourself. When you can see, you don't need anyone to guide you or hold your hand. When you see, you don't have to use anyone to see for you; you can make your own decisions. For example, when you go shopping, you see the color, shape, and what it looks like and make your own decision. When you don't see, someone has to describe the item and they don't always describe it fully. When I'm with my friends, they'd see something and immediately say this is nice or bad according to their vision. On the other hand, I don't have any response to what they see because there is no description.

Going from independent to dependent will change your life. It's very hard to lose something in your life, especially vision which will isolate you from the big picture. I began to rely on my other senses to try to picture the big picture. Without seeing, it is hard to live and adjust when you know how life was when you were not blind.

Mohamed Gazali, from Somalia, is interested in Computers.

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Life ‘Yaa Life

By Milkyas Legesse

It was sunny and the day was beautiful. He was walking by the beach. He could see the yellow leaves falling down from far away. The water felt cold and the breeze was very sweet and warm. There were people all over and little kids playing with one another. He started thinking about the past. His father had been self-employed and his mother had worked for the government of Ethiopia. She was an attractive woman, sensitive, and short, with a bright smile.

It was back in 1979 when there was a war between the government of Ethiopia and the people who called themselves the *Ehadig* or “Outlaws.” It was a dangerous time and the environment was evil. He was in sixth grade when the government seemed to lose the war.

He had a loving and happy family; however, their happiness started to fade away as the war got deeper. His parents, who were always smiling at each other, started fighting one another every day. May 28, 1981, the government lost the war and everything changed. That was the turning point of his life. His mother had to leave the country before they formed the new government. After all, she did work for their enemy.

It was the middle of the night when his father barged into his room with a sad look in his eyes. “I will miss you and always love you my son!” were the last words he heard from his father. His mother packed their things; they would go to the rural area.

At that time, it was very hard to get out of the country. The surrounding area was awfully quiet all over. There was no one around except darkness. They had old-school weapons on their back. His mother was having a hard time getting the right paper work to leave. The night

before she left, he heard her arguing with a young man. When he woke up the next day, she had left without him. They couldn’t provide her with the right papers for him to get out of the country with her so she had to leave by herself.

He found some money, a letter, and a chain. He read the letter out loud, “Son, I am sorry I let you down. May God be with you for I am not. I left you some money and a chain for good luck. Keep it with you at all times. Have faith my son. We will meet one day, so be strong and don’t forget that I will always love you.” For a minute he thought his mother had squandered her money on him, buying the chain, but it meant a lot to him. He froze, staring at the paper. His tears wet the paper; he couldn’t stop crying. There was nothing left for him in this cruel world. He was scared and felt lonely.

He thought, “I never understood when people talked about loving a particular object because it had a sentimental value or why people were so fascinated with a gift that they were willing to sacrifice almost anything to keep it.” Even so, somewhere in his heart he tried to draw a vivid picture of what they were talking about and why a piece could mean so much to them. Similarly, he had that same attachment to the chain his mother left him.

Two years went by, and he went back to school. He worked at night and attended school in the daytime. “All whom we casually call friends are not actually our friends but only acquaintances.” Even though he knew many people, his true friend was Hawi. He was from a respectable family. His father was an executive in a multi-national company, on a handsome salary. His family was very loving and religious. His mother was a highly educated housewife. He had finally found someone who could relate to his problems. Because of his parents’ background, he faced many problems inside and out side of school

but Hawi was there to walk him through the hardship.

Sometimes, life has a surprising ending. He never did see his parents again; however, he never stopped looking. They both, Hawi and he, left their country and went to the States for college. Life is an amazing journey. Life is just like a chocolate; you never know what you are getting. But now sitting on that bench near that beach, he realizes how much he misses the old days, how much he loved his family.

That little boy is me, and my name is Milkyas. I will always wish for that little boy to be strong and believe in himself and somehow find them, his family. May luck be with him, for he needs it!

This story is not 100% true. And it’s not one person’s life. I tried to make it interesting so I gathered different friends’ stories from Ethiopia and mixed them together.

Milkyas Legesse is a Liberal Arts student.

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How Much Does Love Mean to You?

By Rita Jundulaite

It is often said that love is the greatest power on earth. I am a strong believer of this statement.

I recently took a day trip to the Thousand Islands, with my aunt and uncle. My uncle had arranged for us to go on a boat tour of many of the islands. Our trip guide told us that most of the islands were owned by extremely rich families or individuals.

Around one hundred people boarded the tour boat. I was poorly positioned in

the back of the boat, unable to hear all the stories clearly. Suddenly, everyone around me started to talk about one particular island. It belonged to a rich woman who couldn't decide what island she liked the most, so she built her own, the way she liked. That second I thought to myself, "How strange people act when they have so much wealth."

The boat kept traveling from island to island, each having its own story. We even passed into Canadian waters. I witnessed the shortest bridge connecting the U.S.A. and Canada. This view grabbed my attention, so I saved it in one of the pictures: two small houses, two flags and one little bridge.

The whole trip I had been anticipating one particular island, which I could see from a distance. It looked very different from all the others. Probably it was the huge castle, which reminded me of an old English castle from medieval times. When our boat got closer to this mysterious looking place, the tour guide began to tell the story that I would never forget!!!

About a hundred years ago, a young immigrant came to America from Europe. He started his life here very poor and alone. He was working very hard to make a little money. This is when he met his one and only love, who changed his life forever. The couple got married and worked together as one, slowly building their future. In this time they also raised two children, a boy and a girl. Love kept on growing. As years passed, working hard they became one of the richest families in New York.

To show his love for his wife and kids, the father bought one of the Thousand Islands. He made the island the shape of a heart to symbolize his love for them. On this ground he built a magnificent castle, with many heart shaped decorations. The island was named "Island of Love."

This miracle was supposed to be seen on February 14th, which was Valentine's Day and also his wife's birthday. This is where their love took a twist of fate. A couple weeks before, it happened very fast and suddenly, his wife died. Since that moment the husband's foot never stepped on this island again.

He wrote a note saying that the castle of love could never be used as anything else, just as a remembrance of his everlasting love for his family.

Looking at the island, I know that love has been there in the past, it is here in the present, and it will always be there in the future.

Rita Jundulaite comes from Lithuania. She is interested in a career in the Computer field.

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An American Night By Luis Vaillant

Bam!!! The deafening noise coming from the next door apartment chilled my skin. "Daddy, Daddy. I know what that noise was. It was a shot." "**Shhhhhh!!!** Be quiet and go back to your..." **Bamm!!!** once again, but this time closer and louder. "Hurry, go back to your room."

"No, Daddy. I am afraid. I want to stay with you. What will happen if somebody tries to shoot at me and you can't see it?" "Babe, do what I said. Go back to your room and don't worry. You will be safe in there with your mom. Go, please."

"Honey, what's going on?" "I don't know. I guess that somebody..." I paused and then whispered, "...killed our neighbor." "It was a shot, *Mami*, I heard it before on a TV cartoon."

"*Oh, Dios mio, que es esto!* Do not open that door. Please, *y tu niña*, go to your room. Don't worry; everything is going to be all right. Just take the baby with you and stay in the bedroom."

I didn't open the door of my small and humble apartment. I wasn't feeling any fear, not even pain about what had just happened. That night, I had only an unpleasant, empty feeling in my soul that petrified all my muscles. It was then that I found myself in a different but a very familiar place. It wasn't the small apartment of East Main St. any more. I was back in the place that I had left five years ago and I was talking to my mother.

"*Hijo, mio.*" She started saying and her voice sounded desolate and sad. "I let you go because that was always your dream, but I know that you have found that your dreamed America is not what you thought... You thought that your country was noisy, meddlesome, abusive and uncaring. Now you have found that there is not a lot of difference between this one and that one."

"But, Mom. You know that..."

"Let me continue, *mijo, por favor*. You are far from your language, your people and your identity, trying honestly to assure a better future for your family, but has it been worth the price that you have had to pay?"

After those words I couldn't find my mother any more, neither the feeling of being again in my home living room. I visualized my whole life in colored memories that I thought I had erased. For a few seconds a rainbow of pictures danced in front of me, as if alive. I saw the bad times chasing the good ones and I thought that my life as an immigrant has but advantages over the one that I had carried in my own country.

“Mom, I want to believe that all this is not a mistake. Anyway I can’t run back. I never did it before and I won’t do it now.” My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the voices of my wife and daughter demanding my presence in the bedroom.

We couldn’t sleep that night, and neither could the neighborhood. But I believe that at least our prayers brought some peace to the night.

Luis Vallant, from Cuba, is majoring in Visual Communications.

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Storm

By Samphara Fasal

When I was nine years old, I was living in Northeast Cambodia, near a big river and a high mountain. Behind was an endless bamboo forest, home to many animals. Rice was growing in fresh water. After the harvest, rice patties were full of cows and buffalos grazing in green grass all day long. In my big, long yard where mango trees, bananas, sugar cane, pineapples, papayas and potatoes grew, the monkeys usually came to steal the fruits, while the robins picked worms in the mud. The monkeys were adorable, smart animals. Mother monkeys were playing with their babies, hanging them from their necks; it was a beautiful sight.

Suddenly, the animals vanished. My day seemed boring and quiet without the animals around, so I went to play with my neighbor’s kids. In a matter of minutes, there were cumulus clouds beginning to roll in, meshing and building up. The wind stopped. I looked over the mountain; it was covered by a black-purple cloud. In one hour the clouds to the south-west were enormous, an angry combination of black and

violet, resembling a massive misshapen, mushroom. I ran back to my house. My brothers and sisters were on their way to the shelter under our house, the safest spot to stay whenever a storm was approaching. We sat there waiting for the storm; it became a show. Slow moving shadows crept by until the wind suddenly picked up again with a roar. It blew strong, bending mango trees halfway to the ground and their fruits started to fly all over the back yard. The same angry wind sent us scampering to our cold, damp hiding place, to safety. We were terrified, but didn’t move.

In this province, the wind was the messenger of the summer storm, only a warning. When the cold wind built up, when there were no birds or animals out, this meant that a storm was approaching. I was curious; I climbed out of the hiding place and went up to the kitchen for a better look at the storm over God Mountain to the west. I peered through a gap in the wall. Over the mountain, the clouds willingly joined, forming a gigantic black umbrella, and heavy rain started from the west. Lightning and thunder exploded at the same time all about me; the force and vibrating sound of this orchestra made me jump. The streaks of lightning zigzagged from cloud to cloud and from the clouds to the earth.

The bushy tree behind the kitchen, which was always a safe home for the birds, squirrels, chipmunks and ants, was no longer a home for them. Broken branches lay all over the ground; some branches covered plants. Damaged bird nests and ant colonies were lying everywhere. Squirrels and chipmunks, nervous and frightened, were leaving the broken trees, looking for safe places.

The storm consumed the sky, leaving a thick blackness that was torn open only by the lightning. It was hard to remember. Crouching down on the kitchen floor, I heard the lightning

splitting the sky about me, sounding very loud as if I was in a bombarding zone. “It’s only a matter of electrons; don’t be afraid,” I thought.

When the storm had almost cleared up, the bulging cloud crept away from over the town. The sky was lighter; the lightning and thunder sounded less frightening. The rain came hard; it damaged too many crops, trees and property. The storm was over faster than it came. It left behind a lot of water for the trees, the mountain and the earth to absorb, and also small ponds and puddles for the birds and animals to enjoy.

The town was torn down by this angry monster, which had left many houses with damaged walls and missing roofs. Furniture had flown all over, and clothes were scattered everywhere. People came out from hiding places, to try to find their belongings and clean up the mess. Many were hurt by falling trees and flying debris, including my younger brother. During the clean up, a shingle fell and hit his head. His scalp was cut open. Mom took him to get his wound stitched back up.

After the storm was over, the town took time to get back to normal, but the land was greener because of the extra water and the river that was swelling up. The animals were all over the fields again; the birds were also looking for dry grasses to build their nests. My back yard wasn’t lovely looking anymore. There were tree branches and the plants that needed to be cleaned up, but I was so happy to see that the monkeys had come back.

Samphara Fasal is a Liberal Arts student.

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Quinceanera

By Brenda Morales

A quinceanera is a coming of age ceremony, much like the American Sweet Sixteen, but it is only for Hispanic girls when they turn 15. Today families often start to save up for this day when their daughters are born. It has become very important and very complex. There is a very big difference between today's celebration of a quinceanero from that of the past.

This tradition dates back to ancient times when the natives of Mexico and South America would present their 15 year old females as women ready to marry. *Quince*, meaning 15, developed into *quinceanera*, the name for this event, referring both to the girl and the event.

The event starts with a ceremony where the priest talks about when a young girl is becoming an adult. "You are a woman to God now." The father of the *quinceanera* accompanies her to the altar. After the service there is a large reception with music, dancing, singing in a hall or another big space.

Her court of honor traditionally consists of fourteen couples and then she and her *chamberlane de honor* or gentleman make fifteen, each couple representing a year in her life. The *damas*, or ladies, all wear the same dress, usually a color complimenting the *quinceanera's* dress.

There is also the changing of shoes and crown. She wears flat shoes. Then her father changes them to heels. Next her father also puts on a crown with a number 15 on her. Both of these symbolize that the father accepts her transition to womanhood. She can get relatives or her godparents to help her and the family pay for the event. This Hispanic celebration is like a wedding.

In the past, sweet fifteen was nothing compared to now. In that time they didn't have expenses like today. They didn't have such a big celebration. Instead they had a simple birthday party. It wasn't pompous as it is today. Many parents at that time didn't have jobs. They couldn't afford to give a big celebration. Economy was a problem, but at least they celebrated their 15th birthday, in a small way.

In conclusion, the *quinceanera* is probably the most important event in a young Hispanic girl's youth. Even though the past celebration and the present celebration of this special event were different in style, the important thing is that the *quinceanera* herself remembers it as a special occasion and important transition in her life.

Brenda Morales is of Puerto Rican heritage. She is planning to work in the Medical field.

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Where Does the Sun Shine?

By Tuyen T. Vo

"Hey, how long have you been online?" I typed the questions to ask my new friend; I had just known her about a week. "Hello, Mina, do you have free time now? I'm feeling so down and really need someone to talk to." From the image of the webcam, I could see her face, frustrated and filled with tears. "Sure," I said. We began to talk as good friends and at this moment, I understood more about her background, how many problems she had to face.

"My parents want to marry me to a man who's older than me 30 years." Overwhelmed with surprise, I gasped, not knowing what to say. "A nineteen

year old girl married to a 50 year old man?" I could not imagine how it would be. According to her, her family was a traditional family, affected heavily by Vietnamese customs and habits. Most girls who were born into this kind of family must obey their parents' words, even let them pick their husband. My friend is a victim of this tradition. Her family cannot afford to let her continue her dream to become an English teacher because their life was getting harder. Her dad had lost his job, and her mom had been in bed for years with some incurable disease. She is the oldest child who has to take care of everything. She could not stand there and do nothing. Giving up her last year of high school, moving away from her childhood, unable to wear her uniform to school, to hang out with her friends, she was going to change her lifestyle, to live with someone whose age was the same as her dad's. The hardest thing for her was breaking up with her boyfriend. She had to swallow her tears inside to say the word "good bye."

"It is a nightmare. Every night, I cannot sleep; his miserable face always appears when I close my eyes." From her words, I realized that her boyfriend was a part of her life, but her family was the main source of her living. It was like a hard math problem which needed a smart solution. As we've always said, "Money can solve any problem." It might be right in this situation.

Finding a rich husband for her is the only thing they can do, without asking her idea. They think this solution will change their life in a better way as well as bring happiness to her. But they did not know that they were wrong. "Everyone has the right to choose what to do, especially an important thing like marriage. Obviously, the difference about age cannot put them into one world. A marriage without love will not endure for long," I tried to console

her. “No, Mina, sometimes, you don’t have a chance to choose what you want to do because one person cannot go in two ways. Even though I extremely hate being born into a traditional family, I cannot make my parents feel great anguish about me. A good daughter would not do that. I think you would also do the same thing if you were me. If this marriage can solve my family’s financial problem, afford my brother the chance to pursue his dream, I would sacrifice everything.” She ended her words with a sigh; her face was still wet with tears.

“Don’t cry, my friend. Things will get better. So, have you met that man yet?” I asked. She changed her sitting position, with her chin propped up in one hand. “No, but my dad told me that he is a director of a popular company. He’s around 50 and divorced.” She added, “He’ll be here soon to take me out for dinner.” I looked at her from the webcam, trying to give her some courage. “Don’t care about his past too much. Maybe he’s not bad at all. Remember, if God closes all the doors in your house, he will open a window for you.” “I hope you’re right,” she said sadly.

“So, what is the most important thing to you, love or money? Do you think money can control one’s life?” There was a pause between us. “With me, love is some precious thing that you cannot see or touch even if it exists around us. If love could fill up our hunger, make us happy, and not worry about what we will do tomorrow to survive, I will choose love. Unfortunately, love is not that powerful and it cannot win money. And yes, my life is controlled by money. There is no question about it. The truth is always the truth.”

After two hours of talking, we said goodbye to each other. It was also the time that her future husband arrived. From the webcam, I could see the

image of a 50 year old man, wearing a black suit with glasses on. He held her hand and they both left the computer table, moved toward the main door, and disappeared instantly.

Compared to her, my life is definitely better. She understood her family’s situation and prepared willing to do whatever it takes. Her fate did not belong to her anymore, only dependence and complying with orders. She was so pious and generous when making this decision. From two different places, I had the opportunity to be there with her and listen to her story. She was not a lucky girl, but she had a sweet heart, selflessness. She didn’t complain, just accepted her fate with resignation. I admired her action and felt pity for what she was passing through. Hopefully, her life will change for the better with her husband. She might not be happy compared with her past life because everything would not be the same again. But at least, she has done some positive things for her family.

Looking out the window, I could see the sky was covered with darkness. It was a quiet street with a couple cars passing by. Suddenly, it rained hard. How long would it last?

Tuyen T. Vo is majoring in Business Administration.

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Nobody Can Help! **By Akil Aljaysh**

Writing this story brought back a lot of memories for me. I can remember a lot of the things that I did. However, some of the things I’ve forgotten. But I wasn’t making up anything in this story. This story was inspired by the truth in 1998.

His looks were far and deep. The man was suffering. There were no tears in his eyes, but his face was weeping. He was not a friend of mine. I met him in the street. He was walking and talking to nobody. I don’t know why I liked this man. When I got close to him, I said, “*Salaam alaikm*, man. Are you all right? You look sad. What’s going on, man? Can I help you?”

The man looked at my face well and said, “No, thank you. Nobody can help me. Nobody can help. . .” Then he continued, “Thanks for asking. You are a good man.”

I really wanted to know what was going on with him. *He was a stranger; it seemed to me he had a problem. I didn’t know if I could help him. Let’s try.* “Sometimes it’s too difficult to share your problem with someone you don’t know, but maybe he would be the one who’s going to help you,” I said.

“It’s very kind of you, but...” I entrapped him. “What? Come on. Share it with me.”

“I will tell you one part of my long story if you would like to hear it.” He took a deep breath, and said, “I have a family. My father lives in Gaza. He is old, he is blind, and he has no money either. I can’t send him any because I have none. My mother is a weak, old woman. She lives in Haifa, where we had a house in the golden days. We were a very rich family. Also I have a sister named Aminah. She was a child of two years when I left her. She is nineteen now, so the government has asked her to join the army. My mother didn’t want her to go, but Aminah was taken by force. She is a soldier at Beer- Sheba at present.”

A tear ran down his cheek. He wiped it off and then went on. “My friend, you are a man; you have a family; you enjoy the love of a country, but I am nothing.

I have pictures of a family and a map of a country.”

Then suddenly this man cried, “Man, you don’t know me. I’m . . . I’m homeless. I’m Palestinian.”

Akil Aljaysh is from Iraq. He is interested in Radiology.

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Escaping War in Sierra Leone

By Orlando Bangura

In Sierra Leone, we heard on the radio the President of Ghana’s voice. “I’m sending a ship to collect all my people to bring you back home.” “What a great opportunity God has sent for us,” we cried. We used this opportunity to free our lives.

We took the little things we had with us and left for the harbor where we stayed for one good night. The next day the ship arrived, very late. Unfortunately, it started to rain, and became windy and stormy with lightning. The harbor was very cold. In our minds we knew that the ship was really coming for the Ghanaians in the country, not for us. The Ghanaians began to enter the ship, by showing their ID cards, while we were standing under the cold rain. After all the Ghanaians were on board, that’s when they felt sorry for us, after all the disaster we had gone through. We boarded.

The condition of the ship was terrible, but people didn’t notice it because everyone was happy, and running for their lives. On the ship, we, the Sierra Leoneans, were about five hundred, and the Ghanaians, about three to four hundred. There was no food or medicines, yet on our way to Ghana,

people were singing, and dancing; we all were happy and excited to be leaving Sierra Leone. This was June 27, 1997 when we left our homeland headed for Ghana, another country in western Africa.

When we arrived at the first border in the Liberia Sea, the ship began to roll. People started to cry, others were vomiting, and at the end many people fell sick. I was around ten years old; I knew everything that was going on, on the ship because I moved around a lot. Then a terrible thing happened in the middle of the sea; the ship stopped. We couldn’t see any other ship except ours, and we lost connection with the outside world. We stayed one and a half days without moving. I thought it was the end of our lives. But God helped us and at last the ship started up again.

We arrived at the second border called Abidjan (Ivory Coast). This time we didn’t face any problem. Soon when we saw the lights of Abidjan, people thought that we had arrived until they realized that the the lights got dimmer and dimmer. No, we were not yet in Ghana. After we passed Abidjan, the Ghanaian people who brought the ship, gave us some food and sugar, because they knew we were about to arrive. At night time, we reached the border, and we slept till the next day.

Finally, we were at the Ghanaian harbor. Many people had fallen sick after seven days at sea without proper food or medicines, but we thanked God for letting us reach safety.

Orlando Bangura is hoping to become a Nurse.

* * * * *

French Fried Love

By Yuliya Goldman

Are you still sleeping? Wake up then, because St. Valentine’s Day is coming soon. It’s time to go and buy all those candies, flowers, toys. It’s time to love and be loved. It’s time to talk about love and do all for love. It’s time to do the craziest things and never regret them.

I never regret what I did on February 14 three years ago. It definitely was one of the wildest things I’ve ever done.

I was sixteen. I was crazy and I was in love. All my friends said that my crush liked me too, but he never asked me out. This boy was (and still is) totally amazing. However, he was one of the shyest people that I’d ever met. He always gave me his smiles and very special looks, but he never talked to me until I started to talk to him first. We had mutual friends, but we never hung out together. It made me crazy! “How can he be so stupid?” I asked myself, but couldn’t answer.

Once I understood, I couldn’t wait anymore. I knew where he lived, so I put my best stubborn face on and just knocked on his door. He seemed really nervous, so I tried to ease the situation by asking him about his new eyebrow piercing. He just kept answering my questions, not even trying to keep this conversation going. I couldn’t help myself, I had to ask him. “Actually... how to say it... I mean...” I took a deep breath. “Do you want to go out with me tonight?” He looked surprised. “Yes, sure... I mean... no, I can’t. I’m sorry. I have something to do.” “OK... whatever” I said. “See you sometime.”

I was killed. I was so dead at this moment. I was walking down the street, crying like a baby. All my dreams and hopes were destroyed; I was humiliated. Lord, I just wanted to die!

This happened on February 13. St. Valentine's Day was coming, but I was upset, unhappy and single. I decided to spend the rest of my life at home, crying, eating and sleeping. But my mom didn't think so. She woke me up the next morning and advised me to go to the school or start looking for different parents.

On my way to school, I met my best guy friend and told him what had happened the other day. I was ready to cry again, but he said suddenly, "Listen to me, Yuliya. I'm not supposed to let you know, but I can't see these tears in your eyes anymore. I'm going to tell you something, but you have got to promise me..." I interrupted him, "Yes, I've already forgotten your name..."

My friend told me that the "man of my dreams" was working part-time at McDonald's so he could get a nicer car before he asked me out. How could he be so stupid?!

Instead of waiting, I went to his work, and walked right up to his cash register. There was a long line, but I ignored it. I looked at his eyes and said, "Hi, I need a large order of fries, a medium coke and a BOYFRIEND!" He just jumped right over the counter and kissed me...

I broke up with this guy almost two years ago, but we are still friends. He always says he will never forget that Valentine's Day. And I'm glad it's so because it was just one of those wild, stupid and crazy things that people do in the name of LOVE.

Yuliya Goldman is a student from Russia, studying Fine Arts.

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The Day We Crash

By Mohamed Gazali

One day my friend Amin came over to our apartment in the Mt. Hope project to talk and listen to music from TV with me. After a little while my other friend Addi came with his broken bike. He said, "Let's go to the bike shop." At that time it was around two o'clock in the afternoon and it was nice outside.

We started going up the street, up the hill, Amin and I riding my tandem bike and Addi riding his broken cycle behind us. We kept pushing on faster and faster. We were leaving Amin in the dust. I felt uncomfortable going so quickly; I am visually impaired and couldn't see what was in front of us. On the way, ten minutes later, we found my other friend Muhammad. We told him where we were traveling to and he decided to come with us.

Now there were four of us demanding to go the bike shop. As we proceeded, it rained a little bit. Now guess what? We came to the top of the hill and began to race down the hill. The tandem bike did not have good brakes, only on the front wheel. When we tried to stop, the tandem wouldn't stop immediately. It would take time. "Be careful, Amin, or we might crash!" I yelled. "I got this. Don't worry, Mohamed," he replied. As we tore down the hill, the bike was moving faster. The sidewalk was bumpy and missing pieces. I could feel the wind and the light shower blowing on my face. Addi and Muhammad were about ten minutes behind us; we couldn't see them at all.

"Come on, Mohamed. Let's pedal faster because I'm trying to catch the traffic light." "No, we'll wait for the light. Don't go any faster." When I felt that we were moving too fast, I took my feet off the pedal. He kept pedaling, harder and harder. "Oh no, slow down

Amin! I could feel the trees on my right side; we were leaving them behind so rapidly. Less than a minute later, I heard a loud boom noise and all the automobiles came to a halt.

I flew over the left side, over the rear handle, landing on the road with my right leg first. Amin landed on his head and passed out.

After I collected myself, I started walking in the road. "Are you okay," a guy asked me. "Yes," I answered weakly. Three minutes later the lady driver whose car we had run into came over and asked me the same thing. "Are you okay? I'm sorry." Five minutes later the police showed up to question me and the witnesses. Overall, it was her fault for taking a left turn in front of us without looking. Amin could have avoided hitting her if he had looked in front of him instead of the traffic light. Sadly, an ambulance took both of us to the Strong emergency room. "Luckily, you have only a few bruises and they will heal," the doctor said.

Amin didn't listen when I told him to slow down. I learned that if someone is doing something for you – he was the driver – you don't have the control. You don't really have a choice to have things the way you want them. I always try to do things for myself. Don't rely on others!

Mohamed Gazali comes from Somalia. He is interested in the Computer field.

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Nightmare

By Yashira Morell

“Please let her go. Don’t you understand that she does not want you any more?” “Shut up you little girl!”

Those were the last words I told the man that was destroying my mother’s life. Alberto was a tall, skinny, light-skinned man; he was also a famous baseball player. When he did not have games, he dressed in a black suit with a pair of black shiny shoes and a silky tie that matched the suit. He looked like Michael Jackson. He loved my mother a lot, but I think it was more obsession than love because he didn’t want her to do anything without asking him and he was not my mother’s husband. I didn’t want him as my father either. Alberto was kind of crazy.

One day he came to the big old house that we used to have in Puerto Rico. He saw that my mother was talking to my sister’s biological father. “Oh hell no, she is not doing this to me, not her,” he said out loud. “Hey you little bastard, what are you doing with my girl?” “She is not your girl, and I came to see my daughter so you better calm down.” I was ten years old, but I could still hear them cursing and shouting. “Baby, get in your bedroom,” my mom told me. “Mami, I’m scared.” “Don’t worry. Everything is going to be okay.”

Suddenly I heard my mom throwing things and saying, “Get out of my house; you don’t have anything to do here.” “Baby, I love you and I need you; please give a chance. You just want to be with him, right? Tell me, does he have more chances because he has a child with you, ah?” “What if I say yes, would you leave me alone?” “I would never leave you alone, and you know that.” He was so mad that he tried to hit my mom, and he also had a knife. “You and your

daughters will never be happy again.”

Since that day he became a nightmare. Two years later we moved to a small house. I was little bit bigger, and I helped my mother with almost everything, but wait. We were missing somebody in the story, “the nightmare.” By that time my mother was twenty-six years old and married to a firefighter.

One afternoon my stepfather went to work at eleven o’clock. My mother and her friend decided to play a game with us, in which everybody chose a place to hide while somebody was counting and then trying to find them. We started playing when “ka boom,” there was our nightmare! “Did you think that you could get away from me so easily?” “I told you to leave me alone; I’m a married woman now.” “I don’t give a damn if you are married or not.” My mother was a little drunk, and he was also drinking Heineken. She drank the rest of the beer while he was talking to her; when she finished, she hit him with the bottle on his head. “You will pay for this. Did you hear me, bastard?”

He didn’t know that we had called the police. We stopped him from leaving by making conversation until the police arrived. When they came, they arrested him and took him to jail. He promised to come back, but he didn’t because in jail somebody stabbed him and he died. They did the job for us even though we didn’t want to get our hands dirty with a jerk like him. Finally our nightmare was over.

Yashira Morrell is planning a career as a Massage Therapist.

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Earth to Sky

By Preet Kaur

It was a few minutes past 11:00 in the morning. I went outside to get my mail from the mail box, never thinking that this would change all our lives. Has this ever happened to you? Do you believe in destiny? Back inside the next thing was to explore what could be in the envelope. The minute I opened the letter I found myself in a pool of happiness. It was an interview call from the American Embassy. God, can you ever measure the depth of your joy, your happiness?

Soon I heard a voice from the back of the room. “What’s in your hand, Preet?” I turned to see. It was coming from my dad. “An appointment letter for an interview,” I replied. “Interview, from where?” he asked me. “From the American Embassy,” I said. “You lie,” he replied, making a face at me. “No,” I said with a smile. A smile was on my face no matter whatever I was doing that day!

Now, the next step was to wait for that big day, “the interview day.” Would everything be all right? Will they pass me? What if anything goes wrong? What would I do then? As the day was coming near, I felt myself surrounded by a wall of painful thoughts.

America is a big, beautiful and rich country but these aren’t the most important reasons for going there, I thought. The adventure is a much bigger pull. Have you ever been apart from your mom and dad or from the person you love the most? How would you react if you met them again after four or five years?

March 31, 2003, the perfect day had come. At 8:10 I heard “Daljeet Singh, Rattandeep and Preet, please come to window number five.” “Help us God,” I said as I heard our names. The officer

began with his list of questions for the next fifteen to twenty minutes. Then the counselor asked us to come back around 4:30 in the evening, but he didn't say if we had passed the interview or not.

Back home, I tried to keep myself busy so I wouldn't think about what was going to happen. At 4:30 sharp we were inside the embassy. Around 5 o'clock I heard our names again from the same window. There I saw a man holding three packets. He called my name again. "Yes, my name is Preet," I replied. "Oh, congratulations, Preet. You have got a permanent visa." "Oh....., God..... Thanks.....Thanks a lot."

Getting a visa was like having the key to a locked door. Can you wait to open the door if you have the key?

Soon I was on the land of the United States, to meet with my mom. The next day, when I opened my eyes I found myself in a beautiful room with a soft voice from my mom floating into my ears. "Wake up, sweetie." It seemed softer and warmer than anything I had heard in the last four or five years. Being with your family is the best thing, no matter wherever in the world you go.

Preet Kaur comes from India. She is planning to become a Nurse.

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Glowing Waters By *Xiomara A. Matos*

Deep soundless states controlled the students in the class room. I didn't like it when it was this quiet. It always happened when we were taking a test, but it was the way it was supposed to be, so peaceful that you could hear a bee soar across the room from end to end. Suddenly, Eve, my friend, burst the silence to ask me, "Have you seen the

glowing waters?" "What are you talking about, what glowing waters?" I asked. "The ones in *Las Pargueras*. You should go see them"

"Silence!" Ms. Baez looked at us with eyes of shame for breaking the silence. Eve had me thinking about those fluorescent waters all the twenty minutes that were left of class.

When the period ended, I immediately asked her all about these waters that seemed to be so interesting to her that she would interrupt the class. She told me that she had seen them in Puerto Rico, an act of nature that only happens on tropical beaches in Puerto Rico and two other parts of the world. She knew I was going to Puerto Rico in a week, so she wanted me not to miss it.

The day I arrived, I felt like I was inside an airplane engine. I immediately started to sweat. I took my jacket off. As I was walking out of the airport to meet my uncle, it felt like I was walking into an oven. Now we would be in Ponce, my hometown, in about three hours, but on our way, I asked my Uncle Adolfo to take me to *Las Pargueras* one day during my visit, and he immediately told me that he would be happy to.

It was Christmas time and we were so busy those two weeks, but my uncle surprised me, and one day we set out to see this phenomenon. I had heard that in order for the water particles to glow there couldn't be a moon, but that day the moon came out half full. When I entered the boat, I noticed that the floor was made of glass. If you looked down into the water, you could see the water shine. Earlier, I had doubted myself that the water could just glow, but as I watched it glow I was amazed at the beauty that nature has, a beauty that you never finish discovering.

When I got back to Rochester, I couldn't wait to tell Eve what I had just

seen in Puerto Rico. I confessed that at first I thought she was a little nuts for believing that water could glow like that, but when I was over there seeing that amazing phenomenon, the beauty of nature, I thought that if it hadn't been for her, I would've never seen it.

I did a little research after I got back and finally discovered what made the water shine. It is a form of microscopic life, the dinoflagelados which cause the water to shine in the dark, like a sky full of stars in the sea. Parguera is one of the few places in the world, and one of two in Puerto Rico. The other one is located in Vieques where this phenomenon is always visible.

Wouldn't you like to see it some day, yourself?

Xiomara A. Matos is a Visual Communication major interested in Graphic Arts.

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My Boss, Mr.Wossen

By
Banchirga E. Wondesadik

I first met Mr.Wossen two months after I arrived in the USA. I was looking for a job so that I could survive in a country where every minute of life is connected to money. It was my fourth job application when I went to one of Mr.Wossen's gas stations and asked one of his employees, "Are you hiring?" "What pump number did you say?" The cashier did not understand me, so I repeated, "Are you hiring?" She smiled and pointed to the owner. Since then, I was very eager to know more about this man.

My new boss, a hard working, strong, and kind man about forty, immigrated from Ethiopia thirteen years ago with his two daughters and wife. According to Mr. Wossen, it was not as hard to immigrate in the 80's as it is now. Thirteen years ago he was here visiting his older sister when he applied for permanent residency permission that he got two years later!

Mr. Wossen has been driving a taxi at night and working in a gas station for more than eight years while his wife has been staying at home with the children. He has been working sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. He worked hard to fulfill his goal, to open his own store. Now he has two.

Mr. Wossen learned English here in the USA. Although he went to school when he was in Ethiopia, he did not have a chance to speak English. When I asked him whether the language influenced his first jobs in the USA, he said, "Not at all. My job was not the kind of job that requires clear speaking of the language." However, as he worked towards his goal, he needed more English to communicate.

He thinks that life by itself is a kind of college in which one can learn everything from the society you live with. "You do not have to go to college to learn the language that is spoken by the community in which you live. Listen to them, speak with them and then at least you will be able to communicate very well, even if you cannot be a fluent speaker."

How did he become successful, I wondered. He breathed a long sigh and said, "It is a long story. I was like you when I came to America. In short, hard work and a clear goal helped me to reach where I am now." He likes working for himself rather than being employed by someone else. When he compared his business with the income that one

could earn after a college degree, he prefers his. However, he supports immigrants who are going to school. "I like a person who goes to school because you spend the money anyway, but your degree stays with you in that you can be employed wherever you go."

His advice to the new immigrants is "have a clear future regarding your career development. If you have the potential to change yourself by academic work, please do not give up. If you have the potential in labor work, work hard. This is America. You can change yourself in every aspect of life, if you are really a person who would like to be changed."

When we finished talking, he told me that he enjoyed being with me. He smiled, "I say again, be strong and do not give up!"

Banchirga E. Woldesadik comes from Ethiopia. She is interested in a career in the Medical field.

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We All Have the Same Heart

By Ilmee Song

"I am really overwhelmed by the roses. I have never received this kind of treatment in all my life. Thank you!" Barbara exclaimed, gazing at the bouquet of yellow roses she had just placed on her old grand piano in the family room. The combination of black and yellow gave a cozy feeling to the room. I looked around, following behind her, as we walked through her 100-year-old house. She led me to her sunroom which faced the backyard. On one side, a wisteria sofa set was placed and on the other, her desk, which was surrounded by bookshelves. I already knew about

her scholarship, but that day I was truly overwhelmed by the enormous number of books. Her library was full, from the bottom shelf to the ceiling. All her books had tags and they were arranged in alphabetical order.

I met Barbara five years ago through Literacy Volunteers. I still don't know exactly how old she is. I would guess she was between eighty to eighty-five at that time. The first day we met she was leaning on a cane as she walked. I saw a petite lady, about five feet two inches tall with a surprisingly energetic voice, bright blue eyes and a warm, affectionate smile. We usually met at the public library once a week.

A couple of months later, Barbara had knee surgery. About a month after her surgery, she mailed me a postcard of two lambs grazing in a field. She wrote, "Four legs are good; two legs are bad. I returned from the hospital with just two legs. Luckily, I kept my cane in my closet." I laughed a lot. At that time, during our meeting we had been reading George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Her wit and knowledge of literature made me more interested in reading even though my English still wasn't very good. At the end of the postcard she wrote, "from your teacher and friend."

Barbara wanted to have our next meeting at her home the following week. The day I visited her, I baked a dozen apple turnovers early in the morning. On the way I bought a bouquet of yellow roses. When we sat at the kitchen table with tea and the turnovers, I asked her how she became involved with Literacy Volunteers. "I just wanted to share my ability with others." That day I would hear about her life.

She and her younger sister had grown up in Philadelphia with well-educated parents. She studied History and Arts at Yale University where she met her husband when she was a senior. Her

husband, whose major was English, was two years younger, but he was very mature and smart. Even though different majors, they had a lot of similar interests. They married when he was still an undergraduate.

After his graduation, they went to England to study more. While there, their first and second sons were born, three years apart. Seven years after their departure from the USA, they returned to New Haven, Connecticut where each started their teaching career at Yale. Within a couple of years their daughter was born and they bought this home.

“It was a perfect life, one which I had expected,” she said with a smile. Soon her smile was covered with clouds. One day she received a call from the police to notify of her husband’s death in a car accident. Her two sons were teenagers and her daughter was in primary school at that time. She did her best between her job and children. “My husband’s death showed me another side of life. I became cynical toward life.” Barbara made a bitter smile.

She had a hard time with her daughter when she became a teenager. She was very smart, but rebellious, and never interested in boys smarter than herself. After her college graduation, she left home to travel and fell in love with a Turk she met on a cruise. “It was difficult to watch them, how they had a lot of obstacles living together. Now they have lived separately for almost one year, but my daughter is thinking of reuniting for their children’s sake. Do you remember my granddaughter, Stella?” I remembered a five-year-old girl who had curly, brown hair and blue eyes. One day Barbara had brought her to our meeting at the library. I never imagined her as a mixed child because of her perfect big blue eyes until now, when Barbara told me about her daughter. “I don’t want my daughter’s reconciliation with my son-in-law. Even though he is a

good person for my grandchildren and a hard worker as a taxi-driver in New York City, there is something making her life hard. I don’t know if you can understand my point. There are some big differences between my son-in-law and my daughter,” she added. Her daughter’s life was hard for Barbara, but she wasn’t sad about it because it was her daughter’s choice, one which Barbara had to accept as her mother.

“My real sorrow was my younger son’s sudden death. It pained me more than losing my husband.” Barbara was fighting to hide her tears. When her younger son was in university, he met a lovely French girl. He went to France with her and lived as a farmer. He had always wanted to live a totally different life. One day her daughter-in-law called to tell Barbara that her son had been crushed under a large tractor. “I lost my words. He was just twenty-seven years old. Can you believe that? It was like the earth turned in the opposite direction.” Her daughter-in-law, a teacher of middle school, is raising their two college daughters by herself without remarrying. Barbara has kept in touch with her French granddaughters often and both girls have visited every couple of years. “Without me, how can they connect to their father’s roots? They are my responsibility and my love,” she smiled.

Her older son’s family is living in California. Sometimes Barbara goes there to see them and her younger sister. However, she didn’t want to move from New Haven because she has created wonderful memories with her husband, her children and her career there.

As I got up to go, Barbara pointed out a black and white picture on the wall in the hallway. “They are my parents, my younger sister and me when I was about seven years old. I have always showed this picture to my friends. Then they would envy me as if I came from a royal

family. I enjoyed tricking my friends, but my parents were really royalty to me.” I understood what she meant.

This is one of my old memories, one of the most wonderful conversations I have had in my life. I will always thank Barbara for treating me as a friend even though I was a young foreigner who came from a small country. She taught me we all have the same heart, so we can always understand each other.

Ilmee Song, from Korea, is studying Accounting.

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Scared Euphoria *By Rattandeep Kaur*

“WOW, Mama, is it true or are you kidding me? I don’t believe it! How could Daddy agree to spend our vacation in Shimla?” I hugged my mom tight. I was feeling so warm and happy. It was like I had won the lottery! After a long time, we were finally going to spend a vacation together.

I was seven years old when my mom came to my playroom and told me, “Pack your bag, Beta. We are going to Shimla on Saturday of this week.” I was astonished. My mouth fell open. I smiled, but I didn’t utter a word.

My mom, sister Preet, Daddy and I left the house at six that Saturday, in the early morning, but before going, we prayed to God for a successful trip.

We took a bus to the railway station, half an hour away from my house. The train took eight hours to get to Shimla in the mountains, but in the meanwhile, we sang songs, played games and puzzles. We approached Shimla in the evening. My parents booked two rooms, one for them and the other for my sister and me.

The rooms were so cozy and peaceful.

Around nine at night, we had a delicious vegetarian dinner of saag and kari. We had a little chat after the dinner and then went to sleep.

The next morning, I woke up from my bed and opened the curtain to look at the weather. It was an incredible day; I was feeling so relaxed, and calm. Then, I rushed to my parents' room. "Good morning Mama. How are you? Have you looked at the bright sun outside?"

Happily, we decided to go shopping that morning for Rajasthani dresses and dishes. The shops were near the hotel. It took us ten minutes to get to the market place. We bought dresses in pink, blue and gray. We bought Rajasthani shirts and skirts. There were different shops for different cultures. In the meanwhile, I heard some Chinese, Arabic and Hindi music from the loud speakers in the street. Next, we moved to a toy shop beside the music shop.

As I entered the shop, I saw a huge, artificial bear. I said "Mama, look at the bear. Look at his big, blue and shining eyes. This is first time I have seen a big, white, fuzzy bear." I thought he was looking at me and wanted to play with me.

When we were ready to leave, outside I saw a monkey and suddenly started crying. My tone changed into sadness. "Mama, save me. It's going to bite me. OH NO, it's coming to get me." My heart was pounding like a running horse. The monkey was acting like a monster.

I said "DADDY, save me. It will kill me." My dad said, "Don't cry, Beta. We'll get you. I am coming to you, but you have to hold my hand softly and gently. Take care. Don't try to rush to me." "Okay, Daddy... I'll do whatever you say."

The monkey opened his jaws, making horrible scary noises. He was showing his sharp teeth and angry eyes. He was making bigger eyes and approaching me. I was so anxious. As long as he was coming toward me, my heart was beating faster and faster. Suddenly, he snatched the banana from my hands and went away. I was still scared. Then, I rushed to my mom and hugged her tightly as if she were one of my stuffed animals.

"Weren't you afraid, Mama, when I was standing far away from you and the monkey was making scary noises and faces at me?" "Yes Beta, we were worried for you, and for a second, I thought that monkey would bite you. Thank God, he didn't harm you," she answered softly.

I was so grateful to my parents for protecting me and making me feel safe. The moment sticks out in my mind and never leaves it. I learned a lot from this incident. A dangerous situation can occur at any place, at any time, just as I faced it.

Rattandeep Kaur, from India, is studying Nursing.

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Barbara's Long Journey

By Lyudmila Kurylo

When she appears at the corner of my house, I can check the time. It's exactly nine o'clock. She walks with a cane, but you would be surprised to see how fast and how big her steps are. She is not young, but I could get jealous because of her energy. Every morning she goes by my house to shop in Wegmans, which is close to my street.

Barbara is a widow. She is almost 85 years old. When I asked her where she was born, Barbara answered me with delight in her dim eyes, "I am from Poltava, the center of Ukraine. We lived in a village as beautiful as the Garden of Eden." It doesn't matter how beautiful her homeland could be. The time when she grew up was very difficult and unstable.

"Until the year 1928, life was very good. People had their own land and could sell their goods or use bartering," Barbara told me. Then disaster started. The government took away lands from people who were good owners and had more wealth. They became so poor and many were sent to Siberia. They started to send men first, later women and children. Then they decided to form collectives and created propaganda to encourage people to work together: How good their lives would be! Everybody would have equal rights. "They made the beds good, but it was hard to sleep." Barbara described their false promise. Luckily, Barbara wasn't sent to Siberia because her mother was a widow with three kids and she didn't have a large property.

Disasters didn't stop. When Barbara was 12, the Russians started a holocaust to kill Ukrainians. That year was good for crops and people gathered a good harvest. But the Russian government forced the heads of collectives to take all the provisions from the people. Now everyone in the East and Central Ukraine was starving to death. West Ukraine at that time was under Poland who was trying to help. They gathered food and wanted to send it to Ukraine, but nobody allowed them to do that.

"Russia wanted Ukraine destroyed," was Barbara's comment. The statistics say that in the Holocaust in Ukraine more people died than during World War II. Barbara was a live witness of it. People were more than starved; they

tried to eat everything that could keep them alive. When it was spring, they started to eat like animals. They ate leaves, grasses, and roots. Whoever had a little bit of flour could mix plants with a handful of flour and bake it. Barbara said it was named gallety. She remembers how skinny she was and her mother was swollen. People became insane from the hopeless situation. Some of them killed their children and themselves. Some of them were buried alive.

Barbara said, "It was a miracle that we survived." She had a stepfather who was a shoemaker. He was sent to different places to work. People paid him with goods which he brought home. At that time the value of food was gold, and the stepfather told her mother to exchange all of their gold for food. After two horrible years of hunger, the government let people plant again to have some food.

When Barbara was 18, after three months of dating, she got married, but their happiness didn't last long. Her husband Nick went into the military when World War II started, leaving Barbara alone with two kids at home. A few years into the war, Nick was trapped by German soldiers. They kept him in captivity, but he knew what they were going to do with him. He couldn't even sleep, thinking about how to escape. With a friend, he decided to run away at night. They dug under the barbed wire. Their nails were broken and fingers were swollen, but in their hearts there was a spark of hope. Fortunately, the ground was of sand, which made it easier to dig. Hiding from the Germans, they crawled about a mile until they found a stack of hay. They dug under it, making a hole for a place to sleep. When the sun rose, they ran away to the first house in the village. An old woman opened the door and asked them, "Oh, my dear sons, are you hungry?" They were grateful to her. She also gave them clothes, so that they

couldn't be recognized.

"You wouldn't believe it," Barbara said with a smile on her face, "They were 15km from my house and I didn't even expect him back." Because she hadn't had any news from him during the war, when he came home Barbara cried for a long time and very loudly. She had buried him in her thoughts and now he appeared as an angel.

Barbara's husband was against Russia and the war. He told Barbara that they could go out into the world and find a better life. When the Germans asked who wanted to go to Germany, with her husband Barbara took her two small children, and together they took the train to Berlin.

Life in Berlin wasn't easier because that city had been bombed by Russian soldiers. They found jobs on a farm and lived there for 7 years. The people were friendly and helped them in their needs. Barbara's husband wanted really badly to go to the USA. When people were evacuated to Australia and Brasilia, he still waited for America. Barbara had never thought about the USA, but her husband was very determined to be here.

In 1951 on the "Captain Black" they sailed 8 days and nights, and after many years of roving, Barbara and Nick arrived in the country of their dreams. "God bless these people, who accepted us and gave us everything that we needed. We were poor, hungry, and barefoot. We were as animals in a cage. In the America we found a happy life for us and our children."

The next day when I saw her from my window, I wondered again about what a difficult life this woman had had and the circumstances that didn't break her spirit. She is still walking lively and looking forward, not turning back.

Lyudmila Kurylo, from Ukraine, is planning to major in Nursing.

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Xavier *By Melinda Roman*

His face was very dirty. He smelled like he hadn't taken a shower for days or maybe for weeks. His clothes were dirty and his shoes too. When I looked for him on Ave. D, he asked me if I was going to pay him first... before he told me his story. I had to give him five dollars.

His life has been so hard. At fourteen, his family found out he was a drug addict, and left him behind when they moved away from Rochester. That was when he chose the life that he is living today, sleeping in abandoned houses, stealing to go to jail to have a place to sleep when it is cold.

If you go to the city, you will see him with a shopping cart full of metal cans and bottles to exchange for money for drugs. He has been living this life for thirty years. He has been in jail more than twenty times for stealing. "The only family that I have is the drugs." People know him around. Sometimes they offer him food, but he asks for money instead. Years ago he almost died from an overdose. He is more and more dependent on drugs until the point where he needs the drug just to get through the day. "It's easy to start taking drugs, but it is very difficult to quit. Believe me I know it well. Your life will never be the same again" He has tried to quit, but it is impossible for him. To go to a rehabilitation place he needs papers and he doesn't even have his social security card, or any of his important papers.

Xavier has two children and no clue where they are. He would like to see them but how? Sometimes he thinks he would rather not meet them again because he doesn't want them to see him like that.

This poor man gave me sorrow when he talked to me. His face sometimes looked like he wanted to cry.

Melinda Roman is from Puerto Rico. She is a Human Services major.

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Real Hide-and-Seek

By Nanae Imazawa

I used to go to the park to play with my neighborhood friends when I was child. One day, my friends, Yuka, Kanako, Megumi, Kosuke, Yumi, Shun and I went to the park as usual. It was shiny spring day. First, we played with the sand and made a tunnel and a castle. It was a very good job and we had a feeling of satisfaction. Then we played tag. After a while, we got tired of running and we discussed what to do next. At the age of six, we had to go back home at 5:00 pm. We had thirty minutes left at that time.

“Let’s play hide and seek! All of us agreed, so we did “paper, stone and scissors” to choose the seeker. I looked for the place to hide while the loser counted to thirty. The best place where he would never find me was up a tree, I thought. The tree which I found had lots of the leaves, and I could climb it easily. Then the seeker said, “I am coming to find you guys!”

When he approached me, I held my breath. He found my friends one after another, but he was not able to find me. After a while, I heard my friends talking about something, but I couldn't

see them because of the leaves. I thought they were trying to find me together. I waited for ten minutes, but nobody found me and then I couldn't even hear their voices. It was almost 5:00 pm. I had to go back home, so I tried to get down from the tree.

“Oh my God! I don't know how to get down from this tree.” I shouted my friends' names, but nobody answered. I tried to jump down, but I was too high up. I felt so lonely, and didn't know what to do. It was getting dark and cold. I had been in the tree a long time and was almost crying.

Thirty minutes later, finally, somebody called my name. It was my mother and brother. “Nana, where are you?” “I am here! In the tree!” I said, shaking the branches and the leaves. My mother and Hiroki ran up to me and helped me get down.

“Your friends told me they couldn't find you. I was really worried about you. Don't ever do that again, OK? If you want to climb a tree, you have to be with me, Dad or Brother.” “I am sorry. I didn't expect that I couldn't get down from here. I'll never do that again.” “You should call your friends; they are also worried about you,” she answered.

On the way home, I decided to stop at my friend Megumi's house. She said, “I thought you had gone back home, so I went to your house to make sure that you were there, but you weren't. We really worried about you.”

After I got home, I wrote in my diary because it was really scary. My mother made curry rice, my favorite dish. I never went up that tree again and I always hid in a safe place whenever we played hide and seek again!

Nanae Imazawa comes from Japan. Her career plan is to become a Music Therapist.

Megumi

By Akil Aljaysh

I was standing behind her, silent. I was thinking about what she was going to tell me about her life. She was a small young woman, short and straight-waisted like a child. Her forehead was shining though the smooth curves of black hair. She was sitting in her comfy chair, holding a cup of coffee in her right hand. Her eyes flickered to the window. As she looked at the beautiful sky outside, she took a deep breath. She was so relaxed; I just let her enjoy her coffee for a while.

“Hi Megumi! How are you doing? I am so sorry I'm late,” I said. “Oh no, It's okay. I have nothing to do today. So how's your day?” she replied. “Not too bad. I just want to finish my homework. You know I have a lot to do this week.” “Don't worry. You will finish it; you always do.” Then we started talking about her life in Tokyo and how she became a professional skier.

Megumi is a Japanese girl, who was born in Tokyo in 1979. She lived with her mom. Her father left when she was two. Megumi grew up in an Asian society where they gave more respect to men than to women, which made her mom worry about her more than usual. She would never let Megumi play outside alone. Her mom was a ski instructor. She used to work in a different city because there was no snow in the city where they lived. Every day she would leave Megumi with her grandma.

When Megumi was four years old, her mom decided to teach her how to ski. “I will never forget the first time I saw snow.” The pretty girl's face, pink and delicate as a flower, looked so surprised when she saw the heavy snow for the first time. She was six years old when her mom took her to the Nagano Olympic games. Here the

snow was about eight feet high. The beautiful place was crowded with people from the entire world. When she saw professional teams race in the field of snow, it made her so excited that she was there. From that day, Megumi put in her mind she had to practice skiing every day. Her mom was so happy that her only daughter started to love her favorite sport.

When Megumi saw her mom so proud of her, she started working out every single day, and at the same time, she followed her mom's suggestions. Although it was hard for her, she never gave up.

Eight years later, she won first place in Japan's speed skiing competition. She had the chance to become one of the national team. Besides that, she was also a great student, graduating from the University of Tokyo in 2002.

I wondered how she felt when she was skiing. She said. "I can't describe the great feeling. I think there is an air tunnel from me to the goal area." When Megumi is skiing, she feels like she is operating a spacecraft, moving instantly by supernatural power, the view radiating out in all directions.

Megumi is a Monroe Community College student studying English. She is waiting for the competition of 2005. She thinks she has a good chance to take the championship in 2005.

Akil Aljaysh is from Iraq and planning to become a Radiologist.

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The World Is Not Without Kind People

By Anna Bulbotko

"The world is not without kind people"— words from a song I had heard not just one time on the radio, but I had never seriously thought about what it meant. The author of this song probably wrote it from his own experience. Maybe he had experienced a hard situation in his life and at the last moment somebody had offered him a helping hand. Was this his reason for writing this song?

"Hurry up! It is 11 o'clock already! Do you want to be late for your train?"—my thoughts sounded in my head. I had rushed off quickly from college; I grasped my suitcase and flew to the train station. I could have taken a bus to the station, but I didn't because it went very slowly. I thought walking I would be there quicker. On my way I kept thinking, "Hope there is not a huge line for the tickets." At the station I began to search, to see if there was one of my relatives already in line. But there wasn't, just a huge, huge line and nobody I knew. It was three days before the Easter holiday. A lot of students were trying to get home as soon as possible so the trains were always full. Sometimes one train couldn't hold everybody. The town, where I was studying had a lot of different colleges, universities and institutes and students from all over Ukraine came there to study. "What am I going to do? I didn't have enough money to take a private mini-bus." I looked at my watch, took a deep breath, took out my student ID and stood in line. I always took a train because the ticket was fifty percent cheaper with a student ID card. Suddenly I heard an announcement about a train which was arriving.

"Oh God, I am just at the middle of the line"—my heart started to beat so quickly. I knew that they wouldn't wait for late passengers. I decided to get in without a ticket. Of course, there were not any empty seats, so I stood like many other passengers. I knew if the controller came to check our tickets, he would kick me off; he would never give me a chance to buy one inside the train (this is possible only for passengers whose town does not have a place to buy the tickets). Such thoughts filled my head and in that very moment I heard the voice I was scared of. It was the controller. I shuddered, but tried to be calm. "What am I going to say if he asks me to show my ticket?" I asked myself again and again.

"Can I see your ticket please" the controller asked a man who was reading the newspaper. The man took out his ticket from his packet and showed it to him. "Thank you." "And yours, young lady," he asked me next. A lot of horrible thoughts filled my head. My heart thumped like I was running. "What am I going to say?" I asked myself again. "Can I see your ticket?" he asked me once more. "I don't have one. I didn't get to the train station on time because of my classes. I am so sorry... Can I buy the ticket from the lady who sells them on the train?" I asked him in a shivering voice. "Let me see your ticket!" he almost yelled at me. "I don't have one." I took out my student ID and showed it to him. "I'm a student. I don't have enough money to buy a ticket at the original price. Can I..."

"This is not an answer," he interrupted me. "You have just two choices: buy the ticket at the original price, without your student ID or..." His eyes were fearful and huge, "GET OUT OF HERE!" and the horrible man indicated with his big finger the door. "I.I. do not have a..." I tried to say something, but he interrupted me again. "I told you

already: I do not care. You are a liar.” He stood behind me, yelling. I knew he was serious because I had seen before when controllers put out old people and students who didn’t have tickets, even in winter.

Across from me was sitting an old lady. She heard my situation and felt sorry for me. She took out some money from her purse and held out her hand to me. “Take it and go buy the ticket.” Her voice was calm and pleasant. My eyes filled with tears; I couldn’t say anything. “Thank you very much, dear. How can I give it back to you? Where are you from?” “I don’t need it back. I know how you feel. Just take it,” she smiled at me. “Thank you again. I’ll never forget you.” I found the lady who sold tickets, bought one and showed it to the controller. He said nothing.

Since then, five years have passed, but I cannot forget the lady who saved me on that day. Now I know that “the world is not without kind people.”

Anna Bulbotko, from Ukraine, is planning a career in Nursing.

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My Wish

By *Jasmina Daut*

When I lived in Germany, there was a pop group called “Tic Tac Toe.” I always had a wish that somehow I would find a way to meet them. In the group were three singers all girls. Their names are Lee, Ricky, and Jessie. Their style of music was rap, but the things they sang about were non-violent. They would sing about specific situations that people experience.

I tried everything I could to make my wish come true. I tried calling radio stations and music stores that could

help me contact the band, but I was not successful. I tried to watch the music television show “Bravo,” which gave information about Tic Tac Toe’s tour, but I missed it because my parents were watching another program. A few months later, I found out through a friend that they would be having a concert in Munich. I finally found a way to get the tickets and go to the concert. It was fantastic. Even though I was not able to visually see them, I still had more fun than ever. However, my wish to meet them did not come true. The line to meet the band was too long and my sister who was with me did not want to wait for me.

Several months later I had to go to the hospital because I became very sick. When a child is in a hospital for a prolonged period of time and they cannot attend their normal schooling, the hospital provides educational classrooms for them. Soon, I became very close to my teacher, Mrs. Weiss.

One day she told me about the “Make-a-Wish Foundation.” I said to her, “Yeah right, there is no such organization.” She said, “I will send a representative to your room.” One day I was in the room with Frau Keöning, who was reading a book to me. All of the sudden someone was knocking at the door. When the door opened, there was Andrea from the Make-a-Wish Foundation. I just could not believe what I heard. She told me that I needed to write a letter about my wish.

I wrote my letter in Braille, and Frau Keöning helped me handwrite it. I had to wait about six months to get an answer. The Make-a-Wish Foundation said that Tic Tac Toe had broken apart as a group. It would be up to me whom I would get a chance to meet. I decided on Ricky.

Months and months went by. When Ricky finally came to my school, she

arrived with her mom and her manager; the director of the school showed them the way to my class. As they were quietly approaching the class, they called my teacher out. I thought I heard somebody mentioning my name and I became very nervous. My teacher came back and said, “There is someone here for Jasmina.” It was Ricky. She came in and hugged me and gave me a big flower. The rest of the day we had fun together. I was so happy.

I succeeded in reaching this goal. And I will continue trying to succeed in my future goals. Sometimes it may seem impossible, but if I try to work on it, it will happen.

Jasmina Daut, from Bosnia, is planning to study Psychology.

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Me

By *Khanh T. Vu*

“Mẹ già nhý chuỗi chín cây. Nhý xôi nếp một, nhý đýờng mía lau.”

“Mẹ,” the combination of these two letters gives this word a more particular significance, meaning mother to Vietnamese. “Mẹ” is a magic word. When evoked, it revives in each of us memories, regrets, thankfulness, and affection. Combining with the word “Quê” gives us “Quê Mẹ,” our motherland. All Vietnamese yearn to come back to “Quê Mẹ,” where we were born, and grew up. Our land contains all the feeling of our hearts.

Day after day, seeing “Mẹ”—my mom getting weaker, thinner, my heart felt down. All of her lifetime she not only took care of my father and us, but also of my father’s parents. That is the obligation of a married Vietnamese

woman.

It was a hot summer day. Mother and I were on the way home after she picked me up from school. Mom led the bicycle with one hand holding the bucket on the saddle behind. With two small hands, I tried to reach it as I wanted to help my mom hold the bucket still.

“The pigs are hungry!” my mom said, her feet were making longer steps. I was silent and trying to take longer steps too. I knew the pigs were hungry, but the smell of their food bucket made me feel sick. We usually got the waste food from the restaurant for the pigs. Mrs. Hạnh, who was our neighbor, was the owner of this restaurant.

My feet were getting tired. I wanted to tell my mom, but I could not. She was in a hurry. Besides raising pigs, my mom had to sew clothes to sell at the market tomorrow. Her skin was a little thicker. Under the sunshine, the wrinkles on her forehead seemed to become deeper with the worries of life.

Suddenly I hit a rock. My toes began bleeding, I started to cry without thinking about my mom who was in a hurry. “Are you ok?” she was saying, and taking me to the veranda floor of a house on the way. She looked around to find the closest pharmacy. I stopped crying although it still really hurt.

“Mom,” said I. “I’m ok, but I can’t walk anymore for now. We need to get home soon to feed the pigs.” Blood kept coming out. She looked at me and sighed. “I’ll take you home first and come back to get their food.” I nodded instead of saying sorry to her. After asking permission to leave the waste food there, she gave me a ride home. I sat behind her, leaning my head on her back.

My tears were coming out one more time. I wasn’t crying from the pain. I

was crying because of the hard life born upon my mom’s shoulders.

* * *

The sunset had already disappeared, but the sky was still pinkish. I was sitting on the chair, looking outside, thinking of one thing which I always thought of every evening, the time my mom would sew. I wanted to learn how to sew.

Coming a little closer to my mom’s chair. I murmured into her ears, “I’m wondering if you teach me how to sew clothes, I can help you even just a little part. For example, I can sew the bottom of a skirt. Don’t you think I can do that?” I stopped a while and talked in a loud voice. “I’m going to sew tonight.”

My mom looked at me with tears on her face. As each tear dropped, each of my breaths became heavier. My face turned cold, wet from my own tears. My mom hugged me tightly and talked in tears, “Mẹ never wants you to live a poor life.” Wiping off my tears, she continued, “All the things I do are for all of you. You must be strong and confident to make a better life. Whatever will happen, just remember one thing - that I always have faith in you.”

She held me tight, and let my head lean against her chest. I could hear the beating of her heart sending me the messages of love. With all my power I said out loud, “I will do all the things that you want me to do.” Tears were dropping fast, each one sealing my promise.

“Ok. Are you ready? We will begin to sew clothes. And your first lesson is spinning the thread and threading a needle.” Smiling with happy faces, we worked and my mom sang a song, which I used to hear since I was born. “Mẹ già nhý chuối chín cây. Nhý xôi nếp một,

nhý ðyờng mía lau.”

Following the sweet melody, with all the hopes, and wishes of my mom. I’ll be more confident to get through all the risks and perils of life. Nothing can stop me because I have my mom, my whole world.

Khanh T. Vu’s career plan is to become a Pharmacist.

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Little Did He Know

By Mirzeta Dogo

This last weekend I was invited to charity dinner organized by the Bosnian community in order to raise some money for families in Bosnia that are still having a hard time trying to live a decent life as a result of the war between 1992 and 1995.

When I got there, the room was three quarters full. There were a lot of people that I knew from previous gatherings, but also some new faces and one that caught my eye was a young man in a wheelchair. I asked one of my friends about him. She grabbed my hand and pulled me towards him in order to introduce us. As I got close, I noticed his eyes were light brown, nearly the same color as his thick hair. When he noticed us, he smiled. He had wide shoulders and was wearing a t-shirt. One could not but notice his long, muscular arms and large hands with long fingers. He had to be about 6 feet tall. His story is one of the most amazing I’ve ever heard.

Mujo Skiljan was born on May10, 1970 in a little city in central Bosnia called Jajce. This is where he grew up, went to school and met most of his friends. He was the youngest of five children; he thought his life was going in a good direction and that he had a beautiful future. Little did he know?

On March 13, 1992 the part of the town where he lived was attacked by the enemy army. All of his family managed to escape, but a couple young men decided to go back to help an injured friend that had been shot by a sniper. When they got there, the enemy army surrounded them and they had to give up. There were four of them plus the fifth wounded friend. Mujo became a POW. For twenty-two months they made him do everything in the camp: chop wood, dig trenches, work the land and anything else that they could think of - all that on a little piece of bread and some water. One day, digging trenches on the front line, he stepped on a land mine which tore into the right side of his body, from his foot to his neck. In the camp, he received minimum first aid, and struggled for about several months until his body started healing. He thought he would never see the light of freedom again. Like all the others, he was just waiting for the day when he could die because no day would go by without somebody being killed on the front lines or beaten to death in the camp.

At the end of '93 the camp was discovered and registered by the Red Cross. His prayers were answered in a prisoner exchange with the Serbs on January 13, '94.

The war stopped in '95, but there were still too many refugees and unemployed people because the Bosnian economy had been crushed. In the spring of '96 some hope emerged out of nowhere. By chance he learned about a special program for former POW's which sent people to western countries.

In October of '97 he came to Utica, NY. For about thirty days he studied English at the Refugee Center, and then he got a job at a curtain factory. After five months, he was laid off, but a few days later he found work at a small Italian restaurant called Joe's. Mujo

worked here for about a year and a half, really enjoying it. "Maybe I'll open up my own place," he thought. After all the bad things that had happened to him, he thought finally his life was going toward a happy future.

Then one day, in March of 2000, when he was coming from work, he was at an intersection, about three hundred yards from where he lived. As the light turned green, Mujo started going forward, but when he got to the center of the intersection, another car, driven by a nineteen year old who was under the influence of drugs and alcohol, ran that red light and struck Mujo's car. Mujo was taken to St. Elizabeth Hospital, and was in critical condition for two-three weeks. Surgery was done on his spine after five weeks. Then he found out that he was paralyzed from the waist down. After the hospital he spent six months in a rehab center, to get better and to learn how to live in that condition.

Now he lives with his brother, who was brought to the US after the accident to take care of him. Mujo says there are two sides of him now. One side is when he is around people; he tries to stay funny and talkative like he's always been. The other side is when he's alone; he thinks a lot about things he did before and is not able to do now. It hurts him really bad when he sees people do things which are bad for their health or quality of life. They don't appreciate the healthy body God has given them. He says about them, "A waste of a perfectly good pair of legs." Mujo believes in God and he understands that life has to go on. He will keep praying to God and hoping that medical findings will come to the point that they can help people like him walk again.. That's Mujo, always hopeful and never wanting to give up.

Mirzeta Dogo is interested in a Health related career.

Siberia –Planet of Miracles twelve months winter, others summer

By Rita Jundulaite

It was nice Sunday morning. My aunt and I woke up early and left for church. We have our own Lithuanian church here in Rochester. In our Lithuanian community there are around two hundred people. After church everybody goes for a small breakfast, just to talk and see how everybody is doing. I came to the US a little bit more than two years ago, and after me just one more family followed. So, in these two years I got to know everyone from Rochester's Lithuanian community pretty well. But a couple of weeks ago, when I went to church with my aunt, a new face caught my eye.

She was an elderly lady, very shy, standing in the corner, like me the first time. Another woman came and introduced her to us. She was her mother. The family invited us for dinner, to know each other better, so that this mom would not be so scared and shy.

Onute Milusauskaite was born in 1927 into a rich farmer's family. There were three daughters and three sons. She was the fourth child.

In 1945, December 31st, early in the morning, Russian soldiers occupied their house. Onute's father and two brothers were arrested. Onute, her mother, two sisters, and her six year old brother were locked up in the house. The threshing-barn, where they kept forage, was set on fire.

One month later, on New Year's Day, three trucks full of soldiers came

back. They took all the family's wealth, butchered all the pigs, harnessed the horses, and took all the cows with them. But this was not enough; Onute and the rest of her family were arrested too.

After a couple hours of driving in a dark truck, they stopped at the first military camp. From there Onute and her mom were sent on in the same truck, but her brother and two sisters were left behind. After some time, the nineteen year old girl was put in a jail cell, separate from her mother. Here they were treated worst than animals. Nobody could fall asleep. Soldiers always were around to make sure that everybody stayed awake. They wanted the prisoners to be exhausted and then they would hold an inquest.

Three months later, Onute's family was punished by a military tribunal. Onute, her brothers and sisters got five years of reformatory work without any personal rights and her parents, ten years. That day all the family was together; the tribunal let them stay in one cell just for one week, and after this everybody was moved to different places.

September 1946, hundreds of prisoners, political and criminal together, were pushed into big, dark trucks without any windows or seats. After one month of driving, they got to a military colony in the north east of Lithuania. Refugees, the same as criminals, were treated very badly. The food was very poor, especially the fish which was very salty and distributed all week long without any water. When the water was finally brought to them, the people went crazy for it. Security guards were needed so the prisoners would not take more than their share. If you dared to take too much, you could be killed on the spot! Onute until this day remembers every small detail.

The end of December, Onute was put on an old military boat, for an 18 day trip to Macadam, Siberia. The temperature at that time was -30 to -40 degrees centigrade, brutally cold. The first day there she developed a severe case of pneumonia. Then she was hospitalized for two months. Because of the extreme weather conditions, she developed joint problems, back and heart ailments.

Then she was sent to a central hospital, thirty kilometers away, for special care. Throughout a one year period she saw death in front of her eyes again and again. Eventually she recovered. After she got better, nobody let her rest for a while. She was placed in an all female colony to do forestry work, which was so hard that it should have been done by males, instead.

In 1950, September, Onute received a notice that she would be set free. The same day she was transferred to a male colony where they placed her in the laundry room. Onute didn't know how long she was going to stay there. That night freedom was not going to be easy. Threats of rape and harassments followed. She pleaded with them not to harm her.

The following day, in the morning, she was brought to the camp supervisor. He told her all the rules of her new "Freedom." She was allowed to have family, have her own living space but she could not leave Siberia. Twice a month she had to register in the camp office. If not, she would be placed in jail for 20 years, with all her family.

The beginning of her new life was very hard. Onute didn't know anybody. She was walking in the streets, looking for jobs. One day she went into a barber shop. The barber didn't need help in the shop, but he took her to his house to work as a housemaid for his family.

In 1951 Onute met her future husband. He, like Onute, was a political refugee. She moved with him into their own small house, and a daughter, Victoria, was born after a few years. 1955 they moved into a bigger house. They were happy to move into a new place, but bad fortune followed them. The next year Victoria died because of terrible weather conditions and a lack of proper medical attention. The family was crushed, but Onute soon realized that she was pregnant again. The same year another daughter was born, Larissa, and then another two years later, Tatiana.

During this period, the whole family was kept as political refugees, never allowed to go back to Lithuania. Thousands of these families were kept in Siberia, all very close to each other.

In July, 1970 they were finally allowed to leave. It had been 24 years of mostly misery in a God awful place. When the family moved back to Lithuania, they had to start from the ground up, with nothing. Then in 1980, Onute's husband died, leaving her in charge of the family.

While Onute was telling her story, tears never left her eyes, not even for one minute, the same as mine. Nobody could tell that this shy and scared face would hide such a strong and frightful person. She had come to the US to visit her daughter's family, to see her grandchildren. Onute knew about America just from pictures and her kids' letters. She never even dreamed that one day her foot would step into this big country. When I asked her how she feels here, she answered, "Like in heaven."

Rita Jundulaite plans to work in the Computer field.

My Name

By Nadia Bulbotko

"I hate my name!" I cried. I was sitting on my father's knees while he started a fire in the fireplace. "You picked the worse name on the earth and gave it to me!" I was filled with anger inside and sought a chance to pour it out on my father. But it didn't make him angry. He just smiled and put more chips on the fire.

He had named me Nadia. In Ukrainian, Russian and English it has the same meaning -- hope. I wanted to have a more romantic name, like Lilya -- the pretty flower, or Larysa -- which means sea gull in English. It was a pleasure to smell the aroma of the beautiful lilies in our garden or to see the pretty sea gulls flying above the sea, scarcely touching the water. But ...Nadia and hope... What does that mean and how could I see it? My child's intellect couldn't understand the meaning of my name.

The warm air from the fireplace touched my cheeks, and they turned to pink. Pleasure and warmth filled the house.

"I always wanted to have good luck in my life. And I have. Every time I got sick, I hoped to get better. Planting the apple tree, I hoped to eat the fruit. And I did. I hoped to get a good job. I hoped to get married and start my family. Every person has hope because our life is filled to overflowing with failures and difficulties. We hope to get a cure for many diseases. We hope there is no war. How great to have hope! Hope for a good life and a happy future. Until there is life, there is hope. There is a Nadia.

"I gave you the most beautiful name on the earth," smiled my father as he kept putting chips into the fire. And I agree with him.

Nadia Bulbotko is preparing for a career in Nursing.

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A Bird Without Wings

By Tuyen T. Vo

Have you ever worked on a farm? Just close your eyes and imagine how it feels when you spend your childhood raising vegetables instead of playing as other kids. That was what I did since I was 11 years old. It marked in my life an unforgettable time.

It was a sunny day of June, when the sun was still hiding behind the mountains. My small town was covered with darkness. My alarm had wakened me. Forcing my eyes to open, I tried to reach the alarm. I turned it off and headed to the bathroom, still yawning. It was only 6:00 am. "Mina, are you up yet? We'd better go!" It was my mother's voice. Running downstairs, I smiled at her, "I'm ready to go, Mom." Satisfied with my presence, she went out, checking all the windows and doors to make sure they were locked. Then, she beckoned me and we began to walk to our farm. It took us an hour to get there.

From far away, our farm appeared slowly and it looked small. But when I stood in the middle of the carrot field, it became huge, surrounded by all the other farms. My first job was helping my mom to take care of the carrots. She held the hose and started to water the young carrots. I followed her when she moved around, trying not to let the hose hit the carrots.

The temperature was high during the summer, so we needed to water these crops every day which was not

an easy job, as I recall. Watering made the soil wet and slippery. I had to be really careful where I walked. If not, I might fall over the carrots. And I knew my mom wouldn't be happy to see that happen.

After watering the vegetables, we went to the coffee field. This field was immense compared to the others. Because coffee was a long-term crop, it could live for more than twenty years. We picked coffee beans every year and so the size of each bean grew bigger. Walking along these coffee trees, I could see the red-ripened beans hanging on the tree, waiting for pickers. The sunshine sparkled on their sides, making their skins smooth and bright. The branches were swinging every time the wind blew by. The smell of fresh beans was good as it mixed with the wind around us. We started to pick the beans and put them into the basket I carried in front.

When the sun reached the highest point, my basket was filled. My face had become red and all wet with sweat because of the heat. Tired, I lowered my body to the grass under one of the coffee tree shadows, took off my hat and began to fan myself. At this moment, I understood how hard my parents had tried and how much sweat and tears they had used to provide a better life for us. Turning my eyes around the fields I saw that they were all planted with vegetables and fruits. "It took them years to have fields like this," I thought.

At the end of the day, my mother and I had taken care of many fields, not only the carrot or coffee fields but also lots of weeding in the cabbage field. And it was definitely exhausting, but worth it. I felt so happy with all the work I had done for my mom. At 5:00 pm, we packed up and were home at six. That night, I had the best sleep ever.

This first time of mine, helping on the farm, I was clumsy, making many

mistakes. But my mom gave me a chance to accomplish something, my first important experience in my childhood. This time helped me figure out how education affects human beings. There were some people who had to work on a farm to survive because they lacked education. My mom always told me, "A person without education is just a bird without wings. They cannot fly as far as they are able." Whatever I do, she is the one who pushes me into studying. She always hopes education can help me find a better job, so I won't just end up with farm work.

Tuyen T. Vo comes from Vietnam. Her major is Business Administration.

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Lviv

By Valentyna Tabachuk

"Probably you don't love me enough." I lay on my bed and started to cry. "Mom, why can't you afford to buy a piano for me? Why can't you make my dreams come true? I don't understand why I can't have the things that I want. I am probably the unhappiest, ten year old child, in the world!" My mother was sitting next to my bed on a chair, without saying a word. I stopped talking too. Immediately, I felt my mother's warm hand on my head. "What do you want, Mom? I don't want to talk to you."

"Valya," my mother's soft voice floated into my ears. "Valya, come here my baby. I am your mother, and I want to talk to you." "About what do you want to talk with me?" "You are my daughter, and I love you with all my heart. You are the most important person in my life, and I don't want you to feel sad about the piano."

"Mom!!! How would you feel if you wanted something and you didn't

have it, hah?" "I would feel, probably, bad. However, you are old enough to understand things like if I had the money I would buy you a piano right away.

Unfortunately pianos are very expensive, and I can't afford to. I am very sorry. You know, Valya, I want to tell you something. When I was a child, I didn't even have a toy, and I never complained to your grandmother..." My mother stopped talking and started to cry. I felt ashamed. I turned my body. "Look, a-h-h-h, Mom I didn't mean to hurt your feeling, I am very sorry," I hugged my mother. "Daughter, I love you and I promise that one day your dreams will come true." With my mother's words I reflected and comforted myself.

"Valya," my dad called me. "Come here my girl. Would you like to go with me and visit Lviv?" "Sure daddy, I would love to, I think we will have a nice time together. When are we leaving?" "Tomorrow in the morning." "Okay, Dad, I'll be ready."

At 11 the next day we were in the old city of Lviv. My dad parked the car in front of a food store, because we were hungry. "Valya, what do you want to eat?" "Buy me a mashed potato with chicken and apple juice, okay?" My dad opened the car door. "Look Dad. There are two guys behind our car. It seems like they want to talk to us. Don't you think so?" Thirty seconds later the two guys were standing beside our car holding a big bag and showing us some papers.

"Hello, sir. We were just walking here and saw your girl in the car. I think we have a present for her." I opened my eyes wide, "What?" "You know, today we have a special day in honor of our city, which is a 100 years old today. We are advertising a little electronic piano, and everyone who will answer our question

in five seconds, will get one for free. The regular price is \$50."

"Okay, I'll do it," I interrupted the man. "You know the rules, right? Only if you answer in five seconds, will

you get a piano." "Yes, I know." "Are you ready? How many letters are there in the word Lviv?" "Four!!!" I screamed. "U-h-h-h, you are fast, girl, very fast. Here you go. Congratulations. It is yours now." He took the electronic piano, a "Yamaha," and handed it to me.

I was astonished, speechless. Looking at the piano, I couldn't believe it. I remembered my mother's words, "Valya, I promise you that one day your dream will come true." I realized it was a gift from God, "Oh Lord, Thank You very much." My mouth barely moved.

It was the happiest day in my life. Here in Lviv, my dream came true. "Thank you Daddy for taking me to Lviv."

Valentyna Tabachuk comes from Ukraine. She is planning to become a Nurse.

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A Walk to Remember *By Rene Albarran*

Last week while eating in a Mexican restaurant when the busboy came to the table with chips and salsa I told my wife, "I bet he is from Mexico." It was a surprise to me because if you haven't noticed, in Rochester, Mexican restaurants don't have Mexican people working for them. I introduced myself and we started talking. He told me that his name is Ricardo that he is thirty years old, and that he just moved to Rochester. I asked him a few questions

like how he came to the US, what he thought about the country, and it turned out into a full conversation. I asked him if he could tell me more about his stories another time and he agreed and two days later, I picked Ricardo up after his shift. We went to a café to talk more about his life.

“Ricardo, how did you decide to come to the US?” “When I was in Mexico, I had heard that the US is a country full of opportunities and working hard I could save a lot of money. I was also curious about how it would be to live in another place away from home, plus people were always talking about how much money could be made. I was twenty-eight years old at the time, and I felt that I needed to start saving money, which I could not do in Mexico. My brother and friends were already in the US and they were inviting me to come all the time.”

I was wondering if he came legally or like many other Mexicans, so I popped the question. “How did you come to the United States?” “Ha! It was not easy! First I tried to do it the right way by getting a tourist visa, but of course, it was denied, so my next option was to come as all my friends; running across the border!”

“Was it difficult for you to make that decision?” He stared at the floor for a second and shaking his head he said, “yes, but I had in my mind that I would do whatever it took to come to the United States.”

“How did you cross the border?” “My brother made a couple of calls to our family in New Mexico, and they provided him with the information to contact “un coyote.” Coyote is a nick name for the person who helps smuggle Mexicans across the border. “He called me back with the name and phone number of el coyote and told me to take a plane to Hermosillo, Sonora. From there, I had to take a bus to another small

village where I would call somebody to pick me up.” “Just like that?” I said surprised how calm he was, talking about it. “Yeah, just like that. My brother had said that the walking wouldn’t take more than four hours, so I thought it wouldn’t be that bad. Next, I flew to Sonora, as he told me, and then I took a bus to Agua Prieta, Sonora where I was supposed to meet el coyote. From there he would take me to Phoenix, AZ.

“I was doing as my brother and I had planned when a guy at the bus station approached me saying: “Guero, tu eres el que viene de la capital verdad?” Ricardo spoke with a heavy Mexican northern accent. “You are the one that is coming from the city, right? Good, we have been waiting for you. Come this way; we are going to take you to your hotel,” he said. “Which hotel?” My brother had never said anything about staying in a hotel. Without a chance to say a word, these guys were taking my bags, and walking towards the hotel across from the bus station. “Wait, wait, wait. Who are you?” I said to the guys as I gripped my bags.” “We came to pick you up,” they answered. “No, first, I have to talk to la senora Claudia” I said, immediately pulling my cell phone out of my pocket.”

“You don’t trust us. Here, use mine; you don’t have to waste your minutes. You are going to need them later.” And he started dialing a number from his cell phone. “La senora Claudia right?” “Yes,” I answered without even realizing that I answered a question, information that he didn’t have. “Claudia, here is the guy from Mexico City that wants to talk to you,” he said with a very convincing voice. “Hello, senora, this is Ricardo, Raul’s brother,” I told her. “Ok. Ricardo right? Go with them and we’ll talk later,” she replied to me. I felt a slight tone of hesitation in her voice. “I went with those guys, even though I had my doubts about them. They took

me to the 0.5 star hotel across the street where I had to share a room with another five compadres. The coyotes were nice to us. They offered to get drinks, food, and cigarettes, so we wouldn’t have to leave the room for any reason.” “Any women?” I asked with a cynical smile. “That would’ve been nice, but we needed to save our energy for our journey.”

“How long did you stay in the hotel before you crossed the border?” “Just for one night. The next morning, los coyotes were knocking at the door at five in the morning.” “Orale muchachos, parence que se nos hace tarde.” “They were rushing with so much excitement as if we were going out for a party.”

“Were you afraid?” I said. “I’m not going to lie to you, I was. After we left the hotel, we got into a truck where they took us to a very small village in the middle of nowhere. At this place was our last stop. They fed us some huevos con salchicha. I will never forget the taste of the scrambled eggs and sausage. Then we all got a bag with a couple cans of beans, tuna, mango juice and a gallon of water. The guides got theirs too, but theirs was a little bit different. They got two bottles of tequila and a kilo of cocaine!” “For just four hours, this is a lot of food! I thought.” “What do you mean just four hours?” I said “Yes, my brother had said that the walking after the last stop wouldn’t take more than four hours.” “That’s right, you already told me this,” I said.

“After eight hours of walking, I started talking to the other guys in the group about how long they had been told that the walking was going to take and we all had been told different things, so we started asking questions to the coyotes.” “Hey, how much longer do we have to walk?” he asked one of the guides. “Just keep walking. We’ll let you know when we are close,” the guide answered him, not very friendly. The walk seemed endless, so the group dared to ask again.

“Are we almost there?” Immediately he saw one of the coyotes stop drinking from his bottle of tequila, turn around and say in a very mean way: “Listen to me hijos de la chingada. We are not even half way there, so you better shut up and keep walking. Let me make this clear if you haven’t noticed. All of you were kidnapped at the bus station. I paid one hundred dollars per head and when we get to Phoenix, I am expecting to get one thousand dollars back from each of you. That’s the deal, so you better keep walking or you’ll never see gringo land.” Ricardo repeated the guide’s words with pain in his face.

“I wanted to kill that guy, I swear. The only thing in my mind was revenge. I needed to be smart and continue with them to the end. Let me explain it better to you. We started walking on Thursday at five in the morning and did not get a break until Friday at nine, for two hours. Then we kept walking for another couple hours until we started to say that we needed to get some sleep in order to keep going.”

“Around 3 pm the sun was drilling through our skulls and we couldn’t find a spot to stop and get some rest. Finally, we found some bushes on the bank of a dry river that provided enough shade. I thanked God for the shelter and I lay down on the fine, dry sand of the river that was more comfortable than the bed that I have right now. Six hours later, I woke up and when I opened my eyes, I couldn’t believe how many stars were in the sky that night. It made me think about how great God is. We started our journey again. Los coyotes loaded up their noses with cocaine and washed it down with some more tequila.”

“Finally, after forty-eight hours of walking, we saw the glow of the city. This gave us hope and strength to keep walking. Everybody was excited and so much excitement made me want to go into the bushes to do my business.

I stopped for a moment, and the group kept walking without me. I did not take long. I got back on my way as soon as I could. It was really dark and I could not see anything. I needed to catch up with the group, so I started running. I was keeping a pretty fast pace when all of a sudden I felt a whipping pain across my face, chest, and legs. I had run into a wire fence. I did not see that damn thing. I stood up as fast as I could and I jumped over it this time. When I caught up with the group, they were entering a huge drainage pipe. They were walking very softly because apparently there was la migra or “a border patrol” if you want to call it like that, right on top of the tunnel. My heart was beating so hard that I was afraid that the border patrol would hear it. El coyote immediately pulled out his Nextel and started making a call to some body.”

“Ok. Chamacos don’t panic. This guy should be leaving in about seven minutes. After he is gone, on my count you start running as fast as you can to the other side of the hill. There, there are a couple trucks waiting for us to take us to our last place.” It was easy for him to say. He was high on cocaine and I bet feeling like Superman, but some of the guys from the group were barely walking because of the blisters on their feet and one of the guys had twisted his ankle,” he said reliving the events. “It was not easy, but we ran as fast as we could, making it to the trucks in record time. I thought, we were going to get some rest, but I was wrong. Once we got in the trucks, we were folded in half, and then in another half as if we were human paper to be able to fit all in the trucks in such way that from the outside the trucks nobody would see us. That trip was painful; I don’t know what was worst, walking for 53 hours or not feeling my legs for two hours. We all were in such a position that one of the guys was saying “hay, hay, hijo de la chingada ya no siento mis piernas,

me vale madre, yo me voy a parar, no me importa.” How bad he wanted to stand up and he could care less about any consequences. Immediately, one of the coyotes said: “If you stand up, I will leave you right here, so the migra can send you back to Mexico.” “I was trying to comfort the guy by sharing his pain and reminding him of how much we had been through and a couple more hours were worth it.”

“How long was the ride in the trucks?” “Just a few hours then finally we made it to Phoenix by seven in the morning.” “Who picked you up?” “My brother was already in Arizona waiting for me. One of the smugglers called him on his cell phone and said, “mire jefe, aqui le tengo a su pariente, trigame el dinero y yo se lo entrego.” My brother had the one thousand dollars as el coyote had requested and I was free to go.

“It has been two years since then, and it seems as if it was yesterday” “Are you happy to be here?” “What! Of course I’m happy! I’m pursuing my dream, I’m working hard and saving money, so when the time to go back to Mexico has come, I will have enough money saved and I will open a business and be my own boss.”

Rene Albarran is from Mexico. He is studying International Business.

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