



THE LITERACY REVIEW

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A Gallatin Writing Program Publication

THE LITERACY REVIEW

An annual journal of writing by adult students in English for
Speakers of Other Languages, Basic Education and General
Development Programs in New York City

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY VOLUME

While planning the 10th-anniversary volume of the *Literacy Review*, the editors had the pleasure of looking back on the previous nine compilations, from Volume 1, with 36 writers at 14 sites, to Volume 9, with 76 writers at 50 sites. Here, we are delighted to reprint a favorite of the editors from each volume, with an update on the author.

VOLUME 1: “Our Grandmother’s Trunk,” Sergio Rojas

Queens Library, Steinway Adult Learning Center

VOLUME 2: “The Silver and White Hair,” Joseph Risi

New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing

VOLUME 3: “Yum Cha and New Yorkers,” Lisa Lee

University Settlement Society, Adult Literacy Program

VOLUME 4: “About My Name,” Julius Walker

Brooklyn Public Library, Central Adult Learning Center

VOLUME 5: “An American Dream: Spa, Nails, & Music,” Temuri Akhobadze

New York Public Library, St. Agnes Center for Reading and Writing

VOLUME 6: “Best Friends,” Derek Scott

Fortune Society, Education Program

VOLUME 7: “Dinner at My House,” Kyaw Htet

College of Mount St. Vincent, Institute for Immigrant Concerns

VOLUME 8: “The Three Lorenas,” Lorena Deloya

CUNY, City College, Adult Literacy Program

VOLUME 9: “The Sound of Music,” Sandra Guzman

New York City Department of Education, Bronx Adult Learning Center at Phipps

SERGIO ROJAS

Our Grandmother's Trunk

Our grandmother had an old trunk that she jealously guarded. It had a magical aura in the infant eyes of my little sister and me. It looked like a treasure rescued from a pirate galleon. She kept it inside a wardrobe and opened it with a key that only she had access to, so we didn't get to know its contents. In spite of many frustrated attempts, the little we could find out was that its interior was lined with red velvet, and from that box came the candies which were offered to us at situations that she considered appropriate.

A little woman, with small and tired steps, she came out from her almost always semi-dark room, bringing with her the most delicious candies that we could imagine, a motive for celebration on our part.

Our grandmother was very religious, but she became even more devout after our grandfather died. She prayed the rosary every day, kneeling down on a kneeler in front of a small altar with the Virgin of Copacabana's image. Her long worship touched and saddened me. Sometimes I tried to accompany her, but the pain in my skinny knees betrayed those attempts. Her room smelled of incense and Holy Week palms, emanating the peace that one feels when entering into the church and at the same time a mysterious feeling.

During school vacation, while we were playing, we never stopped observing her. We saw her in her room among the embroideries she made, the faith she practiced and the trunk she kept. Later at dusk, she left the house wearing a black coat she used to go to church. In reality, the only thing out of our control (but not outside of our fantasies) was the content of that enigmatic box.

So the time passed: My grandmother continued her disciplined routine, my little sister became more dedicated in trying to imitate every living creature that crossed her path, and I committed to reading comic magazines.

One day our grandmother woke up sick, and in less than a month she died. It didn't take long before we found the key to the trunk on the table; our parents simply had left it there. Without wasting the opportunity, I opened the

trunk in the presence of my young and curious accomplice.

What we found within the ordered compartments of the trunk was: a Bible preciously bound in leather; some jewelry that belonged to our grandparents; a box with gold coins, in addition to many others of silver, coined during the Spanish colonial times, surely at La Casa de la Moneda of Potosi; and a porcelain dish with candles. Without doubt, our discovery was worthy of our surprise. But it wasn't the same. Our grandmother had taken with her the most valuable thing: a loved part of the magic universe of our infancy.

Sergio Rojas wrote this essay while attending the Queens Public Library's Steinway Adult Learning Center. He also published a poem, "Citizen Birds," in Volume 2. Tsansiu Chow, the literacy center manager, reports that Sergio Rojas graduated in 2004. The last time the two gentlemen met was in September 2005, when Sergio Rojas came to say hello and, as a proud father, show his teachers his infant son, Alejandro. Tsansiu Chow adds: "His son should be in the first grade now."

JOSEPH RISI

The Silver and White Hair

My grandmother, Carmela Risi, from Naples, Italy, used to wash her hair in the big kitchen sink. Her hair filled the whole basin, then spilled over the side. When she finished, she went to dry it outside the window. Her hair was very long. It was at least five feet long. It covered the brick wall outside the window. I remember watching her drop her hair down from the window and thinking how the heck she would get it all back inside. Then I saw how she did it. She put a towel under her hair and pulled it in.

After she dried it, it smelled like fresh flowers in a garden. And why? Because she made her own soap. Later, she would brush her hair at least 15 times a night. Then she would go to sleep. In the early morning, she would get up around six am to start fixing her hair. It took two hours or more to brush it. Then she started to braid it. She put a white ribbon on the bottom of her hair to hold it together. Then she started to roll it and rolled and rolled until she stopped. Then she put it in a bun with a comb that was made in Italy. Her hair looked like a big bagel all rolled up. And then it was finished for the day until the nighttime came. Then she would start all over again. When I was a little boy, I used to go behind my grandma and try to take out the comb. But she said, "Get out from there!" The comb was stuck so hard it did not move. Then I thought it was stuck in her head, not her hair.

Today, when I close my eyes, I can see that comb clearly. It was black and silver with little stones that shined like diamonds.

LISA LEE

Yum Cha and New Yorkers

Yum Cha, to drink tea, is one of the traditional habits or entertainments of the people of South China, especially in Guangdong Province and Hong Kong. Yum Cha is not only drinking tea, but is accompanied by many kinds of dim sum to eat. I have worked in a Chinese restaurant for a long time. As regards Yum Cha, I found that New Yorkers have changed from confusion about it to accepting and now to enjoying it.

In the first half of the last century, New Yorkers knew very well about chop suey, won ton soup (or egg drop soup), egg rolls and chow mein with duck sauce. If they drank tea, they would put a lot of sugar in it. They thought that was genuine Chinese food. They liked it because it was cheap and tasted not bad.

After 1975, many Chinese people emigrated from China and Hong Kong to New York or other cities. The newcomers have their own styles of life and values. Actually, their ideas and customs have influenced the Chinese community in New York. Yum Cha became one of the popular entertainments in Chinatown. New Yorkers were very curious to know about Yum Cha.

From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. is the time for Yum Cha in Chinese restaurants. People come with their families, relatives or friends to eat, to drink tea and talk; merchants can confer about business while they are eating dim sum and drinking tea. At this time, the restaurant's hall is noisy and hilarious. When New Yorkers come to Yum Cha, some of them dislike it because they feel as if they are eating and drinking in a market, but more New Yorkers think it is natural and free. They feel as comfortable as at home. Moreover, the waiters and waitresses serve you. Some managers or clerks working on Wall Street choose Yum Cha at lunchtime, because it is an appropriate way to relieve their tense nerves. Some people even hold their birthday party or retirement party at Yum Cha time. They think Yum Cha is a wonderful entertainment for their guests.

Chinese people believe that tea can dilute the grease inside the stomach and is good for health. So restaurants have many kinds of tea, such as Po Nie, Lung Ching, Wulong and flower. New Yorkers are used to drinking cold water, soda, beer, or tea with sugar. But now they know the advantage of drinking tea,

so more of them change their habits and order tea. They like green teas more than the brown tea, Po Nie. Some New Yorkers ask the waiters to teach them the differences among various teas and how to make them taste better, because tea has aroused their interest in Asian eating and drinking.

In the beginning, New Yorkers were confused by so many kinds of dim sum. They didn't know the names and ingredients of each kind. They dared not try and also did not want to waste their money. They needed to ask the waiter or waitress to choose for them.

A boss of a Chinese restaurant printed a picture of the samples of various dim sum and identified them in English, such as Shrimp Har Kow, Pork Shui Mai, Pan Fried Turnip Cake, Stuffed Green Pepper with Shrimp. That is a great help to New Yorkers. Now they are sure what they want. Their big favorites are deep fried food or steamed food. Some can speak fluently in Chinese tones, "Har Kow, Shui Mai." Quite unlike Chinese people, New Yorkers are devoted to their favorite dim sum and eat heartily. I know a customer at our restaurant who likes to eat Deep Fried Bacon Shrimp Balls (one order has eight balls). Every Saturday at 11 a.m. he comes to eat two orders of them, because at this time the Bacon Shrimp Balls are fresh and crisp. Once we advised him not to eat that much deep fried food. He picked up one ball and said, "It is my beloved." Then he patted his stomach. "Let it stay here with me."

For payment, New Yorkers like each person to pay for himself or herself, or share the bill together. But Chinese people like to be the payer. Sometimes they fight to be the one to pay the bill. New Yorkers are amazed at the fighting. A New Yorker sighed. "I wish someone would fight to pay my bill."

Different nations have their own cultures, customs and ways of eating and drinking. People of many nations live in New York. They learn American culture and customs, but also keep their own. New Yorkers are lucky. They have an exceptional chance to benefit from many other nations' cultures and customs, to make their life abundant.

Born in China and a graduate of Sun Yat-sen University, Lisa Lee studied in the advanced writing class of the University Settlement Society's Adult Literacy Program, which is directed by Michael Hunter. She and her husband, Wah You Lee, who was a teacher in China, and also studied in the advanced writing class, were each published in three volumes of the Literacy Review. Both senior citizens now, last year they went on a three-month trip to China. Lisa Lee volunteers often at a senior citizen center, and she enjoys reading books—in English as well as Chinese.

JULIUS WALKER

About My Name

Julius is my name. Oh, I struggled to accept the name as a child coming up. They never pronounced my name properly. “Judas!” they would call out. “You killed Jesus.” When I said, “Stop that,” it didn’t matter. They would continue to shout.

It wasn’t until I started secondary school that I learned to see the beauty in my name. When my favorite girl pronounced my name so well, I wanted to hear it again and again.

I discovered I was illiterate, but it was too late, because I was about to leave school.

Today I am proud of my name. When people ask me my name, I gladly say “Julius.”

If it’s an adult and they jeer at me, I realize they’re not grown up. I even hate being called by my nickname. That’s how much I love my first name. I stand tall as Julius! Julius! If anybody calls, that’s my name.

Born in Jamaica, Julius Walker studied at the Brooklyn Library’s Central Learning Center. The site advisor, then and now, is Winsome Pryce-Cortes. At the time he was writing, Julius Walker said, “By my working with the literacy program, they are helping me to get past doubt and to find belief in myself.” At the LR 4 celebration, he read “About My Name” with tremendous verve. He successfully moved on to the Brooklyn Public Library’s Pre-G.E.D class, then the G.E.D. class and is now employed by UPS.

TEMURI AKHOBADZE

An American Dream: Spa, Nails & Music

Playing concerts and teaching students is not a great business. Who needs classical music today? I was waiting for my rich uncle for many years, but he never showed up. Slight poverty was always after me. But one day my phone rang.

“Hello, is this Mr. Temuri?”

“Yes, Madame,” I answered.

“Hello. My tuner recommended you to me as a piano teacher. Can you teach me? Before you say yes, I would like to tell you that no pianist wants to teach me. The problem is that I have beautiful-looking nails, more than an inch-and-a-half-long, and I absolutely don’t want to cut them. I love music, but I also love my nails a lot. So what do you think?”

“Give me, please, a few seconds, Ma’am,” I answered her quickly. I got a ruler and jumped to my Steinway grand. So! The white keys were six inches and the black keys were four. There was my chance. There was my hope.

“Hello, Ma’am, I can do it. I’m sure that I can teach you how to improve your piano playing with your long nails.”

So I started to work very seriously on a special program, finding music pieces that could be played with long nails.

“I LOVE
MUSIC,
BUT I ALSO
LOVE MY
NAILS A
LOT.”

In a few weeks, the lady made a very big step in her playing. Soon she recommended me to other ladies with even longer nails. I learned there are many, many wealthy ladies with long nails who wish to play piano. They even have their own club where they meet and spend time together.

My business went up and up. Very soon I needed to hire two assistants. In a few months, I rented a nice place on Madison Avenue and 67th Street. I named this place “Spa, Nails & Music.” In the middle of the room sits a big concert grand piano. Anybody can sit and perform for others.

Now I am rich and happy. I like to make other people happy, too. Two times

a week my driver brings me to my library in a fancy Bentley. Here at Saint Agnes I am improving my English. Now I can donate half a million dollars to my library.

Temuri Akhobadze, a concert pianist and piano teacher from the Republic of Georgia, studied at the St. Agnes Branch of the New York Public Library's Centers for Reading and Writing. Three of his works were published in the Literacy Review. Maida Schwab was his tutor, and Steve Mahoney the site advisor. Temuri Akhobadze now writes: "I am still here in New York City, the city I love, which gives me energy and fantasy. As usual, I teach piano, give master classes and perform in the spring and summer. I am very touched that you chose one of my stories."

DEREK SCOTT

Best Friends

The first time I saw what a gun could do firsthand, my best friend and I were on our way home from school. He was from my neighborhood, and I knew him all my life. We used to play in the park in our hood when we were five. His mother and my mother did the same, so he was like a family friend. His mother came over every day after work to talk to my mom.

As we got older, we did different things. I joined a gang. He joined a different gang, but we were still cool because we were like family. I remember stopping people in my gang from fucking him up a lot of times.

One time, we saw each other downtown with both our gangs. We acted like we were fighting, but we were just play-fighting. We would run down one block so we could meet to laugh about what we did.

He was a good kid, the life of the party. He never had a gun and never liked to fight or start trouble. He just lived in a place where you had to be in a gang, just so you could go to the store and come back with your money, so you could come outside at night and live to see the next day. That's why he chose to be in a gang, but in my neighborhood that does not save you for long.

On that Friday, we were coming home from school on the train, talking and laughing about what girls were coming to our houses that weekend. That's one thing he loved to talk about because he always got all the girls. He was a light-skinned boy with long hair. He always had new clothes, so all the girls loved him and he knew it.

We got off the 5 train at West Farms. Like always, we ran down the stairs so that we could see all the girls coming off the train and try to talk to them. That day, we both had our gang colors on. People always looked at us like we were crazy or something because we were in different gangs that didn't like each other.

That day when we were walking, we heard some kids saying, "You fucking Crip-lover," but that was normal so we didn't think about it. We started to hear gun shots but didn't run because that was normal, too; it happened all the time. I was thinking, Somebody is just shooting at somebody, but then we heard air

whistling like *ploom* and someone saying, "Shoot him! He's Crip!"

I was like, *Are they talking about my friend?* So we started running, and I fell. When I got back up, I saw my friend running and the bullets hitting him in his book bag. It tore his book bag apart. All his books and pencils came out. Blood and tissue came out of his chest. The bullets went straight through him. I ran to him as fast as I could. I was not thinking about the bullets flying in the air. All I was thinking about was this person that I loved like a brother was being shot. But I didn't know what to do. I never saw someone get shot before. I remember holding him in my arms, and he was screaming in pain. He said, "I don't want to die."

I said, "You're not going to die. You're just shot. You'll be okay."
Why do people lie when something bad is going to happen? I didn't even mean to lie; the words just came out of my mouth.

I remember looking in his eyes, his big brown eyes, and seeing them turn black. I screamed inside and cried, but no tears came out, and then people came and pushed me off him. I asked the paramedics if I could go with them, but they said no.

So I went home and listened for his call. I watched TV with the sound down low so I could hear his call, but he never called to tell me he was okay. His mother called, crying, asking me why did I kill her son, why did I let him die?

For weeks, on the way to school, I would get on the train and hold the door, waiting for him to come, since he was always late. Then I would step off the train, embarrassed, and let the train pass. After I got on the next train, I would look out the window to see if he was running to catch the train. I remember I used to give him the middle finger every time he didn't catch the train.

But he never came, because he was dead.

New Yorker Derek Scott was 18 years old when he wrote this story. He lived in the Bronx and attended classes in the Fortune Society's Education Program. He also participated in an oral history project at the Fortune Society and was working on his autobiography. His teachers were Eric Appleton, now director of education, and John Kefalas, now teacher/coordinator of Youth Programs. He is now working at UPS, and writes, "My plans for the future are to work hard to try to take care of my family."

KYAW HTET

Dinner at My House

Dinner is very important in my country. At dinner, we talk to each other about work, school and other subjects.

In my family, there were six of us: my father, mother, two brothers and one sister. We had a rule: If we were not all present, we couldn't eat dinner. We had to wait until everyone arrived. We solved problems together, and told funny stories and sometimes listened to my father speak. My mother and I always cooked. Now that time has passed, because of the Burmese military government in my country. My father, my sister and I are all politicians.

After we became politicians, our family dinners were destroyed. We were always afraid that the military intelligence would come and arrest us. One night, they came and arrested my father. Now he has been in prison for 13 years for political reasons. In 1999, my sister and I left Burma and escaped to Thailand. We were not the only family whose lives were disrupted. Some younger men were imprisoned, too. Do you know how their families feel? Their children are small. They too will talk about economics and their futures and tell funny stories at dinner—but without their fathers.

Since I left Burma, I always remember our family dinners. I often think about my mother and see her face before me; she is alone in my house. When we meet our friends, we talk about our mothers. Mothers are very important in our culture.

Now I have been in America almost three years. Every night when I get home from work, I open the refrigerator, take out some prepared food, microwave it and eat silently in my room. Every day I remember my warm family dinners.

Kyaw Htet wrote this essay at the College of Mount St. Vincent's Institute for Immigrant Concerns, where Diana Schoolman was his teacher. Then and now, Mark Brik has been the education director, and Donna Kelsh the director. Kyaw Htet has been working at a food store near Union Square. For two years, he has been studying at CUNY's Borough of Manhattan Community College, and next year he will be able to take classes for credit. In 2011, his father finally was freed from prison, and in April Kyaw Htet will visit his father and family in Thailand.

LORENA DELOYA

The Three Lorenas

My travels started from home, my birthplace, a little town in Mexico, where I would play hopscotch with my friends in the neighborhood until midnight. In my quiet and friendly town, I could walk to the candy store by myself to buy my favorite spicy and sweet lollipop. I could walk to school, chatting with my friends. I did not need a car. In my town, having a car was a luxury. But I could easily walk anywhere I wanted to go. Only one thing was missing: my mother.

Next came an upside-down place in my life: a sleepy-paced city where I never imagined I would be. Houston was such a boring place that I could not walk to the store by myself. Nobody walked on the street, and the heat was suffocating. Without a car, you could not go anywhere. There were no tiny peaceful streets for walking, only big highways for driving. Sometimes I felt like I was living in an isolated place, where I did not have any friends. But my mother's and my reunion changed that boring city to a sparkling place. I was lucky because my mother had a car, so I could go to the store and the laundromat with her. When I had to stay in my mother's house, I used to look out the window for someone or something interesting, but I did not see anything. I missed my life of walking and playing and eating lollipops in my hometown.

Finally, I travelled to a great place, my last stop: New York. I had never before seen a fast-paced city. Walking in New York is crazy and a big challenge. In the beginning, from the multicolored bright lights on 42nd Street, I could see a sea of people walking fast through the street, people pushing me, others just saying a curt, "Excuse me." In the beginning, I felt stupid walking in New York. It took me time to become a fast-paced person, too.

I discovered that walking in New York City is like playing soccer because I have to run around and dodge everybody, only with my purse instead of with a soccer ball. I especially like walking in Central Park, with green spaces and people everywhere. I feel like I am part of one of the biggest cities in the world, which I never imagined would feel most like home.

I hope that one day my mother can travel here and walk with me on the streets of New York. Meanwhile, I no longer feel alone. The “Three Lorenas” have traveled from a peaceful hometown in Mexico to an isolated Houston to find a sense of wholeness as one “Lorena” in a vibrant and true home in New York City.

Lorena Deloya wrote this essay as a student at the City College Adult Literacy Program, with lead ESOL instructor Tamara Kirson. She has continued to improve her English while she enjoys raising her three sons: Alex, now in sixth grade; Erick, in third; and Gael, in kindergarten. The boys play soccer and take karate lessons, and Alex plays drums, often at concerts. Lorena Deloya proudly reports that “all the people (including his drum teacher) speak only English” and that Alex recently played, and his brothers joined in singing, at a center for elderly people with Alzheimer’s Disease.

SANDRA GUZMAN

The Sound of Music

When I was 14 years old, I played flute in a group in Peru. I loved to play flute. But my family was poor, and I didn't have my own flute. I found a stick as long as the flute and practiced my finger movement with it. I imagined that I had one in my hand. When the group had a show, I had to use my friend's flute. When I was playing, I felt the music; my heart was dancing with each tone. I listened to all the instruments around me as if I talked with my best friends. My blood ran faster with each note; my body floated with each song. It was a beautiful and heavenly experience. After we finished the show, my reward was what I saw and heard: faces with big smiles, faces with teary eyes, the applause like drum beats. I felt proud to give people a happy moment. But I needed to have my own flute! I started to work overtime. Little by little, I saved money, and finally I bought one. My flute wasn't a new one, but for me it was my treasure.

When I came to New York, the flute traveled with me. I dreamed of continuing my playing, but here in New York all I could do was survive. I had to put my flute away. For a long, long time, my flute stayed silently inside the back corner of a drawer.

Years passed, and I started to study English with Ms. Wen. She introduced me to her husband, Mr. Baker, a very kind man and an excellent musician, who invited me to play with him at our class Thanksgiving party. I felt very emotional just thinking about my flute. I went back home planning to practice. When I opened the drawer...Oh God, my flute looked so bad! Its body had lost its shine; its pads looked stiff; and its sound was like a last breath. "Oh!" I said. "How can I play with it? How? How?"

I told my teacher about my flute. Mr. Baker took me with my flute to a music store in Manhattan. A guy checked and blew my flute and said, "I can fix your flute, and the cost will be 300 dollars." "Three hundred dollars?!" I couldn't believe it. Where could I get that money? My husband was the only one to have a job in my family. Now, like many working families, we were in a bad economic

situation. I felt sad.

Mr. Baker noticed my preoccupation and said, “Don’t worry, Sandra. Do you want to have a second opinion?” “Yes!” I said. In the second place, the repairman checked my flute. I started to pray. Finally he said, “Okay,” and the charge would be 100 dollars. One hundred dollars was still big money for me. But I wanted to get it.

When I got home, I opened my closet quickly. Inside a drawer, I had a plastic bottle with coins (pennies, nickels, dimes and some quarters). Each day, I put some coins there. I started to count, coin by coin, and the total amount was...110 dollars! I started laughing and crying. “I have enough money for it!”

During the Thanksgiving show, at first I felt very nervous to play. When the music came out, my flute started to have life. I played with Mr. Baker and his band members. I played “Do-Re-Mi,” “Cielito Lindo,” and “Besame Mucho.” Beautiful music filled our classroom. My heart was dancing like a kid’s. My flute had been waiting for this moment for a long time—15 years, in America.

Sandra Guzman, who was born in Peru and graduated from high school there, wrote this essay as a student of Wendy Wen at the New York Department of Education’s Bronx Adult Learning Center at Phipps. After graduating from the ESOL program, Sandra Guzman has been studying in the BE 4 class, which will lead her to get her G.E.D. She has also become a volunteer tutor at PS 126, in the Bronx, working twice a week to help youngsters learn to read. She aspires to become a teacher.



Welcome to Our ESL C



LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY

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XUEMEI ZOU

First Impressions of Chinatown

When I first saw Chinatown, I couldn't believe what I saw there. A crowd of people from different nations moved from one street to another street. There were so many more streets than I had ever seen in China, and they were organized by names or numbers. The most familiar streets were Canal Street, Broadway and East Broadway. Each street was busy with walking people, traveling cars and buses. I couldn't see many trees and flowers in Chinatown, because most of the space was covered by apartment buildings, business buildings, stores, parks and schools.

The February air in the city was cold and chilly, but also mixed with certain smells. Even though people bundled up on the street, I still smelled body smells from people when they walked through the cold air. A yummy bread smell slipped out from a bakery door and made me hungry. Walking by a Chinese bakery, the smells of bread became stronger and stronger. The air of the bakery combined with people's breath and coffee smell all covered my nose. I ordered a cup of coffee and a loaf of bread, and enjoyed it with others in the sweet air of the city.

My cousin took me to lunch when I first arrived. I had a dish called Salmon Woodong Noodle Soup, which my cousin helped me to order. When my order was set up in front of me, I could tell it was delicious. I spooned the soup, juicy and rich, into my mouth. I put a piece of orange-red salmon on my tongue, not too fishy, but tender and yummy. A few years later, I still remember the taste of Salmon Woodong Noodle Soup, and go back to the same restaurant that my cousin took me to in the beginning of my life in the United States.

The sound of the languages I heard was amazing. I could hear accents from people from my own province; I could also hear other Chinese accents that I had never heard growing up. In the street, Chinese people spoke with several Chinese accents—they spoke one dialect the first minute, then they spoke another dialect the second minute. Among the accents I heard were Fuzhounese, Cantonese and Mandarin. I also heard the languages of people who came from a variety of other

countries: Spanish, French, German and some I didn't know. I found that all New York City was immersed in one big language party!

When I think back on my first day in New York City, I remember the street was bustling with life; the air was mixed with sweet bread smells, cold temperature and a sense of common humanity. The taste on my tongue was sweet and joyful; my ears were filled with languages. All those sensations created an awesome greeting for the first day of my American life. Also, those impressions forced me to think about life, and to appreciate the creator of human beings who gives us the abilities of sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch.



“Town girl” Xuemei Zou immigrated from South China at age 19 to become a city girl. She loves to learn and her “heart has been fulfilled by the opportunities of her new environment.” She graduated from the G.E.D. program at LaGuardia Community College and thanks her teacher, Mary Ann Capehart, for helping her achieve her goals, and her friend and program counselor, Ida Heyman, who encouraged her to write down her experiences. Xuemei Zou has applied to CUNY at LaGuardia to continue her studies.

JOSUE NIEVES

Spilling My Guts: 20 Years at the Meat Market

When I was in my twenties, I got a job in the meat market. This was in the 1980s. It was the Meatpacking District in Manhattan, near 14th Street, by the West Side Highway. A lot of trucks—18-wheelers and small trucks—were bringing in a lot of meat. They came from California, from Chicago—from all over.

The boss told me, “You are going to start on Monday at three in the morning.” When I got there, I’d never seen so many different places selling meat. Almost all the buildings were meat markets. I worked where they cut the meat for different restaurants. There were five guys—me and two butchers, one driver and one manager. You don’t count the boss.

You would see the trucks loading and unloading the meat. Sometimes there would be half of a cow, but without the head. In some places, they had a machine to tie up a cow and peel the skin from the cow. They got goats, deer, pigs, pork chops, steak, chicken, chicken cutlets, veal cutlets, filet mignon—forget about it. Some places smelled fresh. The ones that smelled nasty were the chicken places. The juice in the chicken boxes smelled so nasty. In the summer, it was bad.

I did not like my job. I needed to get up early in the morning to catch the subway to get to work by three. When the winter came, I hated it because it was dark and snowing and very cold. But the worst thing was the cleaning. After the butcher cut the meat, and we finished slicing the meat, I had to do the cleaning.

I cleaned the fat and blood from the knives, the tables, the band saw and chopping machine, and then the floor. I used the power washer. There were four tubs, two for bones and two for fat. Some guy picked up this stuff. They made soap out of it. Maybe the soap you use is from there.

The best thing about the job was the paycheck. Also, the boss gave me fresh meat for free. I had so much meat I gave it away. On my block, everybody was my friend.

One early winter morning, I was slicing a pork chop. The piece of pork chop got small. My fingers got too close to the band saw blade. I saw blood dripping

from my middle finger. I stopped the machine, and my friend took me to the hospital.

The first thing the doctor said was, “Where’s your finger?” My finger was in the band saw. My friend picked up my finger and took it to the hospital, because the doctor needed to put the finger back on my hand. I still have the scar on my finger. Before that happened to me, other people cut their fingers. The butcher cut his hand very badly. The manager, who was always drunk, cut his finger three times, and two of the butchers did, too.

I also hurt my back, lifting very heavy boxes. I still have problems with my back from that. I really feel it when it gets cold. In the winter when it snowed, I broke my ass using the hand truck on the old cobblestone streets in the snow.

Now they’ve moved the meat markets to the Bronx because in the Meatpacking District they wanted to build big fancy hotels and beautiful restaurants, and they have new designer stores for people to come to shop.

I heard the meat market is very old—over a hundred years old. I’m just glad I’m not working there anymore.



Born in Puerto Rico, Josue Nieves is 54 years old and has lived in New York since 1969. He enjoys studying at the New York Public Library’s Seward Park Center for Reading and Writing, and would like to thank his tutor, Hilary Schenker, for all of her support. Terry Sheehan is the site advisor.

NIKOLAY MALEVANAY

My Rockaway Neighborhood

My neighborhood is the Shore Front Parkway in the Rockaways. I have lived in this area for about six years. There is a sea of noises: subways, planes, cars and construction equipment constantly roaring and beeping outside my windows; TVs and radios blaring from the major public places. Unfortunately, unlike my eyes, my ears can't be closed, so I'm often a helpless victim of the endless noise. The loud noise sometimes keeps me from sleeping well; it interrupts my concentration when I do my homework and it raises my blood pressure. It also gives me headaches, but to my relief I live right beside the beach. There is a boardwalk, with many trees growing on one side. I like walking on the boardwalk when the weather is nice, the air is fresh, the birds are singing and the ocean is sparkling in the sun. Sometimes I can hear singing like that of a nightingale on a spring morning or a cuckoo in the summer. There are a lot of showers in the summer. After the rain is over, raindrops glisten in the sun like little diamonds.

Even though the neighborhood is polluted by noise, there are still many exciting things that make up for it. I like to swim in the ocean, and I like to tan on the sandy beach. There isn't any shade there, so the sand burns my feet. All of this makes me feel relaxed and calm. I like my neighborhood, and I want to live here all my life.

Born in a small village in the Ukraine, 77-year-old Nikolay Malevanay graduated from Higher Engineering Marine School. He has lived in New York for eight years, and for the last 20 years he has worked as an inspector to protect the environment. Since 2008, he has studied with literacy specialist Ebru Yenil at the Queens Library's Peninsula Adult Learning Center, where Barbara Miller is the center manager. Another of his works, "I Killed Him!" was published in the Literacy Review, Volume 9.



DARLING OJEDA

The Q66

One chilly afternoon in the middle of November, I was waiting for the Q66. I was at 21st Street and 41st Avenue. It was one of those days when the cold wind is in your face, and the bus can't get there fast enough. I was one of the many people who were in line before the door opened. Because I was trying to pay quickly, my MetroCard got stuck in the machine. I asked, "What is wrong?" The bus driver said, "Maybe the machine was hungry."

I said, "Maybe."

I grabbed a seat, and then I overheard two senior citizens ask the bus driver, "*Este bus va para Astoria Boulevard?*" ("Is this bus going to Astoria Boulevard?") At that moment the bus driver started to sing: "Si...si...six...sixty...six..." He was singing the number of the bus, but the two Latino seniors took the first syllable, "si," which means yes in Spanish, as their answer. They believed they were on the right bus, but they weren't.

I told them, "You need to take the Q69 here at the same bus stop."

So they wanted to get off the bus, and each asked for a transfer. It took forever, and you know how impatient and angry other passengers can get. In New York, you need to do things quickly, but naturally they didn't. Luckily, the nice bus driver warmed the ride and continued singing "Si...si...six...sixty...six..." on that cold, busy afternoon.



With a name to match her friendly disposition, Darling Ojeda is a 41-year-old Ecuadorian immigrant who has lived in New York City for eight years. She is a mother of two boys and enjoys learning new things every day, big or small. Darling Ojeda thanks her "dear teacher Ellen Quish" for "teaching us to have high expectations" at CUNY's LaGuardia Community College Adult Learning Center.

SALOME RODRIGUEZ

When You Are in My Car

I am sad because some people don't respect me. When I see garbage in my cars and I see some people fighting in my cars, I feel very sad.

I enjoy being a train, and I have a big heart. I am worried when people are in my cars, and I listen to how they share their secrets. But I keep it in my heart, and I don't talk to anybody.

When I run very fast, I imagine that I have wings and that I am flying. I am scared when I go into the dark, but when I go outside the dark tunnel, I feel glad again.

I am happy when the snow is on top of my cars, and I see that everything is white. My job is to protect the people from the cold, but I like it outside when the snow blows in my face.

Sometimes I see people running to catch me, and I tell them, "Don't worry, you will be on time." But the people don't hear me, and sometimes I see them falling on the platform, and I can't help them.

This is my life. If you like it, you can come again to take a ride.

I am the L train.

Salome Rodriguez is 43 years old and moved from Mexico to the United States 10 years ago. She is married and has three children. She says, "My goal is to continue studying and improving my English. I am grateful to this country because I have found many opportunities. I also give God thanks for my teacher, Lydia Zanaghina, and the Adult Learning Center at CUNY's New York City College of Technology."



GRACE GUO

A Snowy Day

There was a big snowstorm. It snowed all night long. The next day, the snow was very deep and the schools and stores were closed. The streets hadn't been plowed, so sometimes you could see a few people walking on the street as if they were dancing in the snow.

At the park, it was totally different than on the streets because you could see some children playing in the snow in the park with their families. There was a young boy about five years old playing in the snow with his father. The boy looked very happy because he was bouncing vivaciously; he seemed like a monkey.

"Daddy, can we make a big snowman? I really like snowmen," the young boy said.

"Of course we can, but can you tell me why you really like snowmen?" the boy's father asked.

"Because all children like snowmen. Me too! I just read about a snowman in a book. I never had my own snowman," the boy answered.

"Oh, yeah. It's easy. Let's make a snowman now," the boy's father said warmly, touching his boy's head gently.

"Yes, I will have my own snowman soon. Thank you, Daddy, you are the best." The boy felt very cheerful and clapped his little hands.

The two built the snowman together.

"Okay, we're finished. This snowman is only for my lovely boy. Come here, boy, I'll take a picture of you with the snowman," the boy's father said.

"Daddy, can we take the snowman with us when we go home?" the boy asked.

"No, we can't, because when we move it, it will fall apart. The snowman can only stand in the park," the boy's father replied.

"Daddy, the snowman is my friend. I can't leave him. He will be scared when I am not here with him," the boy said very anxiously.

“Don’t worry, boy. He can’t really disappear, even when he melts in the sun. He will always be in your heart because he is your friend now. When you miss him, you can look at your picture. Can we go home now?” the boy’s father asked.

“Yes, Daddy. Bye-bye, Snowman, see you next time,” the boy said with tears in his eyes, while waving his hand.

“Good boy. Let’s go,” the boy’s father said, as he picked him up.

That night, the young boy had a good dream. He was smiling as he dreamed.

Born in China, Grace Guo has lived in New York City for ten years and works in a bakery in Chinatown. For three years, she has been in the advanced writing class of the University Settlement Society’s Adult Literacy Program, and she is now an assistant teacher. She often writes about her family—her husband and two sons. Michael Hunter is the director of the Adult Literacy Program.



JEANETTE CHAWKI

A Parrot and the Police

My story begins when my brother asked me to take care of his parrot, Rocky, while he went on vacation. Every morning, I tried to give him food from my hand, but each time Rocky would peck me and hurt my hand. I asked my husband to feed Rocky, and to my surprise, Rocky accepted the food from my husband without hurting him. *Rocky likes men, not women*, I thought.

When I was with Rocky, he would laugh at me, and he would yell my brother's name because he missed him. When the phone rang, he would say, "Hello." Whenever we left the room and he was alone, he would start yelling, "Help! Help!" so we would come back.

One day, my children and I decided to go for a walk in the neighborhood. I felt bad about leaving the parrot alone, so I put him next to the window before we left. After about an hour, we returned from our walk. I was surprised to see the police near my home. The cops were everywhere. People were looking at me, and I didn't know why.

As we entered the building, I saw police trying to break down my apartment door. "What is going on?" I asked.

A cop said, "A child is crying inside and yelling 'Help me! Help!'"

I said, "I don't have a baby. All of my children are with me."

He looked at me and insisted, "Please open the door."

So I did. He looked around the apartment and did not find a child. Instead, he saw Rocky, who was still yelling, "Help me! Help!"

The policeman started laughing, and he left.



Born in Lebanon, Jeanette Chawki has lived in America for five years. In addition to the story printed here, she tells of a time on the subway when her young son was left outside of the car as the doors closed: "I yielded to God's power, and the train stopped and opened the doors for my son." Jeanette Chawki studies at the YMCA Prospect Park New Americans Program, where her instructor is Christine Randall, and the site advisor is Nabila Khan.

LI ZHOU

I Can Practice *Falun Dafa* Freely

On the morning of August 29th, 2009, my third day in America, I practiced *Falun Dafa* in a park in Flushing. It was my first time practicing *Falun Dafa* in public since the Chinese government forbade it in 1999. When I finished exercising, I opened my eyes. What a wonderful view. Everything was so beautiful, so peaceful here. When I finally found my practitioner friends, they told me, “You don’t need to be frightened any more. You won’t be put into jail because you practice *Falun Dafa*. This is America. You can practice your beliefs freely.” That morning, I couldn’t help crying in the park. This is America. I am free now.

I practiced *Falun Dafa* in 1996 in China. *Falun Dafa* not only taught me how to be a good person but also healed my disease. I got tuberculosis in 1996 before I started *Falun Dafa*. After I had practiced it for almost a month, I went to a hospital to have a test. The doctor told me the lesion of TB was calcified. That meant I had recovered from this frightening disease in a short time. It was a miracle. I didn’t take medicine during that month at all.

Because many people benefitted from *Falun Dafa*, more and more people started to practice it. There were almost 100 million people practicing *Falun Dafa* in 1999. The number of practitioners was much greater than the number of Communists. The Communist Party was afraid they couldn’t control people. So the government announced: *Falun Dafa* is evil. *Falun Dafa* was forbidden in 1999.

Overnight, my life changed. I couldn’t get my Master’s degree in microbiology. Then I was put into jail. I was tortured a lot in jail. After being deprived of sleep for six days and six nights, I was broken down and forced to say I gave up my beliefs. Afterward, I was forced to say and write something bad about *Falun Dafa*. Then I was released. My story, “Repentance: a Female Graduate Student’s Repentance and Her Story of Conversion from an Obsessed ‘Falun Gong,’” was reported in *People’s Daily*, a well-known newspaper in China that is controlled by the government. That story was edited by the government. But that is not my real story.

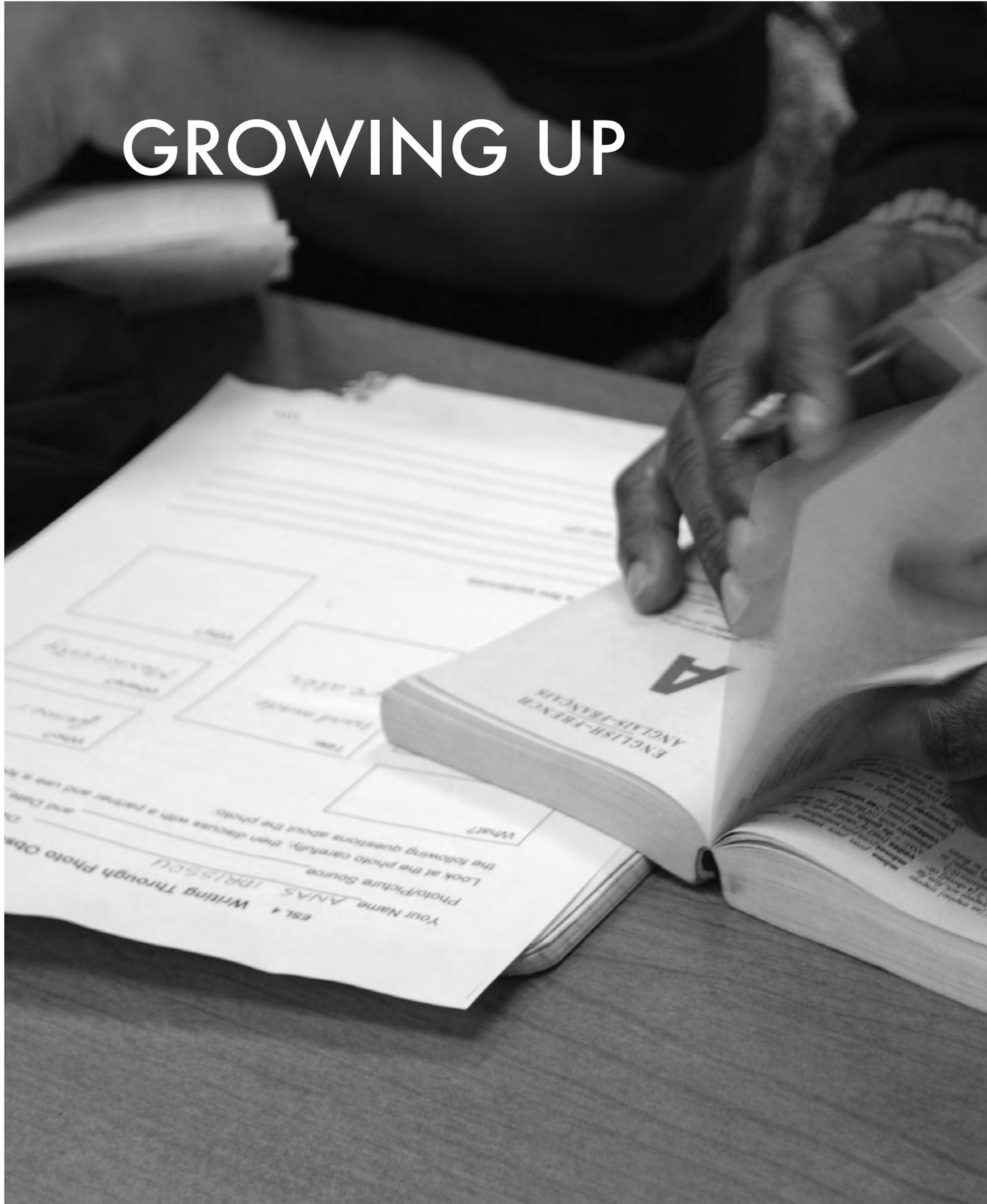
After that, I got my Master's degree. But my mind and memories had been injured badly by the persecution in the jail, and I couldn't get a good job because of my *Falun Dafa* experience. Everyone in China was afraid of *Falun Dafa* practitioners because the TV, newspapers and radio, which are all controlled by the government, told people *Falun Dafa* was evil, and practitioners were dangerous. My husband couldn't handle such stress, so he wanted to divorce me. Because my health was injured badly in jail, I practiced *Falun Dafa* secretly at home to improve my body. Still, my life remained full of guilt and fear—a nightmare for ten years.

My heart is full of thanks for the American people and the American government. Persecution is still going on in China. There are many *Falun Dafa* practitioners living in fear. I hope America can help them like it helped me.



Li Zhou's religion is Falun Dafa. According to one website, it is "an advanced practice of Buddhist self-cultivation...in which the highest qualities of the universe—Zhen, Shan, Ren (Truthfulness, Compassion, Forebearance)—are the foundation." Li Zhou studies at the Center for Immigrant Concerns at the College of Mount St. Vincent, with her instructor Katherine Miller. The director is Donna Kelsh, and the education director is Mark Brik.

GROWING UP



ESL 4 Writing Through Photo Observation
Your Name ANAS IDRISOU
photo picture source _____ and Date _____
Look at the photo carefully, then discuss with a partner and use a photo
the following questions about the photo:
What? _____
Where? _____
When? _____
How? _____
Why? _____

ENGLISH-FRENCH
ANGLAIS-FRANCAIS
A



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WILLIE HOSKINS

Shooting at Me

This story takes place in South Carolina. I was about nine years old, and my friends were younger. One summer morning, we were walking down the railroad track to go fishing. We heard a shooting sound, and we looked around and saw two white boys running down the railroad track behind us, shooting their guns at us. The boys were bigger than us, about 13 or 14 years old. We were so afraid, we ran and ran down into the woods, and hid for maybe 20 minutes.

We came out of the woods, and the boys were gone. We went home, looking around to see if the boys were still looking to shoot us, but we did not see them. Were we glad they were gone!

You wouldn't believe the boys' daddy was the sheriff of the town. I guess they learned from their daddy because I heard their daddy did not like black people. Black people were treated very badly in those days, not only by the sheriff. Many whites were like that. But I know people can change if they want to.

Sixty-two-year-old Willie Hoskins was born in South Carolina and moved to Brooklyn in 1963. He writes that at age 56 he "received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior," and this was "the greatest choice" he ever made. He studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Flatbush Learning Center, where Gladys Ortiz is the site supervisor, Luz Diaz the literacy advisor and Ana Segreto is his tutor. "They are the greatest!" Willie Hoskins writes.



YUK YEE (JAY) CHAN FUNG

Childhood in a Factory in Macau

My mother was a worker in a factory that made incense. All my siblings and I spent most of our childhood in the factory where our mother worked. We all started our time in the factory from the second day of our lives. We were not the only children in a family who had to start their lives there. Most of the women who worked there had to carry their new babies to work after the delivery. Life was very difficult during that period. Babies were either on their mother's back or on the dirty, cold ground while awake or sleeping. The environment was terrible. The floor was full of powder and the wooden, skinny sticks that hurt people's skin. Younger children were not allowed to go outside because nobody would look after them. The older children played outside, but most of them had dirty faces with snot running from their nostrils. Nobody had time to take care of the urchins.

I remember there were many rows of tables lined up in a dim and crowded area, similar to a garment factory with sewing machines. There were a few electric bulbs hanging on top of the ceiling, covered with lampshades. All the wooden windows were open in summer. My mom worked at the end, by the windows. It was very hot with the sunlight shining on her. In winter, though, it was so cold that the windows were closed. The working tables were made of wood, and on them was a box-like container full of powder. On the right-hand side of the table was a piece of brown dough. It was very rough and sticky. They used a piece of a small, rectangular wood board nailed with a small wooden cube in the middle to hold it. They used this little board, rubbing it back and forth, to stick the material onto the skinny sticks, and then to put on some powder as a coating to finish the incense. After they had produced a certain amount of incense, they had to spread it outside under the sun to dry it out. The owner would weigh the dried products in order to pay salaries.

The powders they used for work were colored purple, yellow, brown or red. Workers and their children were usually covered with the powders from head to toe after a working day. Even their snot and their saliva were the same color as the powder they worked with that day.

When we grew older, we attended school. After school, and on weekends or holidays, we went to the factory to do our homework. I remember that there were two big rocks with angles in front of the window. The rocks were our seats, and the lower part of the window frame was our table for doing homework. We played around the area near the factory. There was a ruined church at the top of hundreds of steps. We used to fly kites and run up and down the steps. We played counting step and jumping step games. In the back of the church, there was a small temple on top of an extremely slanted stone lane. Many people went there for divination.

The factory was built midway in the lane. It was difficult and dangerous to walk up and down on the slope, but we were used to it, and we had to go through it every day. During the rainy season, many people got injured by sliding down on the stones. But children would have fun on rainy days on the slope. They used the old cardboard cases and board-like materials for sliding.

No matter how difficult our time there was, we are still nostalgic for the place where we grew up. There are lots of our memories, our tears and our laughter in that place. It was our birth place. The job my mother held doesn't exist now in Macau. As part of a traditional industry, their working tables and the tools are now placed in an exhibition center near the site of the factory. The church and temple were built on the same level, as close to each other as next-door neighbors for more than a century. The ruined church and the old temple are known as an antique historical site, which is protected by the government. This is now a hot tourist spot. It honors the Macau citizens.

Yuk Yee (Jay) Chan Fung was born in Macau and moved to Hong Kong as a child. She immigrated to New York City 12 years ago, and she now studies at the Consortium for Worker Education's Workers United Education Program. Her teacher is Jackie Bain, and Nancy Lorence is the site director. Jay Fung writes: "All the teachers here are excellent. We are encouraged to explore our minds in our writing."



VICTORIA KIMINTA

My Grandfather's Farm in Kenya

I grew up on my grandfather's farm in the Narok District of Kenya. My grandfather had one big hut with three rooms, plus the one the sheep slept in. The hut had wooden walls coated with cow manure to keep the house warm. The roof was also made of wood, covered with bark, and on top of that, long grass. Outside was an enclosure where the cows, goats and sheep slept. There was also a little toilet: My grandfather dug a hole and put some wood on top of it. Around the house, everything else was fields. There were fields of many crops: tomatoes, collard greens, cabbage, peas, maize, sunflowers, carrots, garlic, onion, parsley.

My grandfather was an expert with herbal remedies. He knew which plants and roots to use as medicine. He was recognized by so many people for his knowledge of bush medicine. He could treat malaria and other illnesses. People came from far away to see him. Some visitors had to stay overnight. They could not travel at night because there were lions, hyenas and cheetahs that would eat them.

On the farm was a spot on the side of a mountain where I used to go and sit for hours. There were trees around it, but the spot was open and you could see very far, across many valleys. The mountain was the tallest point in the village. From the mountaintop, taking in the beautiful view, I thought about all types of things.

On the side of the mountain, I saw the big Lake Naivocha, rivers, valleys and hills. At Lake Naivocha, there was a small town. During the daytime, the sun would hit the roofs of the buildings of that town. It was sparkling from very far away. At night, the town lit up. It looked like shining stars. I could see the lights glittering. Some of the lights were moving. I thought they were like the stars in the sky we could see moving sometimes. I found it fascinating because my grandfather's farm did not have electricity. In those days I did not know what electricity was. We used to sit around the fire and my grandmother would tell us stories at night. That fire was the only source of light we had on my grandfather's farm. That's why I spent so many evening hours on the mountain, so I could see the

lights at night glittering in the town of Lake Naivocha.

The rivers went through the valleys and around the hills. Farmers' crops looked so green and lush. They made the valleys look so beautiful. The reflection of the sun going down on the hills made them look like they were glowing. Sometimes when I was sitting there on top of the mountain, in my mind I dreamed of visiting those places.

Years later, my grandmother took me to visit my uncle, who used to live in a place called Karicho. On that trip, I got to see Naivocha Town, which I had been seeing from the top of the mountain. It was like a dream come true for me. It was fascinating, like a wonderland. I wanted to travel more.

My memories of that mountain at my grandfather's farm still run deep. I can still see all those beautiful places I used to see from the top of the mountain. The last time I was in Kenya, I visited my grandfather's house. I went to the same spot. I could still see what I used to see when I was growing up. But now I know those are lights in the town, and the moving lights are cars. The shiny roofs are sheet metal.

Victoria Kiminta is 39 years old and has spent 10 years in New York City. She says, "I was born in the Masai region of Kenya. I love to write stories of my childhood. My dream is to write my life story, since I am learning how to read and write." She would like to thank Ronny DelPozo, her tutor, and Hilary Schenker, the literacy assistant, at the New York Public Library's Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing. Terry Sheehan is the literacy site advisor.



ROY HENDRICKS

Sugar Cane Adventures

As a boy, one of the times I most looked forward to would have to be the time of year the sugar cane got ripe and was ready for stripping on my grandfather's farm in North Carolina. Every year, we all helped to pull the fodder and get the cane ready for grinding. Papa had an old mule that he kept for plowing the garden and pulling the truck to the cane mill. The mule was hooked to the mill. All day long, he would walk around and around, grinding the cane. Juice poured from the spout into large cans that Papa placed under it. Then my grandmother strained the juice, and it was ready to pour into the big boiler over a red hot fire. This slow process started with boiling the cane syrup into molasses. The grown-ups dipped and stirred again and again, then finally began to skim off the foam.

After the syrup cooked long enough and was thick and black enough to be called molasses, they poured it from the boiler into large, thin cans and put the lids on tightly. The most fun of all was the end of the molasses boiling. Our grandfather made each one of us a wooden paddle with his knife. All of the children were able and eager to scrape the sides and bottoms of the vats to get the remaining molasses.

Oh, how we enjoyed that molasses on our pancakes, biscuits, crackers, cake and anything else we could spread it on!



A native North Carolinian, Roy Hendricks writes that his farm childhood “was a most exciting time for me.” Sharonda Dairo is the site manager at the Queens Library’s Rochdale Village Adult Learning Center, where Roy Hendricks studies, and Michael Semple is the site supervisor. Roy Hendricks would like to thank Carolyn John, who encouraged him to move on to the G.E.D. program. Another of his stories about farm life was published in the Literacy Review, Volume 6.

ANTHONY BURNETT

Summers at Grandma's

As a young boy growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, I loved to go to the country with my brother and my cousin to spend time with our grandmother. On summer break, after school was done, my grandma would come and get us in the city and take us on the bus to the country. I loved the country because I'd get to go outside and run all day. My brother hated it because he'd have to give up his TV and all that, but I loved it even when I was grown.

My grandmother always wore bright, long dresses. I told her, "The bees are going to get you, Grandma!" Grandma had a light complexion, was tall, maybe five feet 10 inches or six feet. She was probably 260 pounds. She was a big lady. People always told me I looked like her. Her hair was natural and thick. She would braid it in two styles: sometimes one braid on each side and one in the back; and sometimes parted down the middle, with just one on each side. She liked to hum. She would sit and words never came out; she just hummed.

My grandmother did not have electric lights, so when night started to fall she would light a lamp that burned kerosene. Grandma had four rooms in a house made from boards, and there was no running water, so she had to fetch water from a tank half a mile down the road. She would make several trips back and forth, balancing the bucket on her head. She never had to hold it with her hands. Once she put it on, she could just walk.

My grandmother had goats, pigs and chickens, so she fetched water for us to wash and for the goats to drink. We had to wash from a pan. She did not have a shower. It was a shallow pan, maybe 30 inches in diameter and 18 inches high, and it would make a lot of noise because it was made from aluminum. When she did the laundry in the daytime, she'd use the pan; and when night started to fall, we'd use it to wash.

My grandmother would tie her goats with a rope around the neck to a branch or tree somewhere there was grass to eat, but the baby goats—the kids—

would just wander around. At times I would run after the kids, trying to hold them, but these goats were not used to anyone holding them, so they would run away from me. My grandmother would say, “Stop the running! You’re going to fall!” At times, that is exactly what would happen.

In those days, it seemed like there was so much to do, but when night fell, everything went dead. You would hear crickets singing, and it was dark. The moon seemed to shine brighter than in the city.

I own the property now because my grandmother passed away. In the summer, when I get a break, I’m going to go down and renovate. Whenever I go, I like to look at where my grandmother used to be. I want to hold on to my memories of my grandmother.

Born in Jamaica, West Indies, 58 years ago, Anthony Burnett has lived in New York City for 31 years. He says, “I would like to take my reading level up at least two grades. I am a proud father of three boys who are in college now.” Terry Sheehan is the site advisor and Hilary Schenker is the literacy assistant at the New York Public Library’s Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing. Anthony Burnett thanks his tutors, Sara McAlister and Nate Roth.

HUMBERTO AYUSO

From Puerto Rico to New York

I was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico. My brother and I liked to play basketball and we used to go fishing. I was the youngest one.

When I was five years old, my mother went to New York City to work and give us a better life, and we stayed with our father. He was a very serious person. He used to say only the necessary things. He served in the army in World War II. He was a very good person with a good heart. My father took good care of us. I remember that when he came home at night and we were sleeping, he used to wake us up to give us coffee and bread. He did not want us to go to sleep with an empty stomach. He cooked and did everything in the house while my mother worked.

When I was 10 years old, my mother sent for me to come to New York City on a plane. I was 10 and I was alone. There was a flight attendant who was watching over me. My father had made me an egg sandwich, and I was eating the sandwich while the plane was going up and down—*zoom, zoom, zoom*. It was a two-engine plane.

When I arrived at New York's Kennedy Airport, my two brothers and my mother were there waiting for me. I had a note pinned to my jacket with my name and address, in case I got lost or in case of an emergency. When my brothers saw me, they started to laugh because I was wearing a green suit. My older brother said that if I went to the country, a cow would eat me, thinking I was grass. Then we drove home to our apartment on East 29th Street in Manhattan. When we got there, we went upstairs, and it was a big apartment. I was happy because when I was in Puerto Rico the house was very small.

Humberto Ayuso, age 65, studies at the New York Public Library's Harlem Center for Reading and Writing. Sid Araujo is the site advisor, and Humberto Ayuso extends special thanks to his tutors, Laurie Hockman and Jodi Lewis.

ISABELLA HURTADO

My Doll Collection

When I was a little girl, I liked to collect many types of things, like small calendars, stamps, marbles, stationary, leaves and much more. I also had a doll collection. I used to have about 20 or 30 dolls, small and big. I loved the smaller dolls because I could take them with me anywhere. Each of my dolls was different. I had dolls from Hawaii, the U.S., Italy, Spain, Africa, etc. Every doll had its own name. I had a big stand for my collection, with four different levels. My dolls were put on the stand very neatly.

I often received new dolls as birthday presents. That was what most people gave me. I just kept collecting them. I didn't realize it for a while, but my mother began to take my dolls, one by one, until my collection was gone. My mother explained to me that it was time to leave some of these things behind because I was growing up. She said, "You are not a little girl anymore." I still remember my collection well. But, as my mother used to say, "Everything changes."

Growing Up
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ISABELLA HURTADO



A native of Medellin, Colombia, Isabella Hurtado has lived in New York City for 17 years. During the day, she works "with disabled patients to make sure they are taken care of." In addition to loving her job, she loves "coming to the library to read and write" with her classmates. She extends thanks to Geniene Monterrosa, site advisor at the New York Public Library's St. George Center for Reading and Writing, and to tutor Ann Marie Antenucci.

MARIA LOPEZ

A Strange Way to Make a Friend

I never went to school, but my mother used to clean the schoolhouse, and she took me with her to help. It wasn't really a house; it was a cozy one-room shack with a hard, dirt floor like all the other shacks, and there was one teacher for all the students. I wanted to learn to read and write, so I listened to the teacher while I cleaned. One time she told me to sit down, but I couldn't; I had to keep working. When I emptied the wastepaper box, I took the papers with writing and hid them in my pockets to study later.

One day, when I was nine or 10, my mother and I got to the school shack, and the first thing we saw was the teacher hitting a girl my age with a wooden stick. She was yelling at the girl. The girl's mother was there, and she was yelling, too. The reason was the girl didn't do well in school. The teacher called her stupid and lazy because she did not know how to read. The mother screamed, "Just see—when we go home, I'll put you to work all night. You can't sleep tonight until you do your homework better!" The girl looked very scared and trembled. I was scared, too, watching her. I felt empathy for her.

Suddenly, I was yanked by the back of my shirt, and my mother was screaming at me. I was so surprised that I screamed, too. My mother yelled, "Stupid, lazy girl! You must help me clean! What are you doing standing there looking at another lazy girl just like you?"

The teacher and the girl's mother stopped yelling at her and instead looked at my mother and me. My mother said, "Please lend me the stick. I need to teach this girl a lesson."

Then she hit me with the stick. Now the girl was watching me crying and trembling, and she looked sorry for me. My mother's arm got tired, so she stopped hitting and started to complain about me to the other women. They were happy to join in the conversation and agree with her.

The three women couldn't say enough about how terrible the girl and I were. They were so excited they forgot about us.

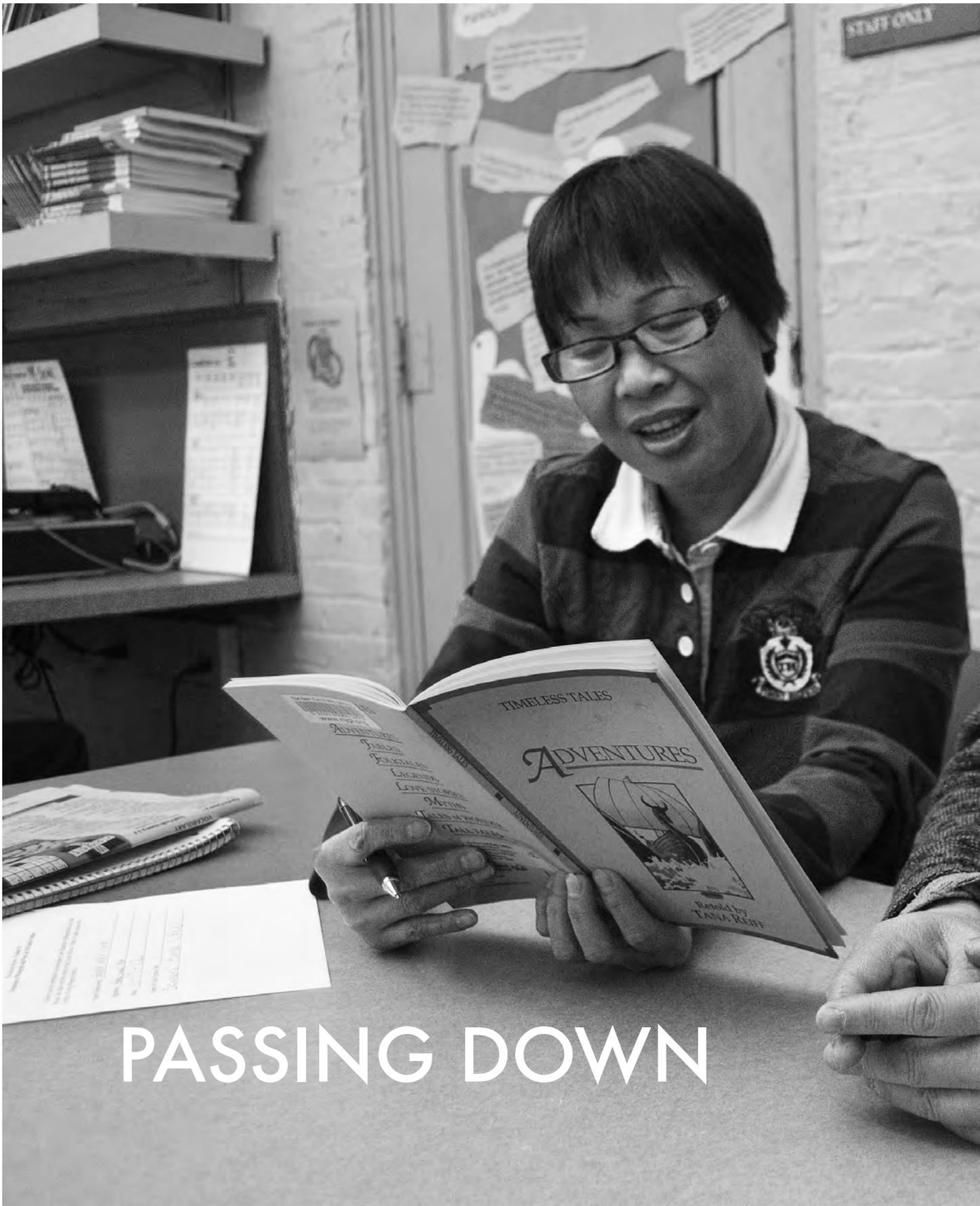
The girl and I looked at each other, glad for the break, and we began to

whisper. I asked her what her name was. “Gloria,” she said. I told her my name, Maria. I asked her where she lived and told her where I lived. She asked if we could be friends, and I whispered, “Yes.”

By then it was time for school to end, so we escaped from a very scary moment in our lives. For now, there would be no more crying, no more trembling, no more screaming. For that moment, my new friend and I were happy, and we laughed all the way home.



Maria Lopez, age 65, moved from Colombia to New York City in the early 2000s. She loves yoga and meditation, writing, reading and solving crossword puzzles. She writes, “Education for me is a priority in my life. It is a passion.” She says the staff at the New York Public Library’s Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing has been “a blessing to me,” and thanks tutors Betty Gerstein and Elizabeth Dreier, and site advisor Elaine Sohn. Her poem, “Shh!! Wait and Listen!,” was published in the Literacy Review, Volume 8.



PASSING DOWN



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JULIO RODRIGUEZ

The Aroma of Tobacco

I remember the fragrance the tobacco leaves produced, which permeated our neighbor Doña Pepita's living room. The tobacco leaves hung in bunches from the beams of the exposed frame of her humble house. I could see, from the floor on which I sat, the corrugated zinc planks covering the roof and the wood sheets making the outside of the house. The furniture was rustic and the floors were covered with a rug made of linoleum.

The tobacco leaves were ground by Doña Pepita and Don Daniel, who were *arrimáos* (people allowed to live on other people's farms). They lived at our neighbor's milk farm, and they rented a plot from my granny to grow tobacco. When the tobacco leaves were mature, they collected them in bunches, and hung them in the exposed beams of their house and barn. The leaves would then turn brown, wrinkle and dry. The process of drying made them give off the delicious aroma that intoxicated anyone around. At this point, the leaves were ready to be rolled in a long rope by Doña Pepita, who had the expertise and speed of an Olympic competitor.

Before the leaves were rolled into a long rope, my siblings and I would pick off a bit of each stem of the tobacco leaves. As preschoolers, we were already expert stem pickers. We would grab the leaf by one end, and with the opposite thumbnail we would pinch it and peel off some of its stem. After that, Doña Pepita would roll the long rope again, making it into a cylinder to be transported to the shop. At the shop, the tobacco would be sold to be smoked, or more commonly, chewed.

My siblings and I would get paid not in cash but with something far better. Doña Pepita always gave us *quenepas* (a sweet tropical fruit).

Born in New Jersey, 47-year-old Julio Rodriguez grew up in Puerto Rico, and has spent the last six months in New York City. He writes, "I like living in the U.S., and I also like to remember my childhood in Puerto Rico." He is a student at the New York Public Library's Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing, where Elaine Sohn is the site advisor. He extends special thanks to his writing tutor, Peter Tilley.



Abdoulaye and Miriam

Abdoulaye, a son of the Doumbia family, lived in Odienne, West Africa, north of the Ivory Coast. He was born in the town of Neguela, a small village within Odienne.

The Doumbia family was poor, so Abdoulaye, like many others, went to the capital city of Abidjan to realize his dream. He started to work as a car washer and an animal caretaker. He was an honest and hard-working man.

One of his brothers introduced him to Mr. Fofana, who was a famous rich man. Everywhere in the village, everyone knew about Mr. Fofana, who was often in the spotlight of the conversation. People loved him and talked a lot about him because he used to help people when they were in need. The hard-working guy, Abdoulaye, was one of his workers.

Mr. Fofana had a beautiful, kind, and very polite daughter named Miriam, and all the village men loved her. I don't know why, but this nice lady fell for Abdoulaye. To her, all the other men were losers.

The problem started when Mr. Fofana heard about his daughter falling in love with his worker. He didn't appreciate this. Yet Abdoulaye was fortunate because Mrs. Fofana liked him and supported their love.

Abdoulaye underwent a lot of pressure from his job and still tried to stay honest and hard-working. He went to see Mr. Lacine, Fofana's uncle, to explain his problem. This was hard for Abdoulaye because as a follower and worker, he was scared. Yet he expressed his love for Miriam. Lacine was able to convince Fofana to accept Abdoulaye as a son-in-law.

So the couple's dreams came true, and it was a really big wedding and Mr. Fofana gave

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Abdoulaye two brand-new cars as a gift. Miriam's first child was named Lacine, after Fofana's uncle, and after two years came Macourani and Vakaba.

And that's the story of my parents, Abdoulaye and Miriam Doumbia.

Macourani Doumbia, age 25, grew up on the Ivory Coast before relocating to New York City four years ago. Now living in the Bronx, she writes, "I am a proud mother and wife, with a courageous spirit." She thanks Tilla Alexander, her teacher, and Diana Raissis, the instructional facilitator, at the site where she studies English, the New York City Department of Education's Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center.



ALENA VYSOTSKAYA

A Detective Story

My father likes to tell funny stories. He has traveled a lot and has seen many interesting things. In addition, he has a good sense of humor. Sometimes he comes up with amusing details, and every time he tells the same story he tells it differently. When I was a child, I liked to listen to funny stories about his parents. One of them was the most amusing to me.

My grandfather was a taxi driver. When he came home after work very tired, he took a bath and sometimes fell asleep in the bathtub. One day, my grandmother came home while he was sleeping in the bathtub. She switched off the light in the bathroom, muttering: “Who will pay for electricity?” Thinking that she was home alone, she headed to the kitchen because she was very hungry.

Suddenly, she heard a strange noise: “Br-r-r...” Because the water in the bathtub had become colder, Grandpa woke up. My grandmother nearly lost consciousness out of fear. She rushed out from the apartment and started knocking on the neighbor’s door. Their neighbor was a detective. He took his gun, and they entered the dangerous apartment together. What was their wonder and embarrassment when they saw my grandfather with a towel around his hips and heard his question: “What are you two doing here together?”

I’m still not sure what in this story is true and what is false. But I remember my grandfather’s habit of sleeping in the bathtub. And I remember my grandparent’s neighbor, who was a detective.



“There are some things in my mind which I would like to tell others,” writes 44-year-old Alena Vysotskaya, who worked as an editor at a publishing company in her native country, Belarus. She has lived in New York City for a little over a year and studies at CUNY’s New York City College of Technology. She thanks her teacher, Jay Klokker, for “good lessons in English and in American life.”

HASSAN BOUIMSILN

The Race

This story is dedicated to my grandpa, who died before I was born. I have heard many wonderful stories about him, and I am sad that I never met him. This is the way I would like to imagine him.

At the age of 80, my grandparents were always there for me, sharing their love, sadness and happiness, until one day when I got back from school. I knocked on the door (*rap, rap, rap*) several times but no one could hear me. I was bewildered. What was the matter today? Always, when I got home from school, one of my grandparents was there to open the door for me with a big smile in a face full of wrinkles, and with a warm heart.

My curiosity made me move to the next window to find out what was going on. In the window, I could clearly see my grandpa with his walking stick standing near a brown wooden table, staring at something. I started knocking on the window again and again. I even tried waving my hands, but he did not see me. My grandpa's body and mind were fully concentrated. I switched to the other window, and guess who I found? My grandma! She seemed to be reading my grandpa's mind.

Suddenly he started running toward the kitchen. On the other side, my grandma threw a container full of water on the floor, which made my grandpa slip. She took advantage of this, just like an athlete running her last 100 meters, but my grandpa, still sharp-minded, had his walking stick in his hands. He used it to grab her feet.

He stood up and continued toward the kitchen. I switched to the other window. In that moment, my grandpa was so excited and happy, holding a can of potato chips as if he'd won the World Cup.

**GUESS WHAT
I FOUND? MY
GRANDMA!**

I looked back to my grandma. I felt sorry for her, but she astonished me with a big sarcastic, hysterical laugh at my grandpa, who was trying to open the can. He grabbed a

potato chip, but his face had turned red and gray. His victory turned into defeat when he noticed that Grandma held his false teeth in her hands.

I exploded in laughter at the scene.

In the end, with a soft kiss, my grandparents shared their potato chips, and after that, they declared peace.

Born in Rabat, Morocco, 25-year-old Hassan Bouimsiln has lived in the United States for three years. He is interested in learning about electrical engineering at City College in Manhattan. Right now, Hassan studies at the New York City College of Technology's Adult Learning Center. He writes: "The person who helped my writing is my great teacher, Jay Klokker."

ANGELICA PAZMINO

Day of the Little Candles

The Day of the Little Candles, one of the most observed traditional holy days of Colombia, is celebrated on December 7th, on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The first celebration took place on December 8th, 1854, because Pope Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary as dogma in his encyclical *Ineffabilis Deus*. In anticipation of this decision, people lit candles and paper lanterns to show their support of and belief in this idea. The Catholic Church of Colombia kept the celebration alive, and made an annual tradition of lighting candles the night of December 7th, the unofficial start of the Christmas season in my country.

On this day, people place candles and paper lanterns on their windows, balconies, porches, sidewalks, streets, parks and squares—in short, everywhere they can be seen. This day is celebrated throughout Colombia, but traditions vary in each city.

In my city, *Cali-Valle*, my family buys candles and goes to my grandfather's house to eat. Before seven o'clock, my aunt says a prayer, and everyone begins to light candles. All of the cousins play with fireworks in the street because it is closed for the celebration.

In Quindío, each of the neighborhoods in the township competes to produce the most spectacular lighting arrangements, and many visitors come from throughout Colombia to admire the displays.

THE TOWNSHIP
COMPETES
TO PRODUCE
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When I was 11 years old, my mom wanted to go there because she said we would like it, and she was right; it was so beautiful. My sister and I will never forget this day because it was very surprising. I think when my daughter is 10 or 11 years old, I'll take her to see the lights because I know she will like it, and this is the most important event in the city.

I would like to continue my tradition, but it is almost impossible as the climate of this country is totally different from Colombia's. I don't think my kids will continue the tradition, either, because the new super generation is different. But in the future, I would like to share the celebration with my family, so they can enjoy it as I did.



"I want to learn and improve my English," writes 27-year-old Angelica Pazmino. Born in Colombia, she has lived in New York City for six years, with her husband. Their daughter is four years old. She gives special thanks to Peggy Conte, her teacher at LaGuardia Community College's CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP).

ANGELA VALENCIA

My Black Shoes

Not everybody has the same luck when they are born. To be born with a family is a blessing, because they help you understand the world. My childhood was very good because I have a good family. They support me because they love me, and my mother is the best mother in the world. I had a childhood with many memories; I will never forget when my father died, and the gift of black shoes that he gave me.

One day my father and I went to a children's store because he wanted to buy shoes for me. He had seen the shoes a few days before and he liked them for me. He thought that I could wear them on special occasions. The store didn't have my size, so my father bought one size bigger. I was so eager to go to my aunt's birthday party because I could wear my new shoes.

Three days after my father gave me the shoes, he died. My mother was very sad and confused. I didn't understand what had happened; I couldn't believe that my hero had died. My aunt didn't have her birthday party, so I wore my new black shoes at my father's funeral. I didn't care that the shoes were big. I just wanted to say goodbye to my father in the black shoes. Everybody looked at my shoes and said, "You have beautiful new shoes," and I proudly answered "My father gave them to me!"

In the afternoon, when all my family and friends were walking in the street to go to the cemetery, one shoe fell in a hole. I did everything possible to pick it up, but I couldn't, so my friend helped me, and finally we did it. Now, I am 24 years old, and I still have the shoes. I hope to keep them forever. They bring up a sad memory, yet they always make me a smile.

Born in Risaralda, Colombia, 24-year-old Angela Valencia has lived in New York City for two years. She enjoys "writing about life experiences" and believes that New York City has given her the opportunity to achieve her goals. She loves her husband and is grateful for all of his support. She also thanks Mari Briggs, her teacher, for helping to improve her writing through the CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program) at LaGuardia Community College.



ONICA LEITCH-EDINBORO

A Night to Remember

One evening, I was home in my bed when something terrifying happened to me that to this day I cannot believe. That evening, after I had finished making dinner for myself, my spouse and my daughter, I locked all the windows and the front and back doors of our soundproof house. I then prepared myself and my daughter, Ojal, for bed. I put my daughter to bed, turned off all the lights in the house, as I usually do, and then I went to bed.

Around eight-thirty, after my husband and I talked in bed and he fell asleep, I heard footsteps in the living area. I got out of bed and went to see if they were the footsteps of my daughter, but when I reached her room, she was still fast asleep. By that time, the footsteps had stopped, or so I thought. I went back to bed, thinking, *I'm only imagining things*, so I didn't bother to wake my spouse and tell him anything.

A few minutes after I got into bed, I started hearing the footsteps again, but this time, the footsteps were getting louder, and they sounded like a person wearing shoes. I then asked myself, *Am I really hearing what I think I'm hearing?* So, just to make sure, I turned to my spouse, now awake, and I asked him, "Are you hearing footsteps in the living area?" He replied, "Yes!" My body then went cold! I was speechless, and I didn't know what else to do at that time, except to hug him.

A few minutes later, my spouse fell asleep again. I was up alone, and my eyes were staring all over the room. I was praying to fall asleep, but I just couldn't. I turned on my side with my back to my bedroom door, which was open. Shortly after I turned, the footsteps got louder and were coming toward my bedroom door. Suddenly, the sound of the footsteps stopped right in front of the door, and with that I felt a heavy weight of someone or something standing behind me.

The hair on my skin stood tall, my body got numb and I was terrified. I tried to call my spouse, but I had no voice. I was trying to turn to see what or who

it was, but I couldn't move my body. I knew someone or something was standing behind me. Oh, I just knew it!

All of a sudden, I heard a voice call out: "Suzie!" Well, Suzie is my nickname! When I heard that, my heart almost gave out, because I recognized the voice. It was the voice of my grandmother, Eileen, whose nickname was I.E. She had passed away over a decade earlier.

I regained my voice and replied, "Yes." I then asked, "Who is it? Is it I.E.?"

The voice said, "Yes, it's me, I.E.!" The voice then went on to say, "Suzie, get up now and move Ojal from her room to yours, because there are people walking in the house who would frighten her. Don't ever leave Ojal's bedroom light off, and the hallway lights off, because people are always passing through this house who would frighten her in the dark." And with that, the heavy weight drifted away and then the footsteps stopped.

I was able to move my body again. I turned and woke up my spouse, with tears falling from my eyes, and my body was shaking like a leaf. My spouse looked at me and wanted to know why I was so terrified. I said to him, "My grandmother, I.E., was just here, and she said to move Ojal from her room to ours right now."

He went immediately for Ojal. He put the hallway lights on, closed our bedroom door and came back to bed with her. Then I fell asleep.

The next morning, when I woke up, I told my spouse what had happened after he had fallen asleep. After that night, we never left the hallway lights and Ojal's bedroom light off anymore. As for footsteps, they were never heard again, and as for my grandmother, I only dream of her now, but I know she's always looking over me.

Born in Georgetown, Guyana, Onica Leitch-Edinboro attended Kuru Kuru Co-operative College and the Government Technical Institute. She has lived in New York City for over a year and now studies at CUNY's Brooklyn College with instructor Louise Mancuso. She is married, has a beautiful daughter, and is thankful to her family and her classmates.



AWILDA CORREA

The Voladora

Have you ever been in a flying bus?

When I was a child, my father taught me how to use public transportation in the Dominican Republic, and how to move place to place by myself because he couldn't go everywhere with me. The most difficult and tedious part of my day was when I had to take the bus. But it was not a common bus, it was a flying bus, or in Spanish, *voladora*.

A flying bus or *voladora* is a particular bus used daily by Dominican people. It is a bus regularly in bad condition; it almost never has windows or good seats and is always dirty. The bus runs at high speed and is so full of people that sometimes you feel like you can't breathe. The driver acts crazy, and for him it doesn't matter if there are kids aboard. The faster the *voladora* goes, the louder the music gets, and it is almost always *bachata*.

Also, you are going to find many characters on the bus, including the peddler, who frequently sells oranges, cellphone cards, accessories and candies. Then there is the preacher woman, who is always telling people that Jesus Christ is coming soon; the drunk old man who is sleeping with his mouth open; and the guy who is always hungry and asking for food.

All *voladoras* have a notorious person who is the collector, or in Spanish *cobrador*. This man's work is to collect the money paid by the passengers and also induce them to get into the bus. The *cobrador* is always hanging out of the open door of the bus and encouraging people with words like "Let's go, let's go," or "Get in, get in." In many cases he offers seats with phrases like "Duarte with seats" (for a bus going to Duarte Street) or "together like last night," or he shouts, "Let's go, Driver."

I had to take the bus all the time to go to school when I was little. One day, because of the bad condition of the bus, I ripped the skirt of my school uniform. I was angry, and for a few minutes I wanted to cry, but an old lady told me, "Don't worry, honey, it is normal in our daily life. Tomorrow it's going to be okay. Go

home and fix it.” After hearing this, I felt relaxed, and since that moment the *voladora* was always an adventure for me.

Traveling on the *voladora* the first time can be very frustrating, but once you become accustomed to it, you can learn something new every day. It’s a bus in bad condition, but it is part of Dominicans’ life, and for us it’s normal. Do you want to take a trip with me? Let’s go, because the *voladora* always has seats, even when it is full.

“I’ve always believed that education is a physiological need,” writes Awilda Correa, who came to the U.S. two years ago from the Dominican Republic. She is 24 years old and studies at the Bronx Community College’s CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program) with instructor Kristin Winkler. Awilda Correa writes that it was difficult for her to leave her country and her family. She thanks her mother and the other people in her life who always believed in her. She advises: “Never give up!”







QUESTIONING

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WALTER WAN

Beyond Babel

A few years ago, I went to a school to prepare for an upcoming Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Although it was a short program, I had a good time there that summer. I also made a lot of friends from all over the world, like Japan, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, France, Spain and Turkey. I think the class was a good way to learn the speaking and listening part of English because students can hear various accents and distinguish their own pronunciation errors, which could cause misunderstandings. However, I was not anticipating that miscommunication could happen to me.

One sunny afternoon, during a short break from the class, I was meditating and was not in a talking mood. A few classmates were talking, and one guy from Peru turned to me and asked me something in a Peruvian accent. I heard: "Hey, are you a gay?"

"What?" I was not sure how to react.

"Are you o gay?" I assumed that "o" and "a" are pronounced similarly in Spanish.

"No." I was curious why he asked that question.

"What's wrong? Did you go to see a doctor?"

"Er...No." I thought I just answered his question, but why did he keep asking me? However, even if I were gay, I don't agree anyone should go to a doctor just because he is gay.

"You should go to the doctor if you feel sick." He looked very serious.

I started to suspect something was wrong, especially because of the last word he said. I think nobody would be that rude anywhere in the world. So I asked, "Can you repeat the first question?"

This time he slowed down a bit, pronouncing it carefully. "Are you okay?"

Finally, I noticed the "k" was not a "g." It was "okay," not "a gay."

Then we laughed so hard everyone on the same floor could hear it.

It was a funny experience. But looking back, I feel the event was significant in some way because it led me to understand one reason why there are many conflicts and disputes in this world.

There are thousands of languages on planet Earth. Even within the same language, there exist different accents or dialects to separate us. Language barriers create culture barriers; culture barriers create mistrust; mistrust creates personal hatred. As a result, political, territorial, economic, racial and ideological conflicts seem endless; wars sparked between countries and within countries seem unavoidable. Often, people would say they were fighting for a righteous reason. But, actually, childish is the only way to describe it if we can look from a perspective outside our selfish nature and see humanity as a single organism. If we could just sit down, clear up some misunderstandings, and learn more about each other before fighting each other to misery every time we encounter something we don't agree with, what's left could be a good laugh instead.

It is said that long ago, humans used to have only one language and they stayed together to build a tower called Babel to reach the heavens. So God or gods, afraid of mankind's exceeding their purpose, went down to Earth, scattered people all over and confused their language. But this may just be another reassuring tale to explain our self-destructive tendency and our inability to unite. I believe humans are more capable of greatness. Together, we can achieve more than the Tower of Babel, if we give ourselves a worthy goal.



Born and raised in Taipei, Taiwan, Walter Wan is 23 years old. "I am interested in science and engineering, and I want to go to graduate school in aerospace engineering," he writes, "so English will be very important in my future." A college graduate, he is now continuing his studies in English at the University Settlement Society's Adult Literacy Program, which is directed by Michael Hunter. "I am glad that many people (including me) have benefited greatly from studying at the University Settlement Society," Walter Wan writes.

LILY HARIPERSAUD

Strength, Faith and Sadness

Guilt is a feeling that I have had to face, live with and feel deeply. How do I begin? My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer on March 3rd, 2007. Toward the end of her illness, the doctors told my family that she was in her final stages of palliative care. They could not do anything more to save her. My mom wanted to come home, so my family granted her wish. She could not accept her illness, and neither could I. My mom lived only two more months.

When my mom worsened, the hospice became involved and made a bad situation worse. I was very close to my mother and shared the role of caregiver with my other siblings. We fought with the doctors because it felt like they had given up when we had not. It felt as if they were watching the ball drop on New Year's Eve.

I remember my mother's last day. I was riding the F train when my sister-in-law called to tell me that my mom was getting worse. I told her to tell my mom that I was on my way to the house. I remember how my heart felt—it was aching and beating rapidly. When I got to her house, I ran to my mom, crying, "Mommy! Mommy! Everything will be okay." I spoke to the doctors at the hospice, and they told me the worst news: My mother was dying and she could go at anytime. I was at her bedside when she passed. My mom held my hands, one on top of the other, and took two deep breaths. I remember my brother running in from the living room. My mom took one more breath before she was gone. I was hurt and angry, but knew that what I wanted I could not have. My mom is with God.

I felt horrible, but I would experience this feeling all over again. Last year, my dad got sick. He had an aortal aneurysm, a stroke and a heart attack. The doctors said that an operation would kill him because the aneurysm had grown to eight and a half centimeters. They told us to just let him live comfortably for whatever time he had.

I took care of my dad as if he were a baby—feeding him, cleaning him, going with him to rehabilitation, everything. When he came home, he got worse. He lost weight because he stopped eating, so we had to take him back to the

hospital. They could not make him better. Once again, the doctors told me that all they could do was keep him comfortable. Now my dad was in palliative care.

The doctors asked me to sign a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate), but I could not, despite the fact that my dad said he did not want to be on any machines. Once again, he stopped eating and drinking and would sip only cold drinks. He told me to bring him home, but he had gotten so weak that they transferred him to a nursing home. The doctors at the nursing home said that I had to sign another DNR. Once again, I did not want to, but I did.

My son Andy offered me strength during this hard time. He was there with me at the nursing home, day and night. He was the one who, when I was crying, had to explain to my dad that the nursing home doctors wanted me to sign DNR papers again. For a nine-year-old, he was acting more like an adult, trying to hold me together.

My dad got worse day after day. The social worker said she could not send him home because I was too emotional, and I was holding him back from passing peacefully. They wanted me to let him go, which was so difficult to hear. So I held my dad's hand and assured him that it was going to be okay: He could go to be with Mommy and watch over us.

My dad passed away on August 10th, 2010, the same day I told him that it was okay to go. I was not there when he passed away because the doctors did not want me there. I cannot believe my dad listened to me. No one knows how I feel, and I cannot do anything to get rid of my guilt. Every day, I question my decision. Perhaps if I did not sign those DNR papers, the doctors would have helped him, and my dad would still be alive. I know that I have been a good daughter, but this feeling is what I must live with.



"I'm the mom of a beautiful and strong child," writes Lily Haripersaud. "Life can change in a second, but when you have that special son, that is what helps you to hold on and get through the days and nights." Born in Guyana, Lily Haripersaud has lived in the U.S. for 36 years. She studies at the YMCA Prospect Park New Americans Program, with instructor Christine Randall and site advisor Nabila Khan.

LUIS MARIN

The Flamingos' Story

When I was nine years old, I saw lots of flamingos every morning and every afternoon in my hometown of Boca del Rio, Venezuela. It was beautiful to see those birds flying in the air. They passed like a big caravan. You could stand there for more than 20 minutes and they would still be coming.

The flamingos' colors were red, pink, white and gray. The birds soared free. But sometimes it was sad to see the flamingos going to the lagoon or coming back to the mangrove because some birds got killed or lost one of their wings by the electricity cables.

The electricity for the town ran in aboveground cables. The birds always took the same route, past the cables, and some of them would hit those cables. When they lost a wing, I would get the flamingo with my cousin Neris. He would hold the flamingo's soft neck, leg and body while I tied the wing very tightly with a fishing line, and then I chopped off the part of the wing that was wounded. I put ash and kerosene in the scar and the next day the bird could walk. We released it in the lagoon to live free, but it couldn't fly with the other birds.

The flamingos without a wing could only walk with the other flamingos. They didn't fly anymore, living in the salty lagoon. They would see their family every night, but they didn't leave with them in the morning.

When the flamingos that couldn't fly saw the others flying, they started to make noise and wait for them to land. And when they got together, they started to dance with their necks high in the air. Some of them danced with their necks higher than the others, moving their bodies in interesting ways. Some of them only wanted to fight and make loud noises, but the others didn't pay any mind to them, because they were dancing together and touching each other softly and quietly. They felt free because nobody could kill them in the lagoon. Then when it was time for them to sleep, they bent a leg and rolled their necks onto their bodies.

Last July, I was talking to my cousin on the phone, and he told me three flamingos had just been killed by the cables at that moment. I would like to see those cables hanging looser. I think if the cables were looser the birds could pass over them. The cables are very tight and high. They are right in the way of the birds when they start to come down to land, and the poor flamingos lose their lives. There were two hundred flamingos, but soon there will be many fewer.



Luis Marin is 47 years old and has lived in New York City for 18 years. He was born in Venezuela, and he says, "Now I feel free because I am learning another language and express myself fine with other people." He would like to thank his tutors, Sara McAlister and Nate Roth, as well as Terry Sheehan, the site advisor, at the New York Public Library's Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing.

JOHN DOUGLAS

Socks

I am a sock. I keep people's feet warm and comfortable. And when people go out, they receive compliments about me. They hear, "Sir, I love your socks. Your feet look so cute in them."

But why do they treat me so badly? They bore holes in me. They make me sweaty and smelly. Afterward, they throw me in the garbage without a second thought. And then they go to the store and get a new pair.

Don't they know I have feelings? I am going to make their feet scratchy from now on.

They will say, "I am not buying that sock anymore. He is bad news."

But I don't care.

Questioning

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JOHN DOUGLAS

"I am a very positive person. I don't believe in doubts," writes 31-year-old Guyana native John Douglas. He has lived in New York City for over 12 years, and has dedicated his life to being a father of three and a professional boxer. A student at LaGuardia Community College's Adult Learning Center, John Douglas thanks instructor Miriam Fisher for her help.



TAMARA TSANKASHRILI

Where Is Safe?

I would like to share with you my search for a safe place. I think each person understands the definition of a safe place differently. For me and my family, safety means everything—a place where there is no war, where nobody’s life is in danger.

My father, a former member of the Georgian army, was fighting for his country’s and family’s safety and future. This was the main reason we left Georgia and moved to the United States.

In 2008, Georgia was at war with Russia. At that time, I was spending my summer in a small village with my younger sister and our cousin. One peaceful morning around five, we heard the heavy sound of a helicopter. Unexpectedly, there was the terrible noise of an explosion, something we had never experienced before. Then we saw a burning light on the horizon.

The explosion was so powerful that all the windows and doors in the house started cracking. We were all very scared, thinking that the next bomb was going to fall on our house.

A few hours later, we heard on the news that Russian aircraft were bombing Georgian territory. Living in this kind of environment is devastating, not only for people who don’t survive, but for those who do.

Soon after, I moved with my family to the United States, a place I considered the safest in the world, or so it looked from the outside. We settled in Brooklyn, in a safe neighborhood. I had always felt very comfortable in this area, and had never felt any danger.

This past summer, I had been hanging out with my friends and was returning home late at night. Even though I was all alone, I wasn’t scared. After I walked a few blocks, I saw a guy cross the street and pass very close to me. He looked drunk. I felt a bit uncomfortable, but I didn’t say anything. I just kept walking. I still had this uncomfortable feeling, so I kept looking back to check if

anybody was following me. Suddenly, this same guy ran toward me. Because there was nobody around, I started running too.

I had been running for about 15 minutes, as fast as I could, when I saw a group of people and asked for help. I was very, very scared, trembling all over with fear, when I finally got home.

Where is safe? I'm still looking.

Twenty-five-year-old Tamara Tsankashrili was born in the Republic of Georgia and has lived in New York City for two years. She studies at the College of Mount St. Vincent's Institute for Immigrant Concerns, where Enes deCarlo is her instructor, Mark Brik is the education director and Donna Kelsh is the director. Tamara Tsankashrili says, "I hope to continue my studies and have a successful career and future."



A Changed Hero

To me, a hero is someone of dignity, honesty and courage. A hero is a person who wouldn't be a bystander to injustice or to someone who is desperately in need. Therefore, when I saw Mr. John, my hero, steal from a department store, I was appalled and flabbergasted. I didn't know what to think, what to say or what to do.

Mr. John was a New York City firefighter who fought many fires of all sizes. He was the one who rescued my family and me out of my burning home, not once but on two occasions. I felt I owed my life to him. He was my hero.

On September 11th, 2001, he was one of the first responders at Ground Zero. His heroic behavior that day saved hundreds of lives. He worked in the rubble day and night, tirelessly looking for survivors, while hardly seeing his wife and two-year-old son for weeks at a time. His Herculean dedication was unparalleled. However, 10 months after working in the rubble, filled with demolished building materials, mercury, asbestos and a whole host of other dangerous and harmful debris, he was diagnosed with lung cancer. His illness caused him to retire.

Ten years later, his pension could no longer support him and his family. The government wasn't paying for the majority of his medical bills because they said what happened on September 11th didn't cause his illness. Now broken, he couldn't work, and couldn't provide for his family, so he started to steal.

We happened to see each other one day in a department store, on the jewelry floor. I was looking for an engagement ring, staring at a 14-karat gold ring, valued at ten thousand dollars. I was about to "pop the question." He was very happy for me. I said to him, "You know, Mr. John, if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here today. You are my hero." He said, "I was just doing my job. I'm glad that I could help."

I then walked on down the counter, looking at various shapes and sizes of rings. I glanced up to ask him, "How's life?" but he wasn't walking along with me.

He was looking at the ten-thousand-dollar ring as if it was talking to him. I kept on looking at the rings in the showcase. When I picked up my head two minutes later, it was just in time to see Mr. John slip the ring into his jacket pocket and run out.

I stood there for a while in complete shock. *No! Not you, Mr. John!* I said to myself. This man was my role model. I'd told the story of his heroics to many. My hero had changed.

"I am an electrician by trade," writes Junior Corniffe, age 25. "I enjoy playing the keyboard, fixing anything that is broken, watching TV and spending time with my family." Born in Jamaica, West Indies, Junior Corniffe has lived in New York City for two years. He studies at the Pre-GED Program at the Brooklyn Public Library's Coney Island Library. "My teacher, Emily Skalet, was most helpful to me. Her skill in seeing my weaknesses and her helpful comments have been my turning point and my strength."



MAHVASH MAHBOUBI

The Christmas Gift

It was a wintry night. I was walking home from my job and it was freezing outside. I had bought a sweater for my daughter as her Christmas gift. As I was walking, someone called out for me.

“Hi...hi!”

There was no one else in the street but a little boy.

“What are you doing outside? Don’t you see how cold it is? You should be at your home right now.”

“I am cold and I have nowhere to go.”

Because I am a mother, the innocence in his black eyes told me he was telling me the truth. He looked at the shopping bag I had. I took the sweater out and gave it to him to wear.

“This is so pretty. It feels good to be warm.”

I told him to keep it. He was still so cold that he was not able to smile. He said thank you, sat on the bench beside him and fell asleep quickly.

I didn’t know what to do. Indeed, there was nothing I could do. I called the police when I got home and told them about the situation I was just faced with. That was the most I could do at that time.

Weeks passed by, but I couldn’t forget his face in my mind. It deeply saddened me that I couldn’t do anything more for him. I had a small home; otherwise, I would have brought him home and taken care of him, at least for a while.

Several months passed by. One day, a good friend of mine called me and invited me to her home. It was such a long time since I had heard from her. She told me she had some surprising news for me and wanted to show me something.

I went to her home. We sat in the living room and started talking. She told me she went to the adoption center and finally succeeded in getting permission to adopt a child on her own. It was a pleasant surprise for me to hear that from her. I was listening to her talking about how she went through all those processes when

I heard a small voice calling me, “Hi...hi!”

A little boy was standing in front of me—the same little boy with those innocent black eyes. But this time his voice was different; this time I heard a happy tone. Not hungry and cold anymore, he had a room, a mother and a family to take care of him and cherish him every second. That day was a perfect day for me because I no longer had to worry about a little boy I met on a cold wintry night.

Born in Iran, Mahvash Mahboubi writes, “My first work experience was with children in a small village. I taught fifth grade. The village had no electricity or paved roads. The school had only two rooms, an office and a classroom for five different levels of students. I always remember those kids.” She thanks Tsansiu Chow, the literacy center manager at the Steinway Branch of the Queens Library, for his help and support.





Math/Pro-GED



FINDING ENCOURAGEMENT

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NELCY RAMIREZ

I Am From...

I am from yellow, blue and red, the flag of Colombia

I am from rice, beans, ground meat, fried pork,
grilled steak, plantains, arepa and avocados

I am from coffee beans, mango and lemon with salt

I am from loud, booming and earsplitting surroundings

I am from *cumbia*, meaning a traditional dance

I am from cruel, brutal emotions

I am from closing doors, sobbing and spending time alone

I am from a trap, a fence, meaning in my own wheelchair

I am from learning disabilities and cerebral palsy

I am from writing poetry on my lonely nights

I am from getting my feelings broken every time I love

I am from dreaming of owning my castle

I am from delicacy, outspokenness and curiosity

I am from love, romance and affection with that special person

I am from self-advocating for myself and others

I am from making myself who I am

I am from not following patterns, but creating my own.

"I am the kind of woman who does everything with love and passion," writes 31-year-old Nelcy Ramirez. "I love my friends and family the same kind of way." Originally from Colombia, Nelcy Ramirez has been living in New York City for 20 years and attends LaGuardia Community College's Adult Learning Center, where Miriam Fisher has been her teacher.



VASYL BARABASH

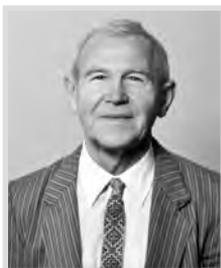
Was My Soul on the Moon?

Ukraine was in ruins after the Second World War. The Soviet troops retreated first, and blasted and burned the harvest in the fields so as to leave none for the enemy. Afterwards, the fascist armies retreated and destroyed everything else to keep it from their enemies. They did not think of the people of Ukraine.

They burned our beautiful house, which our father had built in 1937. My older sister and I were orphans. She was 17 and I was six years old. Soon we were sent to an orphanage in the village of Warwarivka. There were more than a hundred other orphans living there. We were badly dressed and always hungry. Our usual rations were a little pumpernickel bread and different soups. I remember one day we received white bread and American cheese in a round pack. That was a holiday lunch for us.

But I remember much more—the wet snow and the very cold springtime. Our footwear was very poor, so my feet were often wet and nearly frozen. I was often sick. Once I had a strong fever and terrible chills. I raved, and it seemed that I was lying on the hard and hot sands of the planet Mars. Afterwards, my soul sped through cold space to the moon. It seemed as if I drew something on the moon's surface, and then I saw the astronauts. They were planting the striped flag. That mirage passed, and once again my body defeated its horrible disease. I thanked our God and my guardian angel.

I did not draw before then, but after that terrible illness I began to draw and have done so ever since. I am an artist. I founded the Art Studio for Children in New York City on October 4th, 2002, and there the children develop their own talents.



Vasyl Barabash was born in Ukraine 73 years ago and has lived in the United States for 16 years. He studies English at the New York Public Library's Seward Park Center for Reading and Writing. Terry Sheehan is the site advisor, and Hilary Schenker is the literacy assistant. Another work by Vasyl Barabash, "Born in Ukraine," was published last year in Volume 9 of the Literacy Review.

ANA DURAN

A Safe Place

Somewhere I can call home

Where I can breathe and not feel alone

Where I can talk and no one knows

Where danger doesn't grow

Where I am not scared to show

Where I don't feel vulnerable

Where I can be myself

With no worries.

To feel comfortable

With the smell of flowers

I inhale.

Where as soon as I walk in

There is no such thing as failure.

Where I can lie down

Rub my face on a pillow and know

No one's going to hurt me.

A safe place.

Ana Duran is a 43-year-old Dominican Republic native, who has lived in the U.S. for 26 years. When she was young, she used to help out her mother, but she did not have an opportunity to go to school. Ana Duran works for a company in New Jersey and studies at the City College ESOL program with instructor Pamela Britnell. She has had many wonderful experiences in the United States.

ROMA RICHARDSON

The Unknown

I see the trees
Change their leaves
From Green
 to Gold
 Red
 Brown
 Yellow
 Mahogany.

As the wind blows
They keep moving their branches
 To and
 Fro
 Back and
 Forth.

The trees are Happy
The leaves are Sad
Leaving their home
 To go
 To the
 Unknown.

Born in Trinidad, West Indies, Roma Richardson has lived in New York City for 25 years. She writes: "I love to write poems, I love to read books and I love to travel." She studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Learning Center, where, she says, "I had great help." Winsome Pryce-Cortes is the site manager, Susan Knott is the literacy advisor, and Barbara Graham is Roma Richardson's tutor.

FATOU FOFANA

As a Young Lady

As a young lady, I always dreamed I would go to America. My dream finally came true in 1991. When I first arrived, I didn't know what to expect, but I met one of the kindest, most respectful of men. Later on, that man became my husband. I was so happy that I felt as if there was no limit to how far I could make it with him. In 1992, I gave birth to our first son, named Mohamadou. From there we moved to Manhattan. In 2000, I gave birth to our second son, named Sidy. We had a perfect family, but our dream didn't stop there. We had plans to build a house in Africa. Then I would go meet his family, and he would meet mine.

But in June we received bad news. My husband had been sick, and on July 16th, 2007, he was gone. God had taken him away from me. But I kept his plans alive. In 2007, I went back to Africa with my kids and met his family. I feel like I never lost my husband because in our sons I see his features, his way of life, and the way he acted. So he is always with me. He always wanted to teach me how to read and write, but God had different plans. Now I'm at the Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing, so I can make him and myself proud.

Yolanda Rodriguez, a tutor at the New York Public Library's Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing, sent this note: "Fatou Fofana, my student in a beginner literacy class, was looking forward to participating in the Literacy Review. She went home and worked on her piece with her son.... She was a very happy woman, in spite of the difficult things she had to face in life. Fatou Fofana passed away suddenly on the Friday after Thanksgiving. I am submitting her piece in honor of her hard work."

MAMADOU DIAKHATE

You Are Not Alone

I lost my father when I was one year old. I don't recall much about him, but I do remember one time when he spent a week with me. He worked out of town. That's why I didn't think much about his absence when he wasn't at home. He was so friendly with his younger sister and older brother, who took care of us. My father's brother loved us a lot and gave us much protection.

After my father went on his eternal trip, my uncle seemed to prefer me more than my siblings, and he was always there when I needed him. When I had to go somewhere, he accompanied me, waiting for me until I finished the activity. He developed my thinking and my heart. He taught me to believe in myself, and he used to talk with me as if I were a grown man. Sometimes, I felt that he wanted to realize his dreams through me. My new father owed his rationality to his profession: He was a doctor.

One day, I woke up and someone told me, "Your lovely father has passed away." Suddenly I had a big pain in my heart. The day before, my father had told me that he would always be my protector. And then, my friend, my second father, was no longer there.

After some time passed, I had a dream. I don't know if this dream symbolized a message from beyond, but I would like to share it with you. In this dream, I was walking with my second father. We crossed the forest and desert. Our last destination was the beach. We walked along the sea, and at each step, I saw a flash of my entire early life—the good and happy period of my childhood, as well as my troubles. Each of these events matched a footprint on the sand: mine and my father's. At the last part of our journey, I saw a painful flash: death and loss. Then, when I turned around, I saw only one series of footprints on the sand. *Mine*, I thought.

Distraught by what I saw, I told my father, "You said that you will always be there, even in the worst moments of my life. Now I cross the worst one and I don't see you by my side. Where is your footprint? What does this mean, Dad? You

leave me alone while I need more attention.” Before finishing my sentence, tears were streaming from my eyes.

He responded, “Even if I’m not in your current world I love you, and I will never leave you alone. I will be there when you’re down on your knees. When you saw one series of footprints, it wasn’t yours. It was mine. I carried you in my arms, my son.”

I learned many things from this dream. Even if we think we are alone, we aren’t. Our loved ones who disappear leave their footprint on our lives. Since this day, I have understood what Birago Diop, the Senegalese writer, said: “Those who are dead are never gone. The dead are not under the earth: They are in the trees that quiver, they are in the flowing water, they are in the still waters. They are crying in the grass. They are in the forest, they are in the house.” Your loved ones have merely gone on a trip, and you’ll never be alone.

“I was born in Kaolack, a town in Senegal, West Africa,” writes Mamadou Diakhate, age 29. “I received a degree in financial econometrics at Cheik Anta Diop University,” after which, “I was one of the lucky green card winners.” A student at the Department of Education’s Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, he thanks the instructional facilitator, Diana Raissis, his teacher, Tilla Alexander, and his former teacher, Emilita Poling, for their assistance.



ANNA CIESLIK

Friendship

Friendship is important in every person's life. Without friends, my life would be sad and empty. I have a few best friends. I love them and treat them like family.

Best friends are with you through good times and bad times. I know my friends never leave me alone in a difficult situation, and I never let them down. All the treasures of the world are not as valuable as a true friend. Therefore, it is important not to refuse to help a friend when they ask for help. For me, my best friends understand me even without words. When I have a problem, my friends always help me and cheer me up. I know I can tell my friends anything, and they always hear me.

I think people who don't have friends feel alone. Their world is sad and empty, but even a shadow of a friend is sufficient to make a person happy. Friendship and love are the most important values for me. I can't imagine my life without my friends. Friendship is the most beautiful gift one person can offer another. Silence between two friends is comfortable, and not a cause for worry.

I write about friendship because I feel it very deeply in my heart. A true friend is one for life, and I feel blessed to have found true friends. Although they live very far away, I feel their presence close to me. I miss them so much; however, I am sure they will stay in my life forever.

A love is two souls in one body; a friendship is one soul in two bodies. An honest and faithful friend is a huge support. In finding one, we find a treasure!



Born in Poland, Anna Cieslik has lived in New York City for two years. She is 26 years old and studies at the College of Staten Island's Adult Learning Center with instructor Judy Falci, and the ESOL director Elizabeth Schade. Anna Cieslik enjoys reading and hearing the stories of other people's lives. She believes that every person has something interesting to share, and says, "I am fascinated by this!"



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LUZ GOODRIDGE

Miss Peru

Many years ago, when I had just arrived to the United States, my supervisor at work asked, “Do you miss Peru?” I answered “No.”

My answer seemed to surprise her, but she didn’t say anything to me. For the rest of the day, I noticed her disappointed glances at me. *Why?* I asked myself, as I didn’t understand.

Sometime later, I realized why my supervisor was disappointed in me. She had asked me if I missed my country, Peru, but I understood her question as asking me whether I was Miss Peru. Needless to say, I was very embarrassed.

I don’t see my supervisor anymore, but one day I would like to see her and tell her that I am very happy that I live in the United States, but I always miss my country, Peru, even though I have never been and will never be “Miss Peru.”

“I like to have honest people around me. I appreciate true friendship,” writes 52-year-old Luz Goodridge. A native of Peru, she loves to travel and came to the United States 25 years ago. She has been living in New York City for 20 of those years. “My teacher, Ms. Alvard Berberyman, is my big helper and advisor,” says Luz Goodridge, who studies at the New York City College of Technology’s Adult Learning Center.



MARIA L. RIVERA

Where Is My Cigarette?

I grew up in a family of smokers. My mom smoked every day, just like my father. I was 15 years old when I smoked my first cigarette, in secret. I enjoyed it, and I felt like an adult when smoking. Ever since, I smoked, always in secret. I quit only while I was pregnant with my three children. Sometimes I tried to stop smoking, but I could not do it.

When I was 31 years old, I came to live in New York. I quickly saw there was more freedom to smoke. So I continued doing it.

One Saturday, I didn't go to work; I stayed home with my eldest son, who was eight years old. That morning after breakfast, I wanted to smoke my first cigarette of the day. I looked at my pack, and it was empty. I didn't have even one cigarette left, so I went to the store to buy more. I didn't have too much money, so I bought three cigarettes for a dollar. I smoked one and saved the other two on my table, and I continued my chores.

Three hours later, my body started to feel a lack of nicotine. I went to the table, where I had left my two cigarettes, but I was surprised. My cigarettes were not there! I looked for them for a few minutes, but I didn't find them. My son was watching TV, so I asked him, "Son, did you see my cigarettes?"

He said, "I didn't see anything, Mom!"

I kept looking. I felt nervous. I needed to smoke now! But I didn't find anything. I asked my son again. This time my expression was angry. I said, "Son, tell me the truth. Did you take my cigarettes?"

My son looked at me and said, "Yes, Mom, I took your cigarettes. I broke them and threw them out the window."

I looked out the window and saw my cigarettes on the ground, two floors below. I felt angry. "Why did you do that? I have no money to buy more!" I told him.

He looked at me. The tears came from his eyes as he said, "Mom, I saw on TV that each year, three million people in the world die from smoking. I don't want you be number three million and one. I don't want you to die, Mom! I love you!"

That touched my heart. I hugged my son, and we cried together. I told him, “I promise, Son, I will never smoke a cigarette again.”

From that day, I stopped smoking. Now, I have been free of nicotine for nine years.

Thank you, my dear son, for this lesson of love.

“I’m a worker and a mother of four lovely children,” writes Maria L. Rivera. Born in Mexico, she came to New York City nine years ago and currently studies English at the New York City Department of Education’s Bronx Adult Learning Center. “This is the first story I wrote in English. It was hard, but I learned a lot from this writing project. Thank you, my son Jose, my class, and the best teacher, Wendy Wen.”



SONIA NUNEZ

One of My Craziest Experiences

In May 1995, I graduated from the Technical University of Ambato in Ecuador. Exactly 24 hours later, I took a plane to Germany.

For some reason that I could never explain, I wanted to learn German, so I spent almost all my savings and set off. I had only four hundred dollars in my pocket. This is not much if you consider that it is the amount you pay for three nights in a hotel, without any other expenses. Finding information on the Internet was not an option for me. Before my departure, I never thought about learning basic German in order to ask for necessities, such as accommodations and food. I didn't have a plan to follow after I left the Munich Airport.

Surely that was the reason I preferred to spend the first night of my new life in the airport. Actually, I thought of returning to Ecuador the next day. But I am the type of person who does not take steps back. In Germany, contrary to the United States, you find hardly any people who speak Spanish, which made the problem of communication even worse.

Fortunately, however, humans have an amazing capacity for survival and adaptation. The next day, I left the airport and managed to find an affordable and safe place to stay. After some days of walking up and down the streets without knowing what to do or where to go, I remembered a phone number that my best friend had given me—"just in case."

When I called the number, a friendly female voice answered. She spoke German, but as soon as she heard my greeting she started speaking Spanish. I introduced myself very carefully because I didn't know what kind of relationship existed between my friend and her. After hearing my story, she invited me to visit her so we could have a conversation face to face.

I managed to find a train station, buy a ticket and take a train for the first time in my life. When I reached her home and saw her, I knew that my journey had reached its destination. I felt like she had been waiting for me for a long time.

She was very supportive during this difficult period. She was my connection in this new country, and helped me to navigate many challenges and obstacles. The fear that had overcome me that first night turned into the beginning of a new life. I learned to love this country as if it were mine. It is the place where I lived for many years and where my only son was born. I was lucky—everything could have gone very wrong.

I will never act so irresponsibly again. Or maybe I will. You never know.

“I am a Spanish teacher,” writes Sonia Nunez, age 41. She has been in the United States since 2008. Having already learned German when living and studying in Germany, now “I’m learning English at the College of Mount St. Vincent.” The College’s Director of the Institute for Immigrant Concerns is Donna Kelsh, and Mark Brik is the education director. Sonia Nunez’s instructor is Trevor Eckles.



JAMES DURR

An Out-of-Body Experience

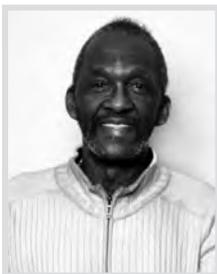
One day in March 1982, it was very cold. I suffer from arthritis, but that day I was on my way to work. I was waiting at West 225th Street for the train, which was delayed. I got dizzy and suddenly passed out on the platform. I struck my head on a billboard.

I went into a dream state. I saw myself rising above my body. I looked down and saw myself lying on the platform. I was in a fetal position, like a baby. Then I said to myself: *What am I doing up here, when I'm lying down there?* My arms flew up, and I looked through my hands. They were transparent. I knew I was flying around my body. I felt no pain, and was very comfortable. I realized I was becoming a spirit.

Then I saw the light. It was like the morning sun, so bright, coming nearer to me. My whole life passed before me, like pages turning rapidly. I felt energy. I was like an atom, spinning everywhere in space. An angel took me by the hands. Without speaking, we communicated. I wanted to see God. But the angel told me he was my guardian. He told me that, before I could see God, I had to go back to Earth to finish my education and my art.

I felt something touch me, three times, on my shoulder. I thought it was a policeman tapping me with a stick. He said, "Get up" three times. I woke up on the platform. There was no policeman.

A train came, and I got up and went home.



James Durr has lived in New York City his entire life, and spends his free time on his education and art. "I like to carve in wood and write stories and poems." He studies at the New York Public Library St. Agnes Center for Reading and Writing, where the site advisor is Sid Araujo. James Durr extends his thanks to tutors Sara Velez and Edie Cohen.

GLADYS MEI YUE LAM

Worker Education

My father was the secretary of a firemen's union in Hong Kong. He spoke and wrote Chinese, English and Spanish, as well. My parents had eight children. We were not too poor, but not rich. When I was a child, my father spent very little time with his children. He left home early and came back home very late, after we had gone to bed. At that time, we did not know why he was so busy; other fathers would have dinners with their children. We would see ours only on Sunday. I thought that my father did not like his children.

My father sent all of his children to Chinese school in which English was just one of the subjects and the language used only in English classes. As a result, my English level was low. When I went to high school, I learned why my father always came home late: He worked as a volunteer English teacher in a worker's union school after work. He taught workers' children English because the workers had no money to send their children to school. The English classes were free, and my father did not get paid. I did not understand why he did this.

After I graduated from high school, I had to find a job. I found that it was very difficult to get a job if your English level was low. I was very frustrated and disappointed. I knew that the road of my life would not be easy. Eventually, my uncle encouraged me to work in a bank. The salary was low, and I hated the job.

However, I was unable to switch to another job because of my poor English. At that time, I blamed my father and from the bottom of my heart, I was angry with him. He taught others English, but his children's English level was low. If he'd stayed at home after work to teach his children English, or if he'd sent his children to English school, all his children would have better jobs and better lives.

**I THOUGHT MY
FATHER DID
NOT LIKE HIS
CHILDREN.**

When I talked about this to my brothers and sisters, each of them agreed that he was not a good father. He served others, but sacrificed his children's future.

When my father died, several hundred people were present at his funeral. I was very surprised. I asked my uncles what he did to become so respected. They told me it was because my father contributed his time and his knowledge to people in need. He changed a lot of people's lives. They were very grateful to him.

Today, I study English in a worker's union school, and it is free. I am benefitting from it. Now I understand why my father taught.



Fifty-seven-year-old Gladys Mei Yue Lam immigrated from Hong Kong six months ago. She studies at the Consortium for Worker Education's Workers United Education Program, where Jackie Bain is her teacher and Nancy Lorence is the site director. Gladys Mei Yue Lam aims to get her college degree. She gives special thanks to Piling Ein, an advisor at the site, saying, "She was most helpful to me."

City and Country

When I was a little kid, I found myself living in the city of *Cap-Haitian* with my lovely family. I can remember my grandmother was living in the countryside, but my mother always had my grandmother come and visit twice a year. As a young child, I never had any interest in visiting my grandmother in the countryside. However, the reason was very inconsiderate. Most people who live in my city are likely to devalue those who live in the countryside. They always think that they walk funny in groups, they are not smart and they are illiterate. I, too, thought this was true at that time.

One day in the summer, my mother made a plan to send me away for vacation with my grandmother during the school break. I didn't feel like going because I didn't want to disconnect from my hometown. However, I wanted to make my grandmother happy, so I went.

When we got to the country, it was already nighttime. I didn't have a chance to see what the outside looked like. The next morning, I went outdoors alone to visit some fields not too far from the house. Some of the fields looked kind of empty, with some grassy ground and birds flying back and forth. However, there were some distinctive patterns of bumpy lines on the ground; they were made of dirt, with some small leaves growing on top. I didn't bother thinking about what they were. I started throwing small stones at the birds, running and jumping all over the place. I was really having good fun. It was a nice outing for me. When I came back to the house, I was so tired that I took a quick shower, then I fell asleep.

The next morning, I heard a lot of complaints about me. "Send that boy back to the city he came from," said people in front yard. "He destroyed the whole field." Some said, "He doesn't know how to plant a tree or walk well in the garden." "Send him home," said an old man. I was ashamed because I didn't know the empty field was a plantation area they had just made. After that, I learned from my mistake, and I tried to be more careful.

After a few hours, my grandmother came home. She went to the kitchen

with groceries, and then started to prepare a delicious lunch. The minute after I finished eating, I went to get some water in something called canaries, where they kept drinking water for the house. There was a very small can available next to the canaries, to take the water out. I couldn't see the water level inside of it, so I put my hand in, and half of my arm plunged into the water. Unluckily, someone was right behind me and observed what happened. He said, "Oh, my God, you are dirtying the water!" From that came more complaints, until I left the village.

I was astonished to experience and discover some differences between country people and city people. As a city person, I wasn't very knowledgeable in the country environment. It wasn't as if I couldn't be, but I had never had that kind of life experience. I enjoyed a different way of life and customs than the country people did. I learned that these preferences or experiences do not decrease ability or intelligence. When it comes to living in someone else's environment, we seem to be strange, and most of the time we need their training and their help to understand their environment. That experience helped me to distinguish and understand how valuable we all are. Undoubtedly, people are the most important of all things that exist on the planet. If so, we need to start thinking right and give value to one another, whether we are from the city or the countryside.



"I became a U.S. citizen when I fell in love with this country," writes 30-year-old Rosny St. Fleurant, who moved to New York City from Haiti eight years ago. He is a student at the New York City College of Technology's Adult Learning Center, where Jay Klokker is his teacher. "My goal is to pursue academic study, and major in computer science."

ARIANE IBARRA-TABOADA

A World Apart: My Early Education

The idea to recreate heaven on earth—*Alias Felicis*—came to America when Hernán Cortez came to conquer the country. Twelve priests from the order of St. Francis came along with him to back him up and perform the task. More religious orders came after, and established educational institutions throughout Mexico.

My own education in a convent elementary school kept this idea alive. I was educated by Catholic nuns from the order of the Incarnate Word. To them, you needed to do nothing but live in accordance with God's principles. By this, they meant following Moses' rules and avoiding at all cost mortal sin; being clean, saying your prayers every day, practicing calligraphy and reading the Bible. I took some everyday subjects as well, but they were not as important as what I'm about to describe.

Inside the convent was a world created by the nuns to be heaven on earth. Thick walls, narrow windows and high fences protected their world. Time was kept in mind and used as a reference, but it did not rule this world. Gardens were integrated into their everyday life, as were animals. They kept peacocks and birds because of their singing. After school, the nuns baked bread and served it in the gardens. There, you could join your friends, eat bread and play. Rituals, planned as a choreographed show, were meant to delight the eye. What comes to mind were the rituals dedicated to the Virgin Mary, celebrated during the entire month of May. Nothing mattered but to please her.

Nuns wore a burgundy, black and white frock with a translucent black veil from head to toe, and they made us wear a brilliantly white uniform. At mass, held every day, the church was filled with white gladiolas, and enough incense was burned to make one almost faint. Silence was interrupted by joyful Gregorian chants. Nuns walked aligned in pairs, procession-style. Our homework: to bring bridal bouquets.

This might sound like an idyllic world, and perhaps it was from the nuns' point of view, but they didn't think that life outside their world was different. The

nuns were educating me to be the perfect wife.

It was not until I finished elementary school and got into an American school that I discovered freedom of mind. I found mathematics, biology and music, but it was very hard for me to understand science subjects since I had never had the basics. On one hand, I had lived in a fantasy world, but my imagination was nurtured by the nuns' idyllic environment, and I found friendship, so I was a happy child and enjoyed my childhood. On the other hand, I regret not learning science from childhood. I was behind in everything, and could not catch up. It was a rude awakening when I left their world.



Born in Mexico, Ariane Ibarra-Taboada has lived in the U.S. for three years. A graduate of Tecnológico de Monterrey Torreón, she owned several businesses in Mexico. However, “my true passion is art in all its forms.” She spends time with her husband of 30 years, photographer Rodolfo Caballero, their three children, dog Lola and Lusiphine, a spider monkey. A student at the New York Public Library’s Riverside Branch, her ESOL instructor is Maria Neuda.

QUISQUELLA DE JESUS

It Is Not Andrew's Divorce

One day, my nine-year-old son, Andrew, woke up and went to my bedroom to look for his father, but his father was not there. Andrew asked me, “Mom, where is my daddy?” Andrew did not know that his daddy had moved out because we were divorced.

Andrew was very upset. He used to play baseball with his father watching. Now he didn’t want to go to the baseball field anymore. He used to do his homework quickly and nicely. Now he had mistakes in his math exercises. He used to talk a lot, and ask many questions. Now he was quiet, and stayed in his room. Andrew was thinking about his dad. He didn’t understand what a divorce was and why his father, Miguel, was not there. Andrew was frightened that his father had left him forever. He thought that Miguel and I got divorced because of him.

It was painful to have a divorce, but it was more painful to see my son suffering. I told Andrew that his father and I decided we would be happier living apart from each other. I explained to him that he did not do anything wrong. His father would come to see him or take him out soon. Andrew realized I was telling him that it was not his divorce. I told Andrew that his dad lived only a few blocks away, so his dad could visit, and Andrew could also visit his dad. Andrew learned that when parents get divorced it doesn’t mean they love their children less.

A year later, things gradually got back into a routine. Miguel sometimes came to see Andrew, and would take him out to baseball games. Sometimes Andrew stayed over with Miguel. Andrew began to ask questions again. He had a smile on his face again.

A native of the Dominican Republic, Quisquella De Jesus has lived in New York City for nine years. “I wrote about my son. He didn’t understand what a divorce was, so he suffered. Now I’m so happy because my son has realized that he is still loved by his father.” Quisquella De Jesus studies English with Wendy Wen at the New York City Department of Education’s Bronx Adult Learning Center at Phipps.







PERSEVERING

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INTESAR

Before Sleeping

When I am in bed, intending to sleep,
I suddenly recognize that this bed where I am is not my bed,
This is not my room.
Nothing around me is familiar.
Who am I?
I tell myself, oh, I am dreaming.
But it's not a dream, it is the truth.
I am in another place, another world,
Completely different from my world.
I realize that I have run away from my country and I am very far from home.
That I decided to keep everyone safe and get another life in another land,
To make better lives for all my family.
But I am in such a hard new place with so many rules.
Then I say to myself, many difficult things have happened in your life
And every time you faced them, so don't give up.
Take a deep breath and make your first move
And keep going.

Persevering

112

INTESAR

Intesar, age 53, was born in Iraq. She writes, "I am just a simple woman who has amazing children who are now adults, and a very nice husband who supports me and encourages me." Intesar studied in the Literacy for Life Program at the International Rescue Committee, New York City, where Emily Scott is the adult education coordinator. Intesar thanks her instructors, Erika Munk and Natasa Milasinovic.

ANA LUCIA DESOUZA

One Moment That Saved My Life

The Bowery Mission is a place where people go when they are homeless and struggling to stay off drugs and alcohol. I lived there for 14 months, after I had lost my way for 12 years. I was in so much pain when I went to the Mission.

For nine months I struggled with the decision to go there. I wanted to get better, but my friends would call me to hang out and do drugs. I knew it was wrong. I fought between doing what I knew was right, giving myself to a higher power, and hanging out with my friends.

In May 2005, I went to the Mission for an interview. They asked me if I was using drugs, and I lied and said I was not. It's a Christian program, at which "any woman who is without a home, without hope...is able to find spiritual, physical, emotional and practical help...and can have her life transformed by God's love through an intensive residential recovery program." But I wasn't ready to commit. I just wanted a place to stay and rest for a while. They gave me a date to move in—June 21st, 2005.

On that day, I was supposed to show up at nine in the morning, but I called and changed the time to 3:30 p.m. because I was high, and I needed to sleep it off. I had lost my apartment and was in a hotel, living on money I begged and borrowed from friends. I went to the Mission at 3:30 with drugs and paraphernalia and \$380 to buy more drugs. They said I had to give them all my personal belongings to hold, like my cell phone and my money. I panicked. I didn't want to give up everything. I made an excuse and ran out.

Outside, I began to walk. I felt totally alone. There were people around, but I was thinking: *This world is not my world; I don't belong anywhere.* I walked for 40 minutes. I wanted to go back to the Mission, but I wanted to finish the drugs I had first. That's how crazy and mixed-up my thinking was.

Then something happened to me. For the first time in 12 years, my mind became clear. Something pulled me in. I understood that I had to give up this unfruitful life I was living. I was lucid; I surrendered.

I got into a taxi and gave the address of the Mission. When I got out, I left the drugs and paraphernalia in the taxi on purpose. I wanted to leave everything from my old life behind. When I got into the Mission, they welcomed me. I felt so relieved that I slept the way I hadn't slept for 12 years. When I woke up in the morning, I had no desire for drugs. I felt free. The staff of the Mission left me alone for a few days. That was a very good thing for me.

Two weeks later I began to work on myself. I still had all my problems to work out—my fear of abandonment, neglect and loneliness, the loss of my family. I had to learn about forgiveness of myself and others. It was a struggle to go deep into the process of learning about myself, but I did it with the help of good people and God's love. The struggle was worth it.

Born in Brazil, 45-year-old Ana Lucia DeSouza has lived in New York City for 18 years. She writes, "I made a painting that was chosen to be on the cover of a booklet about the Bowery Mission Women's Center. Then the original was sold at an auction to benefit the Center." She thanks Lynda Myles, her writing group leader, and Elaine Sohn, the site advisor, at the New York Public Library's Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing, for their help.

OSWALDO RODRIGUEZ

A Boy Named Jenny

I remember Jenny, a nine-year-old boy with dark skin, big eyes and straight hair. He was very shy. He didn't like to talk with anybody, and his big eyes always reflected worry and sadness. He had eight sisters. The five eldest left the house because of his father. Jenny was born into a complicated family. His father was a typical "macho man," the only one who was allowed to talk at home. Nobody could do anything without Jenny's father's permission.

Jenny was nine when his mother left his father, and took the children with her. Jenny's life became even more difficult because he had to look after his three youngest sisters while his mother worked as a food vendor on the street. He had to cook and clean and also be the babysitter. His mother was a hard-working woman, but the money was not enough to support Jenny's ambitions.

Jenny and his mother were very connected to each other. When he looked into his mother's watery eyes, he understood that he had to go to bed without food. Jenny always wanted to go to school and graduate, but without money it was impossible. So one day he talked to his mother and said, "Mother, I am going to school at night." He was very young to take night classes; they were really only for adults; but he didn't care about that. Jenny asked his mother to buy cloth so that he could make his pants and shirt by himself. And even though they didn't have a sewing machine, Jenny made himself a uniform. It was not perfect, but he didn't care; he only wanted to go to school. Then Jenny had pants and a shirt, but no shoes, and he said, "Mother, just buy me a notebook and pencil; you don't have to worry about shoes. I can walk without them."

Everybody was surprised because he was the youngest in the class, but he thought that everybody was looking at him because he wasn't wearing shoes. The teacher started to call the list of students, and when he called "Jenny," everybody laughed, because "Jenny" is a girl's name. Jenny looked around the classroom, saw everybody laughing, and he laughed, too.

He understood that it was not a malicious laugh; it was just unexpected and funny. Jenny had to walk one hour to get to school, and he never missed even

one class. He didn't get any presents for Christmas Day or even for his birthday, but he was so happy with his mother and sisters. The most important thing was that he went to school, and he finished it.

Now Jenny is 47. His mother died one year ago. He lives in New York City. I know because I am Jenny.

A student of literature in Ecuador, Oswaldo Rodreguez has lived in New York City for 17 years. He previously attended the UTM (Universidad Técnica de Machala) in Ecuador and now studies at the Consortium for Worker Education's Workers United Education Program. He thanks instructor Jackie Bain for encouraging him to improve his English. He likes to write poetry and enjoys reading classic writers.



SAMANTHA BONILLA

Something I Want You to Know about Me

I spent my early childhood on the streets. By the time I was nine, I was staying outside until all hours of the night. Growing up in this environment, I got to see what it was like to make money in an illegal way. I learned what it was to be homeless and hungry. I started robbing people and selling drugs, and before I knew it I was in jail, facing a felony charge. It wasn't long after I got out that I was arrested again for an attempt to sell. My mom and dad couldn't handle all the police contact I was having between the ages of 12 and 18.

If you know me, you know I was brought up in a group home and with foster families that did not want me because of my background. I was on a five-year probation, and ran because I felt like my life was pointless. It wasn't the life I wanted, and I blamed my mom for introducing me to the streets.

When I was younger, I wouldn't care what you thought about me or how you saw me—but is that all there is to me? No, it is not. If you knew me today, you would see I am motivated to be better than what I was. I got into a G.E.D. program and then college, taking up both electric and plumbing trades to become a superintendent of apartment buildings. I work with others whose job it is to give back to the community. On weekends, I go to the studio to sing or to clubs to DJ, and for fun I work on web design. By looking at the cover of my book, would you know that, or would you judge me based on my outside presentation?

I am more than just a number or a criminal record. I am a student, a learner, a daughter and more. At this point, I no longer blame my mom for allowing me to be introduced to the streets. I blame myself for letting other individuals lead me, instead of being my own leader, which I am today.

"I'm much more than what a human eye can see," writes 19-year-old Bronx native Samantha Bonilla. "I'm a communicator, an educator and a teacher. I would hate to be judged based on my past, because if my past wasn't a lesson learned, I wouldn't be able to lead by experience." She studies at the Phipps Community Development Corporation, where her instructor is Gale Shangold, and her tutor is Laura Pendono.

SHAMEKA LAMBERT

A Day to Remember

In June, my grandmother got cancer. The only thing that ran through my head was death. While she lay in her hospital bed, and I was at home in my bed, I imagined what life would be like without her. How strong would I be? Would I hold up or fall?

One morning, I got a knock on my door at approximately six o'clock. I screamed, "Who is it?" It was my grandmother's boyfriend, Bill.

In a shaky voice, he whispered, "Meka, there's something wrong with your grandma."

In just a robe, I ran to the front of my house where her room was, scared that she was dead. I quickly went to her bedside and grabbed her.

"Grandma!" I screamed. When she looked up at me, my heart felt softer. It was a relief that she was still here with me.

But when she looked up, she seemed strange. She was slurring her words, with a confused look on her face. She cried in my arms, complaining about how bad her chest hurt.

Holding my precious grandmother, I cried, thinking, *Please don't die here in my arms. I'm not ready for you to go.* Thinking these would be my last words to her, I sang her favorite song, "Jesus is Love."

She looked up at me, and I said, "I'm going to follow your star wherever it leads you. I don't mind, and I hope you don't mind. I'm going to walk with you, talk with you and do all the things you want me to do because I know that Jesus is love."

The ambulance came, and the EMS technician told me her blood sugar was low—she was a diabetic. They gave her a shot. That was the closest I've come to losing my grandmother.

Born and raised in New York, 21-year-old Shameka Lambert describes herself as "multi-talented": "I know how to sing, write poetry, box and dance." She studies at the Fortune Society's Education Program with teacher/coordinator John Kefalas. Shameka Lambert writes, "If I could change the world, I would take the word 'violence' out of the dictionary."

YUDONG (EUGENE) ZHANG

Finding My Voice

When I first came to the United States, I was afraid of talking to anybody because of my poor accent. After I found that people couldn't understand me, I used to lose my voice. Then, when I was able to speak, I began to stammer. As a disappointing finale, I lost confidence in myself to the point where I wanted to be caged in a greenhouse and have no connection with the world.

One day, I walked to J. Hood Park, north of my apartment. At its center is a building, from which I heard happy sounds echoing when I passed by. The sign on the door said that it was a recreation center and that the annual fee was only 50 dollars, not so expensive. But I didn't dare to knock on the door. That night, the happy sounds haunted me, and they seemed to taunt me for my cowardice. I wept the whole night, but the next day I was still timid.

Some time later, my wife told me about a piece of news: The comedian Joe Wong, who was born in China and came to America to study for his Ph.D., had a successful talk show and had won first place in the Third Annual Great American Comedy Festival. It was a marvel for a Chinese immigrant to be a talk show presenter and comic, but he had done it. I was strongly encouraged, and exhorted myself to confront all challenges. That afternoon, I knocked on the door of the recreation center, and trying my best to keep a steady voice, said to the receptionist, "Excuse me, how can I get a membership card?"



Eugene Zhang hails from Suzhou, China. Age 26, he is a research scientist at Columbia University Medical Center and the New York State Psychiatric Institute. He moved to New York a year and a half ago, and has since visited over 100 landmarks and events throughout the city. He would like to thank his instructor, Fran Schnall, at the Fort Washington site of the New York Public Library. He writes, "Life is a boat in a rainstorm, and Fran's words are a guiding light throughout."

SHARON GENTLES

Reflecting on My Life

I am reflecting on my life of ten years ago. This is not easy, and it is something that I dread doing. In July 2000, I had arthroscopic surgery. After that procedure, nothing went right. Following the doctors' instructions and doing therapy, I was concerned about being a good patient. But by December, nothing had changed.

By April 2001, I had to have a knee replacement procedure. Things were looking up—a longer healing time, but I had high hopes. I always wanted the doctors to give me a time frame, something to work with. However, this battle was bigger than me. I fought with everything I had, but things got worse. After seeing many doctors, and spending months in the hospital, I got very tired. I cancelled all my appointments and gathered my thoughts. I was lost. I didn't know what to do. This was the first time I couldn't fix the problem by myself. I was just there, like a bump on a log, and gaining weight. I was like a baby; I cried and had many pity parties.

One evening, something happened. I was home alone, and I got very low. It was so bad that I started talking to God. I told Him that if this was the life I had to live, then He should take me home. Yes, I gave up; it was painful and very uncomfortable. I became comatose for a while. When I came to, I was in my bedroom, it was dark and the TV was on. I thought I was dead. When I realized I was alive, I thanked the Lord and asked Him to heal me and use me.

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THE PROBLEM BY
MYSELF.

This is the eleventh year since my illness started. So many things have happened along the journey. I am so grateful to be alive. I am doing well and doing things I have never done before. Life is looking brighter and I am learning more every day. Most of all, I want my life to be complete in every area—health, finances, family and community. In this life, it is important for me

to help others. We need each other in order to survive. I have many people helping me along my path.

Last but not least, in the next 10 years I would like to publish my autobiography, as well as books about many more good things. God has been good to me, and I have learned that if I want to be great I have to raise my expectations of myself.



“What I would like readers to know about me is that I am grateful to be alive,” writes Sharon Gentles, who was born in Jamaica, West Indies and has lived in New York City for 25 years. “My path has changed, and learning makes me a better person.” A student at the Brooklyn Public Library’s Bedford Learning Center, Sharon Gentles thanks Patricia Hazelwood, her tutor and mentor. Haniff Toussaint is the literacy advisor, and Edith Lewis is the site supervisor.

ROSA DIAZ

The Dreadful Year

It was dreadful when three tragedies happened in an eight-month period. Looking back on our grieving, I can't imagine how we survived.

First, my brother Francesco's death on Thanksgiving day overwhelmed the whole family. The siblings lost our loving brother; our parents were grieving the loss of their lovely son. We were planning a funeral on the day that others were giving thanks for their blessings.

I'm very grateful to have had a brother for the time that he lived, but I will miss him.

On December 31st, my father suffered a heart attack and was pronounced dead in the Emergency Room. Again, devastating news for the family, this time on New Year's Day. My mother, already reeling from the loss of her son, now was grieving the loss of her husband. My sister, brother and I were again grieving, this time for our father, and once again we were planning a funeral on a joyous holiday.

I will always remember him as a good father and I will miss him.

Six months later, in the summertime, a fire broke out in our house. The smoke spread quickly. I ran upstairs to my twin boys' room. The twins had been diagnosed with special needs, and though it had been very hard to take care of them, I had learned to understand and love them for who they were. Now I could not open the door. The thick smoke was seeping through the cracks in the closed door. I thought for a moment that my life would be over.

But the Fire Department and E.M.S. arrived, the twins were rescued and taken to different hospitals. My husband, Nelson, stayed with Noe, and I stayed with Isaac. Our first son, Jonathan, was 12 years old, and thank God nothing happened to him.

Nine days later, Noe died in the hospital. The most difficult part was when I had to tell Isaac that Noe was dead and had gone with God. I didn't know how

much he understood about the loss of his twin brother. Isaac could not be at the funeral or the burial because he was in the hospital in Intensive Care. I had to go back to the hospital to see Isaac, and he asked me, "How is Noe?" I said, "He is with God." Isaac stayed quiet for a moment. Now, sometimes when Isaac hears a song that Noe liked, he will say that it was Noe's song.

Nelson, Isaac, Jonathan and I came back to Brooklyn for a month. Nelson's brother let us stay in a small apartment in his house. We got lots of support from our church and the people in the community. My family and I are closer than ever before.

Looking back at all those difficult moments, I learned that God is in control of every moment. But I will miss my special son, Noe, my lovely brother, Francesco, and my father, Jose.



Rosa Diaz, age 55, was born in the Dominican Republic and has lived in Brooklyn for 41 years. She has been married for 35 years and has two sons. Rosa Diaz studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Coney Island Adult Learning Center. Her teacher is Jean Marie Buonacore, her tutor is Nick Titakis, and Darlene McCloud, the office associate, has also been helpful. Rosa Diaz advises people not to give up when there is a problem or even a tragedy: "Just look up and look forward."

FELICIA THOMAS

The Most Interesting Person I Met This Year

Finally, I met myself at 41 years old. When I was 17 years old, I went to apply for public assistance, and I had a problem when the case worker told me to fill out some paperwork. I could not do it. The lady told me, “Someday you are going to have to teach your little girl how to read and write.” She asked me, “What are you going to do?” and I said, “I am going to better myself.”

Then, at 18 years old, I went to a literacy program to learn the basic things I needed to learn to get me through life. I learned to read, write and spell a little bit. I did not finish school because by 18 years old, I had two kids, and I was married to someone I did not want to be with. By 21 years old, I had three kids, and I did not know who I was. I was only a mother and a wife, and that was not the life I wanted. I knew I had to finish the program because I had no one to help me.

So 20 years later, without any kids at home, I finally have time for myself. It’s not about the kids anymore; it’s about me. I am trying this life again. I will do whatever it takes to get to the next step.



Felicia Thomas has lived in New York City all her 41 years. “I have learned that it is important to read and write. Someday I am going to get my G.E.D. I will try my best to get it soon.” At the Brooklyn Public Library’s Flatbush Learning Center, Gladys Ortiz is the site supervisor, and Luz Diaz is Felicia Thomas’s tutor. Felicia Thomas advises: “Stay in school!”





CELEBRATING

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DIVINIA HERNANDEZ

My Best Christmas Present

Recently, I was talking to my children about Christmas gifts. They told me what kind of presents they want for Christmas. I was surprised because my children asked me for expensive gifts. When they finished their Christmas lists, I decided to talk to them about my childhood and how I celebrated Christmas with my parents.

I told them that I was a happy little girl. Although I did not have brothers and sisters, I never missed them because my mother and father were enough for me. However, sometimes when I felt alone I used to talk with my imaginary friends. Later, I told my children about my best Christmas gift ever. They were excited because they thought that the present I received was big, fabulous and extremely expensive.

This event happened 36 years ago on Christmas 1975, when I was five years old. I told them about how happy I was waiting for Christmas Eve. I had already made my Christmas list, but unfortunately a tragedy struck my family. On December 13th, my father died. Before this tragedy, never in my life had I felt pain,

but that day I cried a lot. When Christmas Eve came, my mother woke me up to see the Christmas presents because she wanted to make me feel happy, but I was sad about my daddy's death.

My mother showed me a lot of gifts from our family and friends. Although there were many presents, nothing caught my attention.

Finally, my mother gave me a present that was wrapped in simple brown paper. She suggested that I open this present, and finally, I opened it. I was shocked and speechless because this present was the last picture that my mother had taken of my father and me on the previous Christmas.

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EXPENSIVE.

Since then, this present has been the most important Christmas gift in my life.

I don't know if my story about my best Christmas gift changed my children's Christmas lists. However, I feel in the depths of my heart that they learned to appreciate feelings over material gifts.

"I came from the Dominican Republic looking for a dream," writes Divinia Hernandez. "I would like to get a bachelor's degree in business administration." Age 41, she has lived in New York City for 10 years. "Even today, my dream has not become reality. I am still struggling to get it." Divinia Hernandez is a student at the Hunter College SPELL Program, where Ruby Taylor MacBride is the ESOL instructor, and Laretta Goforth is the director.

MIRYAM AWUTE

My Greatest Birthday

Every year, I receive gifts for my birthday. Sometimes I don't like the presents, but I keep them as memories. The most delightful thing about my birthday is that, no matter what else happens, I always get a present from my grandmother.

I love her very much. She's a warm and caring person. But the fact is, I don't like her presents at all. The garments she gives me are usually knitted scarves, gloves, sweaters or socks. Sometimes I don't like the style; other times it's the color I hate. Sometimes the sweater is too big, or too long or too short. The gloves and the hat are usually too small, and the knitted scarves are always itchy. But I smile and thank my grandmother for her kindness and thoughtfulness.

I am an African. In my culture, when someone gives you a gift, you must keep it and offer thanks, whether you like it or not. It is a sign of respect, especially when the gift-giver is an elderly person.

Last year, a month before my birthday, I went to my grandparents' house. My grandmother told me she was not going to give me a knitted garment as a birthday gift, which raised my hope that I might actually get something I liked. When my birthday arrived, she was true to her word. She gave me a beautiful neckerchief with a floral design that had belonged to her. I was touched by the warmth of the gesture, but a little surprised.

I thought my grandmother had finally decided to give me something that a girl of 18 would really appreciate—an attractive piece of jewelry, a pair of fashionable shoes or a handbag, for example. Still, my grandmother was the only person who gave me a birthday present last year.

This year, I was scheduled to leave my native country of Togo for the United States a week after my 19th birthday. My family organized a big farewell party—their birthday gift to me—and my friends arrived with many gifts. My grandmother handed me a box that contained a pair of lovely gold earrings and a gold chain with a pendant, featuring the same floral design as the neckerchief. "I knew you didn't like the presents I gave you all this while," she said. "But you were

such a good girl to be so quiet and thankful.” I hugged my grandmother for a long moment, but it didn’t make my guilty feelings go away.

Today, living in New York City, I find that all my grandmother’s old gifts, especially the ones I had liked the least, are the most useful in the cold weather. The knitted sweaters, hats and gloves didn’t do me much good in the African heat, but in the fall and winter chill of New York, they are essential. I understand now why my grandmother gave me those gifts, and I realize more than I ever did that it is the thought, and not the present itself, that counts.



Miryam Awute is 19 years old and moved to New York from Togo, West Africa less than a year ago. She writes, “I plan to one day study business management and marketing communications, and would love to travel extensively throughout the world and learn new languages.” She currently speaks English and French, and wants to thank her writing tutor, Mark Mehler, at the Queens Library’s Central Adult Learning Center, for his support.

BENY RODRIGUEZ

Beautiful Tears

There were tears in my eyes
I looked at him and smiled
He touched my face and I cried.

He looked at me and said
Don't worry you're fine
It's a normal process you know
It's a normal process in life.

It's a beautiful girl they said
Everything else got quiet
A new voice was shining
I had my baby to hug that night.

There were tears in her eyes
I looked at her and smiled
I touched her face and she cried.

Beny Rodriguez came to New York City from the Dominican Republic six years ago with her family. She studies in the Bronx Community College CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program), with instructor Kristin Wrinkler. Beny Rodriguez writes, "It doesn't matter where you are from, what language you speak, or what your skin color is. The only thing that really matters is where you want to go and what you want to be."



MAGDALENA SOSA

A Very Special Dinner

Last Christmas, we had a very special dinner at my parents' house. We had been planning this party for a year, not only to celebrate Christmas, but also to reward our mom and dad for being excellent parents.

This party was so special because we were celebrating that my mom was with us again. A few weeks before the party, she went into a diabetic coma because her blood sugar level was too low. She started to feel very cold, and then she collapsed. We took her to the hospital immediately. A lot of doctors worked together to bring her back to life. When we arrived, I saw that they looked worried. They thought that she would never move some parts of her body again.

Finally, a doctor came out and told us that she was still unconscious. He suggested that we talk to her, so she might hear us and come back little by little. We told her that we were with her, and that we loved her a lot. And we did what she loves the most—we prayed. We invited her to join us, and we sang her favorite song, but we got no response. We spent days talking to her about how much we loved her and needed her. We let her know our lives would never be the same without her.

I started to make promises. I promised to take her to Mexico. Because she loves mariachi music, I told her that many mariachis would play just for her at Plaza Garibaldi in Mexico City. I asked her to picture the mariachis singing her all the songs she loves the most, and told her she, too, would be dressed like a mariachi.

Because she had once said, "I do not want to die before you make me a grandmother," I told her, "Mom, you have to wake up and wait for your granddaughter." I told her I could not be a mom without her.

I moved into the hospital room with her. I never went back home or left her alone. I took care of her as she took care of me when I was little. The days passed. I was running out of promises when a miracle happened: My mom squeezed my hand. She did not speak, but it was a great sign she was getting better. I kept talking to her. Then one day my mom said to me, her youngest child, "My little baby, I am back."

My heart was beating so fast I thought that it would come out of my chest.

I thought I was dreaming when she called me again. No words came out; I was speechless. Tears rolled down my cheeks, tears of happiness and thankfulness to God, who always keeps His promises. When my mom did not hear me answer her, she called me by my favorite name, Magdalena. Then I, too, came back to life, a life I almost lost with her. I gave her all the kisses and hugs that I could not give her the previous few weeks.

We invited a lot of family and friends to the Christmas party. My sisters cooked many different dishes: rice and beans, roasted pork, turkey, potatoes, lasagna, salad. For dessert, they made rice pudding, apple pie and sweet potato pie. We all dressed up.

We gave special thanks to God for giving us the chance to spend another memorable moment with our mother and for answering our prayers on this special occasion. We also celebrated baby Jesus' birthday and gave thanks for all the blessings He had given us during the year, for our family and friends and for the food we were about to eat. We made a toast with Champagne to our parents, asking God to keep blessing them with love, health, peace and hope.

Later, we gave our parents an award of recognition. It was a wooden plate that read: "For excellent parents, for choosing to take care of us when other parents would have run away; for still being with us whenever we need you; for working hard so we had everything we needed, and so we could be well educated; for showing us great values, such as love of God and others, honesty, and respect; for showing us how to find the good in every situation, and to keep on going regardless of the difficulties; how to learn from our mistakes and do better the next time; for your positive attitude every day; for forgiveness when we've offended you; for correcting us right away when we did something wrong; and overall for your unconditional love."

Our parents were so happy. They both cried. My father said that they were proud of us. My mom, who was still weak, was speechless, but full of emotion. I looked into my mom's eyes and she gave me a look filled with love and gratitude. I knew that after this party we would have a lot of things to catch up on, and with one look I let her know that I would keep my promise.

Born in the Dominican Republic, Magdalena Sosa had lived in the United States for only three months before writing "A Very Special Dinner." She studies at the College of Mount St. Vincent's Institute for Immigrant Concerns, with instructor Andrea Hermida. Mark Brik is the education director and Donna Kelsh is the director.



LUCY LIU

My Sweet Family Dinner

The Dragon Boat Festival is a traditional Chinese festival. My family usually gets together to celebrate many holidays; but this time, I decided to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival at home.

I bought many kinds of food. I spent hours stewing a pot of oxtail soup and slicing the vegetables, pork, fish, green onion and garlic. After I prepared everything, I started to cook. I poured oil into a pan. When the oil was heated, I put some garlic into the oil.

Sizzle, sizzle.

The garlic spread its fragrance far and wide. I tossed the pork and vegetables into the pan and turned them repeatedly with a spatula. Then I added some salt, cooking wine and other condiments.

I usually cook. I know how much seasoning I should use. So I didn't bother to taste the food. At last, I loaded the cooked food onto plates. I was so busy and joyful. While I cooked, I imagined my relatives enjoying the food. I smiled.

When my husband got home, I had set a full table of dishes.

"Wow, Mommy is so good. She cooked so much food!" My husband was surprised. Everybody sat around the table.

"Hooray!" My children were the first to pick up the food. My husband joined in, too. I looked at them. I was eager and hoped they all would love to eat it. Everyone looked happy. When the food was in my mouth, my smile froze.

There's something wrong. I thought. I tried every dish in a hurry. All the food was sweet. I got up and tasted the salt from the seasoning box. I frowned. The salt also was sweet. Now I knew I had used sugar instead of salt.

I couldn't say anything. I went to my bedroom. I was so angry with myself.

If I had tasted something beforehand, at least not every dish would have been sweet, I thought with regret.

My husband opened the door and came in. He hugged me and said, "Honey, come eat with us. It doesn't matter. You don't make many mistakes. The

food still is delicious.”

I was still upset. I didn’t want to eat anymore.

“Mom, come eat! Come eat,” my children shouted.

“See, our children would like to eat with you. Don’t let them down.” My husband was so strong. I did not have enough strength to struggle. He held onto me as I walked to the table.

“It’s still delicious, Mom,” my daughter said with a sweet smile.

“Yes. It’s still yummy, Mom,” my son said very loudly.

My husband stuffed pork in his mouth. “Mmmm. Yummy. Yummy.”

The sounds made it seem like they were eating the greatest foods. I looked at their likeable faces. Eventually, a big smile came on my face.

My family is sweeter than my dishes, I thought.

Lucy Liu wrote her family story during her first semester as a student in the advanced writing class of the Adult Literacy Program at University Settlement Society. Michael Hunter is the director of the program. Born in Fouzhou, China, Lucy Liu has lived in New York City for nine years. She loves to write and has many ideas for stories. “I hope one day I will speak English well. I hope to communicate in English with my children and others.”



“Happy Birthday to You”

I thought that all people like to sing the happy birthday song. But my daughter, Zoila, did not.

When she was four months old, we went to my nephew’s birthday party. Everything was joyous and fun, but when people started to sing the happy birthday song, my daughter’s little face was covered with fear, and she began to cry. I had to take her to the bedroom. I thought something might have happened, but there was nothing wrong. Another time, when we celebrated another cousin’s birthday, the same thing happened. At the third birthday party we attended, I finally understood that she did not like the happy birthday song.

The funniest part was that when she celebrated her first birthday, we could not sing the song to her. However, we still had to fulfill our social and family obligations. Then there were more birthday party celebrations. When the next celebration came, we went there, but I had to take Zoila away from the party before people sang. Looking at us, everyone seemed to know Zoila’s peculiar reaction, and they smiled with understanding, but I felt a little bit awkward.

Two months before Zoila turned three years old, I talked with her and told her that the happy birthday song was a beautiful song and all people love to sing it. *What a caring, patient and loving mother!* I said to myself. I sang the song softly to her for several days. She cried at my first attempts, but I was like a broken disc until I reached the moment when my daughter stopped crying.

At Zoila’s third birthday party, I was so happy! For the first time at a party, I could sing her the song. She was also very happy, and people at the party began to clap loudly. My daughter’s little face showed no fear, no tears, but a smile like a morning glory. Now my daughter is nine years old. She has passed six birthday parties and sung “Happy

WHEN THE NEXT
CELEBRATION
CAME...I HAD TO
TAKE ZOILA AWAY
FROM THE PARTY
BEFORE PEOPLE
SANG.

Birthday” for herself, for me and for her friends. She loves this song and often dances to it. I look at her as she sings the song, and I follow her dance steps. I can never forget this story. It always brings a smile to my face.

Born in Ecuador, Yela Noboa has lived in the United States for 11 years. “I’m very happy to study English at Phipps,” she writes, referring to the New York City Department of Education’s Bronx Adult Learning Center. “It was very important for me to write this story because I can express my feelings and practice my writing. I’d like to thank my teacher, Wendy Wen, and the Literacy Review for the opportunity.”







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AMGAD SEIDI

Trees

The most beautiful things you see in this wild world are in nature. I mean the natural beauty all around us, like the ocean, mountains and trees. There is the sky, with its dark clouds that seem like the beautiful sad eyes that might tear at any moment. But these tears are different than any other tears. These tears are full of love and emotion. Once they hit the ground, the soil becomes moist.

Then there are trees. You might ask yourself, What's the beauty of a tree? To me, there is so much beauty, starting with their shape, color, height, branches and leaves. Every tree has its own story to tell. I enjoy looking at them and love to take pictures of them. The leaves of the trees remind me of human beings. They sprout in spring and mature in the summer. By autumn, they have slowly changed their original color. The wind blows hard, and they drop down to the ground. When winter comes, the snow covers the branches, making the tree look white and fluffy, like cotton candy. What a beautiful sight! In the spring, it starts again.

Year after year, trees stand there so strong.

Amgad Seidi, age 24, was born in Yemen and has lived in New York City for almost four years. She appreciates the saying: "I may not know the key to success, but I know the key to failure is trying to please everyone." At the New York Public Library's St. George Center for Reading and Writing, in Staten Island, she says site advisor Geniene Monterrosa and tutor Dennis Kearny "are two people who really helped me with my reading and writing skills."

SHUXIA WANG

I Will Love You Forever

"**M**ommy! Look! Look at me!" My daughter rushed into the kitchen. She stood in front of me, and couldn't wait for even one second. When I saw her, dressed up and wearing make-up, I could not help laughing. She had used lipstick to draw many big teeth around her mouth and darkened her eyes with eye pencil, so she looked like a panda. My big dress on her tiny body looked like a moving sleeping bag.

"Oh, my little clown, I love you!" I said.

"I'm not a clown! I'm a princess!" she said in naughty protest.

"I'm sorry, my little princess, you are so beautiful. I love you."

Then she kissed me and ran away.

My daughter's name is Emily, and she's four years old, with short hair, so she looks like Dora the Explorer. When she is smiling, two dimples appear, one on each of her cheeks. Like all girls her age, Emily dreams of being a princess. She has a strong sense of beauty. Every time we go out, she not only chooses her clothes by herself, but also teaches me what makes me look good.

She wants to have a sister one day. Once she put a pillow under her clothes and said, "Mommy, I have a baby, a baby girl!" She patted her belly. "Now, I will have a sister to play with me!"

Sometimes she wants to help me do housework. One day, when she was two years old, my friend visited me. When we were talking, Emily called me, "Mommy, water!" I came into the bathroom, and it looked like a swimming pool. She was holding her stuffed bear, and her clothes were soaking wet.

"What are you doing?" I asked angrily.

She looked at me innocently. "I'm washing my baby."

"Oh, my naughty girl!" I said.

One night, I taught her a Chinese poem. I explained it to her: A man left his family and lived far away from home. When he looked up at the full moon, he felt lonely and sad, for he missed his mother. I said, "Your grandmother lives in

China. She's very old, and I miss her very much!"

She comforted me, saying, "Don't worry about that. You have me. Tomorrow you can go to see Grandma by airplane, and I'll go with you."

Tears streamed down my face.

Emily fell asleep. I looked at her, and there was still a smile on her face. Maybe she was dreaming that we were on the way to Grandma's house in China. I kissed her gently.

"I love you, my little princess. Although I am not a queen, no matter how poor I am, I will give you my best. I will love you forever!"

This is Shuxia Wang's first story written in English, after immigrating from China three years ago. She writes, "As a Chinese teacher in China, I loved writing. Now I'm studying English at the Phipps Center. I wish that English could become my best friend." She gives thanks to Wendy Wen, her instructor at the New York City Department of Education's Bronx Adult Learning Center at Phipps, for all her help.

BERNICE BRISTOL-LAROC

In Honor of My Mother

I am writing in honor of my mother, Elexdrine Bristol, a woman of strength in everything she did. I admire her not because she was my mom, but because of who she was. She took care of six children on her own.

My mother was a woman who loved to pray. Prayer was her life, which is where she received her strength.

One thing I admire about my mom was her love for people. Anyone who would come to her home would never leave hungry. If someone had no place to stay, she would let him or her spend some time with us until they found a home.

My mother was a pillar of strength. She became ill, and could not work and was in a wheelchair. But she never complained to anyone. That's how strong she was. My mom will always be remembered and admired as a great woman of strength, and a woman who could never say "No" to people in need.



Originally from Trinidad and Tobago, Bernice Bristol-LaRoc has lived in New York City for 24 years. "I am a home health aide because I like taking care of the elderly. I am passionate about what I do," she writes. "I have two children and four grandkids." She studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Eastern Parkway Learning Center with her tutor, Ann Marie Harrigan. Gladys Scott is the site advisor and Judy Soffian the site supervisor.

ADJOWA MAGLO

A Tribute to My Sister

My sister Rose was the fifth child in my family. My mother had six children, two boys and four girls. Rose was very friendly, caring, sweet and generous. She was also a peacemaker in the family and a fashionista. We were very close to each other. When our oldest sister got married, Rose, who was 10 years old, went to live with her. That was a tradition in Togo.

When Rose turned 23, she started her own small business for women's clothing. Her business was doing well, so she wanted to move out. My older sister gave her permission and helped her find a nice apartment in a city 25 miles away. By that time, I was living in New York, and sometimes Rose called me to ask if she could send me an African dress from back home. But I said to her, "Don't waste your money on me. Save your money for yourself."

Now I wish I had accepted her offer.

In 2003, I got a call from my brother, and he said, "Rose is very sick." I told him to take her to our family doctor. The doctor did many tests, but all the results were negative. But the doctor knew Rose very well, and he could see the change in her appearance. So he requested an HIV test. When the test came back, it was bad news. Rose was in the last stage of HIV/AIDS.

It was a very difficult time for my family and me. Because Rose was so ill, the doctor kept her in the hospital. My mother stayed at her bedside all the time; she even slept there. I remember I used to call Rose in the morning and at nighttime to try to cheer her up, but I could feel in her voice the quietness and the sadness. I sang to her and told her to listen to church music. I told her we all loved her, and we were going to fight together.

I told Rose I would do anything for her, but I asked her not to tell Mama what her illness was. Mama loved her so much, and I didn't know how she would take it. I also told my brothers and sisters that we had to keep it among ourselves because there was so much prejudice about AIDS in Africa. I didn't want her to have to go through the dirty looks, the rejection and the loneliness. Sadly, Rose passed away after she was in the hospital for only one week.

After the funeral, I finally told Mama that Rose had died of AIDS. She accepted it calmly and said it was what she suspected. Since then, I have wanted to find a way to honor Rose's memory. I'm hoping in the future to create a place for AIDS orphans in my country, where they can eat and play and get clothing, so their lives will be easier and happier. And that would make me happy, too.



Adjowa Maglo, age 39, was born in Togo, West Africa. A New Yorker for 15 years, she has often been employed as a nanny. She writes: "I do hope someday to go to college and get a degree, so I can work with children in a professional capacity." A student at the New York Public Library's Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing, she thanks her tutor, Judy Friedman. "She keeps me coming back every week." Elaine Sohn is the site advisor.

MARION BURRIS

I Just Want to Say Thank You

My Aunt Doris is a wonderful person and so sweet to others. When I was eight, my sister nine and my brother seven, we lived with my Aunt Doris.

At first, we didn't know she had so many kids. There were 12 of them living in the house in Jacksonville, Florida that my uncle had built for his family.

It was very strange at first to see all of those kids. Aunt Doris told her kids that we would be living with them because our mother had passed away. We had to get along with each other because now there were 15 of us. At first it was hard because my brother, sister and I were not used to a big family. We all did housework, washed clothes and went to church every day. Aunt Doris also cooked meals for the church and served the people food.

I can think back to when I was getting into trouble. One day, I decided to punch someone in the face. I really didn't know why, maybe because I wanted my mother and didn't want to live in such a big family. Another time, I fought in school, and Aunt Doris had to leave her job to come and pick me up. She was very mad at me because I was the only child out of 15 who was giving her problems.

So one day she sat me down and talked to me about how I was acting out. She understood why, and she told me that she missed my mother too, but that didn't give me the right to throw a chair at someone. My aunt always had switches in the house. I didn't understand why until she had to use them on me. Those switches really hurt.

After that day, I never got into trouble again. When summer came around, my sister, brother and I would ask Auntie if we could go to visit our cousins in New York for the summer. She would say okay, so we would go for the summer and come back before school started every year.

Then one day, one of my cousins in New York asked us if we wanted to live with them, and we said yes, but what will Aunt Doris say? My cousin called my auntie that night and told her we wanted to stay in New York. My auntie really didn't want us to stay there, but after she spoke to my older sister, my auntie said

fine. She just wanted to make sure her babies were taken care of.

We stayed in New York for good, but every day we would call her, and she was so glad to hear from us. Sometimes, we would go to see her when the summer came. She liked that, and her kids missed us, too. It was fun going back and forth from New York to Jacksonville.

It was fun growing up with my aunt. She was and still is the most patient and understanding person I have ever known. If it wasn't for her taking us in when my mother passed, I don't know what would have happened to the three of us. So I thank you, Auntie, for your love, kindness and understanding. You taught me what family is truly about.



Marion Burris has lived in New York for 47 of her 53 years, with the difference spent in Florida with her Aunt Doris. "My passion is cooking and teaching my grandchildren to cook." She studies at the Phipps Community Development Corporation and would like to thank her teacher: "Ms. Gale Shangold is an inspiration to me because she is patient in teaching."

LUIS GUERRA

Building My Confidence

Five months ago, I left my country, Colombia, to travel to the United States in search of a better life and to achieve what many call “The American Dream.”

The day of the flight that was to take me directly from my city, Bogota, to John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City was a sea of tears and concerns as I did nothing but wonder: *How are things there? Will I be able to adapt to the customs of that country? Will I get a good job in my profession? Will I be able to communicate with others?* In short, I had a thousand questions about starting a new life in another country.

But I could not turn back; on the contrary, I had to continue forward with this madness. So I tried to convince myself that everything would be fine, that the hardest part, leaving my house, had passed, so the decision was made, and I had to keep moving on.

But when I got off the plane, I realized that this was not just a trip to another country, it was a journey to a new world. First was the language problem. I was desperate and frightened because I was alone and could not communicate with anyone, and because of my nervousness, I did not remember most of the little English that I had been taught in school many years earlier.

But, as they say in my country, “Learn by looking”: I began to observe and imitate everything other people did. Slowly, I felt calmer because no one was aware of my ignorance. Or so I thought.

When I went to the customs officer with my bags, he said in English, “Good morning. Papers, please!” I did not answer anything because I did not understand what he was saying. I just gave him all my papers as the others had. The agent reviewed the documents, smiled and asked, “Colombian? Reason for your trip to the United States?”

This scared me as I did not understand what he said. Then all I could think of was to tell him my name in English, my country, the address and phone number of my new home, and that my dad was waiting outside the airport.

The officer began to laugh, and I thought he was making fun of me. So I took my bags and my documents, but when I started to leave, he called me back

and said, “Relax! I am just laughing at the way you speak English.” I did not feel this was right and I said, “You should not laugh at me because this is the first time I am practicing the little English that I learned.” The agent answered, “Excuse me, you do not speak the language well, but at least it can be understood. Do not be afraid to talk. Look, if you want to learn more English, there are libraries throughout New York where you can study English for free. Find a library near where you live, and start taking classes now. And certainly welcome to the U.S.A. and good luck.” I did not answer; I just turned around and walked out of the airport.

The day after arriving, the first thing I did was to leave my house to register my documents, visit the city and learn to use the subway. Doing that, I was filled with satisfaction that I was finding a course in this country, but sadly I could not do anything else because I had no documents and had to wait at least one month until I got my first ID. After I got my ID, I remembered the words of the airport official, and I found a library nearby and signed up for an English course.

Today, five months after coming to this great country, I am about to finish my first level of English. I am very grateful to everyone who helped me: relatives, teachers and peers. But I am especially grateful to that person at the airport who told me how I could learn English and whom I never thanked for the valuable information he shared with me.

Luis Guerra is 31 years old and moved from his home country of Colombia to New York less than a year ago. He writes, “I lived all my life in Colombia. Now I’m starting again in this great country, looking for new opportunities to grow, to learn about this culture and to have my own family.” He has been studying at the Long Island City branch of the Queens Library, and would like to thank his teacher, Fran Schnall, for her patience and support.

YANMING LIANG

Freedom

"**W**aaaah, waaaah." I hear a shrieking, which sounds like "help" to me. Two newborns that look like my daughter are floating in the water. I cannot move. My heart hurts. I cannot breathe. I feel the water falling over my whole head and face. I want to scream for help, but I cannot speak. That bad dream still haunts me; the picture is so vivid, just as if it happened yesterday.

It was in China. Every couple under Chinese law could only have one child. I already had a one-year-old daughter. The government doctor put a birth control ring inside my body. This gave me an infection, a backache and headache. I was not allowed to take it out. For a few months, my menstruation had stopped, but I wasn't too worried about that. Unbelievably, I soon found out that I was three months pregnant. I took off a day of work to see the doctor, and my company found out. My company and the government forced me to have an abortion. I couldn't say no. Three people accompanied me to the hospital. They didn't give me any anesthesia, and I felt so much pain. My body felt as if it were tearing apart. After it was done, I saw a yellow cup with some red blood. I heard the doctor tell the nurses that there were two embryos in it. Then, I saw them put it in the sink as the water was running from the faucets. I was numb.

Five years later, I came to the United States to begin a new life. I paid \$180 in Chinatown to take out the birth control ring. I promised myself to have a life of freedom and choices. Though I couldn't speak much English in the beginning, I went to school and tried to practice English in the street. I found a close friend and roommate, also from China, and have maintained this friendship throughout the years.

Now, I feel like a true resident of the Big Apple. I work hard and volunteer in the community. I'm also an interpreter at a seniors' residence, helping the social workers, nurses and doctors. I volunteer at Gouverneur

I PROMISED
MYSELF
TO HAVE
A LIFE OF
FREEDOM
AND
CHOICES.

Healthcare Services, where I interpret for Chinese immigrants. I still go to school to study English and computers. I'm even taking a citizenship class and have already applied for citizenship. If I pass the test, I will be an American citizen and hopefully will become a professional interpreter someday, living a life of happiness in the land of freedom.



Originally from China, Yanming Liang has lived in the United States for 16 years. "I'm the mother of a beautiful, smart daughter," she writes. Aside from studying English at the New York City Department of Education's Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, she enjoys reading and traveling. She is thankful for the help from her teacher, Tilla Alexander, as well as the site's instructional facilitator, Diana Raissis.

WILAWAN THIRAPATARAPONG

My Teacher

My teacher is not an actor
but plays a variety of roles.

My teacher is not a guide
but navigates students in the right direction.

My teacher is not an orator
but makes difficult lessons easy to understand.

My teacher is not a politician
but organizes students to keep within the rules.

My teacher is not an artist
but teaches students to draw plans for the future.

My teacher is not an inspector
but helps students find their errors and correct them.

My teacher is not a diplomat
but wisely mediates between students with different opinions.

My teacher is not a psychologist
but makes students feel comfortable when they have problems.

My teacher is a person
who wants students to grow and succeed in their lives.

Born in Bangkok, Thailand, and a New York City resident for only seven months, 35-year-old Wilawan Thirapatarapong is a physiatrist—a rehabilitation doctor—and also a teacher of medical students at Thailand’s Mahidol University. “I came here to gain medical experience by being a volunteer in a hospital. I wrote this poem for my English teacher, Peter Tilley.” Wilawan Thirapatarapong studies at the New York Public Library’s Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing, where the site advisor is Elaine Sohn.



NATALIA PANKRATOVA

Study for a Hundred Years

There is a common Russian saying, “Live for a hundred years, study for a hundred years.” This means that each person has to continue studying for her entire life. A baby is brought into the world in order to learn about the world. To speak philosophically, a person should recognize the truth of life, meaning that she should learn about this world. The path of mastering the surrounding world begins in the first days of a person’s life and lasts until the end. In the beginning, a mother helps her baby to study the world. Later, of course, schools and universities help. The person will also acquire knowledge and skills through studying. After high school, young people stand at the crossroad and try to choose the right way for their future. They must make important decisions about their work or professions, which may last their entire lives. Now the person may have five to 10 more years of intensive training. Throughout a person’s career she continues to acquire new knowledge and understanding. A person should never stop reaching for more knowledge of the world, because there is no limit to what a person can learn and there never will be!

Every single day we should discover something new. This doesn’t only mean we should read the newspaper and watch TV to know the news all over the world. It also means we should continue to study deeply to improve ourselves and continue to learn more about our chosen profession. When our work becomes routine and we do our jobs mechanically, we should try to rediscover the creativity in our jobs to improve ourselves. Only in this way can we make small steps to progress, and these small steps become big steps.

I appreciate the United States very much for giving me an opportunity to continue studying. There are not many countries where a person has the opportunity to continue studying long after she has graduated from high school, and even start a new career. I am very impressed by many older people I see who go back to school, not always for a career, but to improve their knowledge of the world.

When I go to college, I will get my degree, and then I will continue my

studies along with my work, so I can continue to learn about my career and the world. I will try to get a Master's degree or a Ph.D. I will also help younger students who are beginning their studies. When I worked as a teacher in my country, I noticed that when I taught my students, they in turn taught me something new.

I wish every person would continue studying throughout his or her life, through the Internet, meetings, seminars and conferences. We should always keep our hands on the pulse of the world news in our areas of interest. We should never stop working to find out new and interesting things. Knowledge is power and happiness! A happy life is not based on money; it is based on a person's ability to learn, grow and be challenged. These three things help to improve our ability to contribute to society. We should constantly learn and help others to learn. We should continue to study all our lives!

Natalia Pankratova, age 38, was born in Russia and has lived in New York City for nine years. She studies at the College of Staten Island's CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program) with instructor Azadeh Leonard, to whom she is very grateful. Elizabeth Schade is the ESOL director of the site. Natalie Pankratova has a Master's degree in the teaching of literature, language and art. She hopes to continue her education at CSI and says, "I am very appreciative to the United States for giving me an opportunity to continue my studies."



Write If You Can!

I believe being a writer is very hard, but it is also very enjoyable. Because explaining emotions is very difficult, when I want to write I try to escape to a place far away in my mind that helps me get in touch with my feelings. As I begin writing, I feel pressure in my brain, as though I am in space. Planets spin loudly all around me. I feel like there is an endless sea before me. Emotions are a very big ocean in the human mind. If you can swim with confidence, you can find an island and be safe. You can pick up pearls from the deepest part of the ocean. Actually, the hardest part of writing is to catch your imagination and never give up.

Writing is very enjoyable, too, because you can return to your childhood and re-live the feeling of fun. When I decide to write, I begin to play hide and seek with the words in my mind. I close my eyes and see where they are hiding. I open my eyes and the words are there. After searching the most remote places in my mind, I touch the words, and I am the happiest person in the world because now it is *my turn!*

It is fun to write because I feel excited like a little child. When I was young, I never fell asleep the night before a holiday. Now when I decide to write something, I don't sleep all night, either. I keep a pen and paper by my bed, so when I think of something that interests me, I can make a note of it. Even if you make up your mind to write, it is still hard. But when you start, your fountain flows.

Write, write and write!



A writer in her native Turkey, Dilek Ustun Ozlap has lived in New York City for a little over a year. She is 38 years old and enjoys writing science and mystery stories. When she was young, she wrote for a children's magazine, but she had to discontinue. Now, "I have started to write again!" She studies at the College of Staten Island's Adult Learning Center, where Elizabeth Schade is the ESOL director. Dilek Ustun Ozlap thanks her instructor, Judy Falci, very much.

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212-666-1920
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Diana Raissis, Instructional Facilitator
draissi@schools.nyc.gov

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY CENTERS FOR READING AND WRITING

Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing

174 E. 110th Street
New York, NY 10029
212-534-1613
Colette Hughes, Literacy Assistant
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Elaine Sohn, Site Advisor
elainesohn@nypl.org

Harlem

9 W. 124th Street
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212-369-2714
Sid Araujo, Site Advisor
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Seward Park

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New York, NY 10002
212-529-2909
Hilary Schenker, Literacy Assistant
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Terry Sheehan, Site Advisor
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St. Agnes

444 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10024
212-790-3432
Sid Araujo, Site Advisor
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St. George

5 Central Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-816-1025
Geniene Monterrosa, Literacy Assistant
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Tompkins Square

331 E. 10th Street
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212-673-4528
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NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY ESOL PROGRAMS

Fort Washington

535 W. 179th Street
New York, NY 10022-5799
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Riverside

127 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10023
212-870-1810
Maria Neuda, ESL Instructor
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QUEENS LIBRARY ADULT LEARNING CENTERS

Central

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Queens, NY 11432
718-480-4222
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Mara Raizer, Assistant Center Manager
Ashia Hossain, Literacy Specialist
Mark Mehler, Instructor
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Long Island City

3744 21st Street
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Peninsula

92-25 Rockaway Beach Boulevard
Rockaway Beach, NY 11693
718-634-1110
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Barbara Miller, Center Manager
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Rochdale Village

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Steinway

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Tsansiu Chow, Literacy Center Manager
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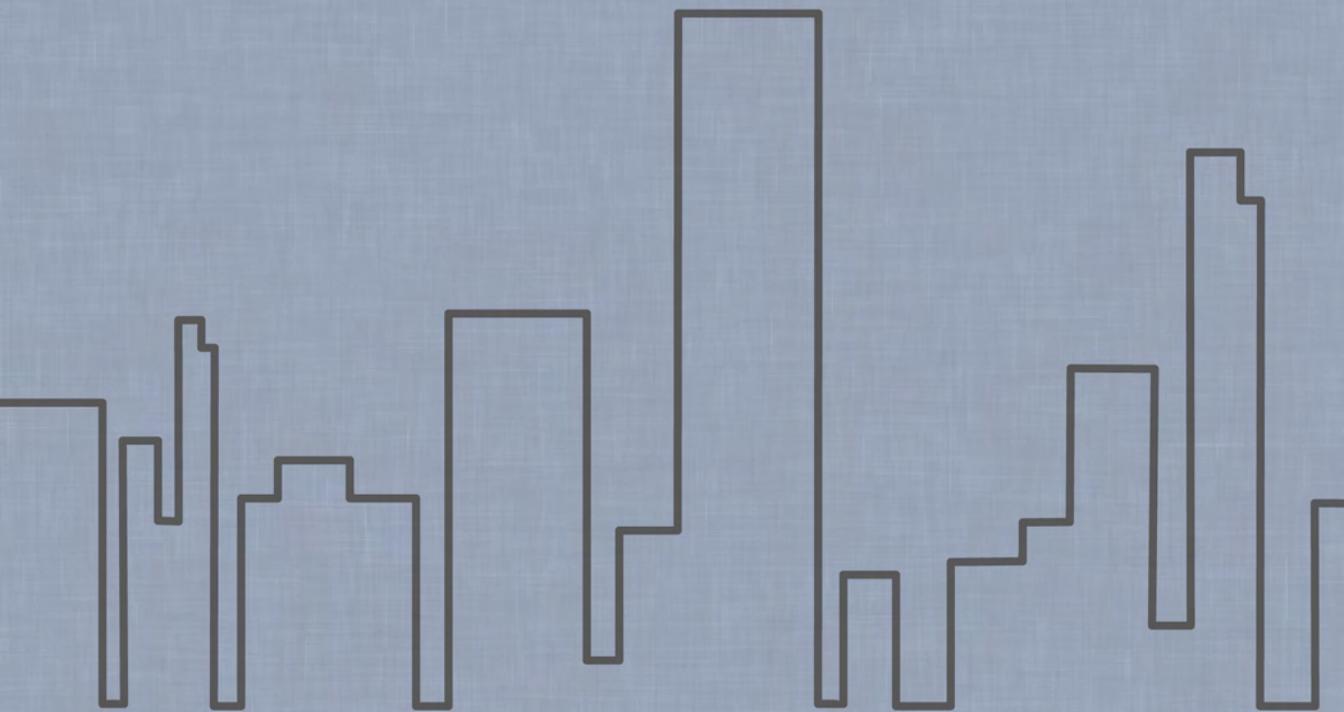
The Writing Program includes a curriculum of more than 30 courses each semester; a Writing Center staffed by undergraduate Peer Writing Assistants; the electronic Writing Program News; a Guest Lecture Series; Writers in Progress and Gallatin Teachers Reading events, at which members of the Gallatin community read from their own works; the Gallatin Review, an annual student literary and visual arts magazine; and two Community Engagement Projects: the Literacy Project and Great World Texts.

The Literacy Project dates from 2001 and is comprised of a Literacy in Action course (co-sponsored by the Community Learning Initiative) that combines the study of the adult literacy/ESOL field with volunteer work at four partner organizations (University Settlement Society, Fortune Society, International Rescue Committee, and Turning Point Educational Center); a weekly writing class at University Settlement Society; publications of writing by adults, including the *Literacy Review*, *Refugee Writing*, *A Gift*, and *Where I'm From*, and the annual all-day *Literacy Review* Workshops in Teaching Writing to Adults.

Great World Texts, which began in fall 2008, consists of a collaboration between Gallatin Writing Program faculty and undergraduate mentors with teachers and students at several New York City public high schools, which have included Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School, in the Bronx, and New Design High School and Marta Valle High School, in downtown Manhattan. Together, faculty and students study a canonical or "contemporary classic" work and create and present writing projects—including essays, stories and poems—related to it.

For further information, and/or a free copy of the *Literacy Review*, email the Writing Program Director, June Foley: jaf3@nyu.edu

Look for the *Literacy Review*, Volume 10 online at the Gallatin website this summer!



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