

# The Literacy Review

Volume 3, Spring 2005

A Gallatin Writing Program Publication

# The Literacy Review

VOLUME 3, SPRING 2005

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*The Literacy Review is an annual journal of writing by adult students in English for Speakers of Other Languages, Basic Education, and General Education Development programs in New York City.*



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## INTRODUCTION

### *WHAT IS THE LITERACY REVIEW?*

*The Literacy Review* is an annual compilation of some of the best writing by adults in Basic Education, General Education Development, and English for Speakers of Other Languages classes in every borough of New York City.

This third volume includes work by 53 writers from seventeen sites. Some writers were born or raised in New York City, others come from about 25 countries, including Ghana, Mali, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, the Republic of Georgia, Yugoslavia, Iran, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Brazil, Guatemala, Colombia, and Ecuador.

### *WHY DO WE NEED THE LITERACY REVIEW?*

The editors of *The Literacy Review* want to celebrate the writers, teachers, tutors, and site supervisors who create these works, and we also want to inspire others to write. Further, we want to advocate for more literacy/ESOL education at a time when programs are—once again—threatened with cutbacks at federal, state, and local levels.

Worldwide, 1.3 billion people lack basic literacy skills, according to Proliteracy America's *State of Adult Literacy 2004*. More surprisingly, almost 50% of adults in the U.S. lack the literacy skills necessary "to find and keep decent jobs, support their children's education, and participate actively in civic life," according to the National Institute for Literacy.

Some literacy/ESOL problems come from learning differences and schools inadequate to deal with them. Immigration also plays an important part. Since 1980, the foreign-born population in the U.S. has risen by 145 percent, from 14 million to 35 million, according to the *State of Adult Literacy 2004*. In New York City, adults with problems speaking English rose by 30 percent from 1990 to 2000, according to a *New York Times* article by Nina Bernstein of January 19, 2005. Moreover, "Almost half the 1.5 million people with English difficulties live in households where no one speaks English proficiently," and "another quarter of the group live in households where only a child is proficient in the language."

Only a fraction of adults who need help becoming literate, or literate in English, are served, yet literacy sites are being shut down.

### *WHO EDITS AND PUBLISHES THE LITERACY REVIEW?*

*The Literacy Review* is created by undergraduates at NYU's Gallatin School: editors Carin Clary, Nikki D'Errico, Ben Stowe; copyeditor Phoebe Fox; designers/photographers Abbye Churchill and Lindsay Wolff; and designer Megan Mullett.

Despite their youth, these undergraduates have experience in community teaching and learning: Carin, Nikki, Ben, Phoebe, and Megan all took the course "Literacy in Action," taught by Professor Paul Jurmo, and co-sponsored by the Writing Program and the Community Learning Initiative, through which students volunteer at one of five partner sites: Union Settlement Society, University Settlement Society, Fortune Society, Service Employees International Union Local 1199, and the International Rescue Committee.

Carin, Nikki, and Ben went on to do independent studies in adult literacy/ESL education with Prof. Jurmo. In addition, Nikki has worked for a year and a half as a student-teacher for several University Settlement writing classes, as well as tutoring at the International Rescue Committee; Phoebe has been student-teacher

at University Settlement's Advanced Writing Class for a year; Carin and Ben have tutored at Fortune Society; Carin and Phoebe have created a curriculum to teach essential English to restaurant workers, for a Community Learning Initiative course; Nikki and Phoebe will present a workshop on teaching writing to ESOL learners, at a conference in May.

*The Literacy Review* is funded through the generosity of the Gallatin Writing Program, NYU Office of Community Service, whose director is Gloria Cahill and assistant director is Lisa Kail, and by a Gallatin alumna, Claire Morris Stern.

### *HOW CAN LITERACY/ESOL SITES USE THE LITERACY REVIEW?*

Simply reading *The Literacy Review* can inspire writers. But Hillary Gardner, ESOL/ Civics Program Coordinator and Instructor at LaGuardia College's Center for Immigrant Education and Training, suggests a more specific use:

"Recently I've used *The Literacy Review* to introduce intermediate ESOL and Civics students to a unit on 'Our Town.' I ask students to read a couple of essays related to the weekly theme—transportation, education, jobs—over the weekend as homework. In class on Monday, we share one essay aloud as a class. Each student takes a turn reading one sentence. I repeat a difficult to pronounce word from the sentence and ask everyone to repeat it. We continue like this until the story is finished. After we read, I dictate a few comprehension questions and students work in pairs to answer them. Students have enjoyed the vocabulary and how closely the experiences of their reading relate to their own lives. Their own journal writing has improved tremendously as a result."

### *HOW DO WRITING STUDENTS USE THE LITERACY REVIEW?*

Lisa Lee, a student at University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program, provides one answer:

"We are very happy that our writing will be published in *The Literacy Review*. That makes us more confident to learn writing in English.

I love to read *The Literacy Review*. It is a great education for me to learn all the writers different cultures, experiences, emotions, and feelings. Also, I get enlightenment and inspiration from their writing skill.

I always think that our writing teachers are like diligent gardeners. They give their various plants a wide and fertile field to grow. They water and weed; they nurse and protect the young plants; they let the plants grow densely and keep their specialties. After a year, they get a good harvest with full delight. *The Literacy Review* is the great harvest of all the writing classes."

*June Foley*  
Writing Program Director  
The Gallatin School  
New York University

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Our New York City

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# The Fried Fish Luncheon

MARTHA GARY



One sunny day, May 20th, 2004, my sister Marie and her daughter Bonnie invited me to lunch at their home in Queens. My twin sisters, Pris and Ann, were also invited. We all live in different boroughs: Pris in Suffolk County, Ann in Brooklyn, and Marie and I in Queens.

Marie asked the twins what they would like for lunch and to her great surprise, they responded in unison, "Fried whiting and cornbread, but please, no navy beans!" You see, growing up in Hanover, Virginia during the Great Depression, when times were hard and food not plentiful, we had cornbread and beans for many, too many meals.

Marie and Bonnie bought the whiting and cleaned, washed and seasoned them with specially-made seasoning prepared by Marie. This special seasoning was also requested by the twins. Marie did everything her baby sisters asked her to do.

The fish were fried to a golden, crispy brown in a skillet of hot oil, taken out and drained on paper towels. The crisp golden fish was served with lemon slices on the side, hot homemade cornbread with butter, vegetable salad of lettuce, red cabbage and carrots, with a choice of dressings. We drank sweet ice tea or lemonade. For dessert, we had delicious fruit cake.

While we shared in this sisters' feast, we exchanged stories of our children and grandchildren, funny and heartwarming stories. The afternoon passed much too quickly.

Sadly, it was now time for us to part. The time that we spent together was indeed a most happy, enjoyable May 20th afternoon, filled with much laughter and reminiscing. We don't like to say goodbye; we just hug each other, say, "I enjoyed being with you," and finally, "See you later!"



*Martha Gary was born in the U.S.A. and has lived in New York City for fifty years. She studies at the Rochdale Adult Learning Center in Jamaica, Queens, where her tutor is Vivian Roberts. In addition, she is a Bible class student, and "I bowl and play basketball with my grandchildren."*

# Killing Rats

DAVID CHEN



Last Saturday morning when I finished the preparation of food at 9 AM, I went to the backyard to throw out the garbage. I was shocked to see many rats in a metal garbage can. It was almost empty, set by a wood stand. I dropped my garbage into the next can, because I did not want to help the rats to escape. Then I went back to my apartment and took my stuff downstairs and went to go out. Just at this moment, I thought, if someone dropped a bag of garbage into the

can, all the rats would jump out. Those rats would make trouble in our building. No way; I preferred to make a self-sacrifice—go to work late. I had to kill the rats. I went back into the backyard and found a long, metal stick. I moved the garbage can out a little bit. I began to crush the rats.

At that moment, all the rats were seized with panic and screaming. They ran in a big mess. Even if I focused on a rat, it was hard to kill it with one stroke because the rat was running and jumping. I could hunt and kill it as long as I made many strokes. It seemed like a war. I killed the last rat in five strokes. The battle lasted ten minutes. Then I took out a bag filled with Chinese leftovers—fried rice and fried chicken wings. Just this food attracted the rats to jump down the can; but they could not jump out, as the can was too high, like a trap.

Finally, I made sure all six rats were dead. All the dead bodies were the same size—about five inches long. Maybe they were siblings. I thought I did a good job and felt happy, and then I went to work in a hurry.

Somebody might ask me, “Why were you so cruel? How dare you kill the rats!” I would give a definite answer: I like pets, such as cats or dogs, but I hate pests, such as rats and mosquitoes. When I was a little boy I saw my cat catch a rat more cruelly. My cat bit the rat and ate its body.

As we know, a rat is a very harmful pest. There are Chinese expressions concerned with hatred of rats: (1) When people see a rat crossing the street, they all shout to kill it. (2) A grain of mouse shit could spoil a wok of soup.

I remember when I was a boy I saw a cartoon movie. The cartoonist, Walt Disney, created a mouse that was naïve, clever, and lovely. He was called Mickey Mouse. Ah, don’t worry, Mickey Mouse is settled down in Disneyland only.

In short, no one can switch the bad instincts of a rat to good ones. No one can change my mind about killing rats.



*David Chen attends University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program. "I work as a salesman of mini cakes. I make them on the scene and they are fresh and delicious. I welcome people to come and taste them at the corner of Bowery and Grand."*

# My First Impressions of New York City

MARIA GUADALUPE MARTINEZ



It was February of 1998 when I arrived in New York City. I had traveled by plane with my husband and two sons. My sons were six and four years old. I couldn't believe we were here because I never thought I'd be in the United States. The plane landed. All the passengers left the plane. I saw many people of different nationalities. It was amazing. I had never seen Chinese, African, and Russian people together in the same place. I was very excited, but I was afraid too. I didn't understand when people spoke to me because I didn't know the language. I just smiled at them. We were in the United States and our dreams would come true.

The year before, my husband had come to the United States and lived in East Harlem. So he was familiar with New York City, but I was not.

I thought that my new home would be like houses on TV—big, beautiful, and modern. When we entered the house, I saw that it was not a house at all. Oops! It was an apartment. A small apartment. Oh my God! In my country we had lived in a big house with a garden and yard. It was really different here in Manhattan. Then, I thought I wouldn't care because we were all together as a family: my husband, my sons, and me. But after a few days, I was going crazy. I didn't want to be in that apartment. Besides we were sharing it with two roommates with only two bedrooms for everyone. We were in that situation for nine months. This was not the lifestyle I wanted for my children. So I looked for, and found, another apartment.

Now, six years later, we are still in East Harlem, but we are in a bigger apartment without roommates. It seems like heaven to me.



*Maria Guadalupe Martinez, who is forty years old, was born in Mexico and has lived in the U.S. for six years. She attends the College of Mount Saint Vincent's Institute for Immigrant Concerns. "I've been a volunteer for four years. I like to teach people how to read and write in Spanish. I love to help others."*

# My Discoveries in New York

YOKO ONO



I moved to New York from Japan fourteen months ago. I had lived in other cities for about two years. Also, living in Tokyo for fifteen years, another cosmopolitan city half a globe away, has made me fully aware of the life in urban centers: dense population, gridlocks, cavalcades of honking emergency vehicles, rush hours' rackets in subways, and so on. But I was still thrilled to be part of this city, New York, which is regarded as the most animated city in the world.

For the past fourteen months, my image of New York—a never sleeping, dazzling city with glaring neon light all over, like in movies—has been somewhat dispelled. New York hasn't galvanized me much, but at least I have been stunned by several things.

First of all, I am reassured that New York is inhabited by the greatest multiplicity of people on earth. The languages spoken in New York are the most numerous, too. On streets, overhearing strange languages is ubiquitous. The settlers here speak their acquired English in their own styles. Spanish speakers might outnumber English speakers. New York is not a proper place to learn English, since authentic English is an illusion.

Secondly, I am convinced that there are plentiful divorces. Since my arrival, I have met more or less fifty U.S. citizens who have married at least once, and I barely tallied only ten out of them have "never divorced." Speaking of divorce, one day I got surprised by an innocent question from a 29-year-old American girl when we started volunteering for a certain U.N. organization where we sell souvenir items for charity. After introducing ourselves, we asked questions alternatively, such as, "Where were you born and raised?" or "Have you been to Japan?" Shortly after our conversation moved on to family, she asked me in a very natural way, "Are your parents divorced?" This question is highly unlikely in Japan. I became deeply conscious that divorce is a daily matter.

Thirdly, here is an example showing how New York is blessed with freedom. I often go to my neighborhood library where I see a young guy who always watches pornographic pictures on the Internet. He even downloads some nude pictures. I applaud his audacity because he never hesitates to ask the librarian's help whenever the printer doesn't work well. And the librarian's attitude is also marvelous. She never frowns but fixes the problem quietly and politely.

Fourthly, one more anecdote happened in a women's restroom in Grand Central Terminal. When I was in the line, a teenage girl was disappointed

to find the tampon vending machine was out of service. Then a friend of the girl, who was standing next to her, turned around and began to ask all the strangers if anyone had spare tampons. Although she looked friendly, I was bewildered. Then a young girl in her mid-twenties behind me answered, "Yeah, I do. You can have two," sticking out two tampons from her purse to the teenage girl before me. So, the teenage girl changed her mind and received another one, saying "Thank you," again. Then no more words were exchanged and the women's room became quiet again.

Fifthly, speaking of public transportation, I was amazed that quite a few New Yorkers don't drive but use subways or buses. I had believed that living in the U.S. required driving a car, even in big cities like Los Angeles where cars are indispensable. But my belief crashed and burned. Thanks to subways, buses, and great service by yellow cabs, the majority of New Yorkers survive without cars. I was overcome by the tremendous numbers of taxis running lane by lane as well as by copious scenes in which people fight for a vacant taxi. The subways, being infamous for the dirtiness in the past, are now nice and clean, though most subway stations lack escalators or elevators. Instead, I'm impressed that the public buses are installed with an electrical lift at the front doorstep in order for disabled persons to get on and off by themselves very easily. This is one of the aspects that U.S. citizens can be proud of.

Finally, I noticed mysterious objects that New Yorkers mostly don't pay attention to: they are lots of small, round, black or white spots on sidewalks all over the city, and I have been wondering for a long time what they are. My guess is that they are probably gum spit out of mouths and flattened by stomps of passersby. If I am not mistaken, I would like gum lovers to spit it into a garbage bin on the street. (Sounds too Japanese?)

The other day I was excited to come across Mr. Kofi Annan, U.N. Secretary General. I saw Mrs. Hillary Clinton, too, shortly after my moving in. Encountering international celebrities is another sort of fun making me feel privileged. Thus, my tiny discoveries will be compounded in New York.



*"My name has nothing to do with the widow of John Lennon. It's just a coincidence. I'm always very embarrassed when I introduce myself. I'm an ordinary homemaker with two children. I like reading books, taking walks, and window-shopping." At Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing, Yoko Ono's tutor is Judith Schwartz and the site supervisor is Terry Sheehan.*

# A Bad Day on the Subway

JAIME MIRANDA



I took the train at four o'clock like I do every day. Everything was going well, like any other day. But August 14, 2003, was a hot, summer day in New York City. It was 4:30 and suddenly the train stopped and all the lights went out except for the emergency lights on the train. It seemed like no big problem. But people started to talk louder and to sweat because there was no air conditioning.

I was sitting in the first car. There were a few seconds of silence. Then, we heard the radio of the train operator saying there was no electricity at all in the whole city. It surprised everybody. Some people were scared.

Thirty minutes later the train operator was still asking for power to move the train. And we heard again the radio operator saying that other cities in the U.S.A. didn't have any power either. The people started screaming at each other and all of us were wet from sweat. It was very hot inside.

After half an hour the police showed up. They told us they were going to start taking people out from the back of the train. And I was in the first car. It took another half an hour to get out of the subway because the train was full of people. Finally, after an hour and a half, I was outside.

After the long hour I spent inside the subway, the bad day was still there, not only for me but also for thousands of people.

I was kind of dizzy because I almost couldn't breathe inside the train. When I got outside, the first thing I thought about was my wife because she was working in the city. I tried to call her cell phone, but it wasn't working. I hung up the phone and saw some women crying, thinking the worst had happened, like on 9/11. I was very worried about my wife because there was no way to get in touch with her.

I took a deep breath and started thinking about what to do next. I was very far from my home. Then I looked around and saw a lot of people walking, standing, talking on their phones, waiting for the bus. The streets were full of people. There was no room for cars to travel properly. It was horrible.

I decided to go to my uncle's house because it was closer than my house. I saw a lot of people buying candles so I did too. It took me almost two hours to get there, and when I did, I was very tired and thirsty. We started talking about the blackout, about how if there was a blackout here, imagine what would happen if we were back in Ecuador. There, sometimes blackouts last for days.

It was 10 PM and my uncle told me to stay with him and go home in the morning. I said okay, but I was worried about my wife, so I decided to take a taxi and try to go home. We came out of the building and I stopped a taxi. I asked the driver how much he would charge to take me from Roosevelt Avenue to Jamaica. He told me \$25, almost double what I usually pay.

Even so, I took the taxi and on my way home I saw some buildings with electricity. I thought, "Maybe the power is coming back on." In the taxi I saw a woman holding a child. I thought it was another passenger, but when he dropped me off I realized that they were his wife and child. He was protecting them.

When I got home and saw my own wife, I felt better.



*Jaime Miranda was born in Ecuador 27 years ago and has lived in New York City for five years. He would like readers to know, "I'm not the only one who lived through the blackout." His teacher at LaGuardia Community College's Center for Immigrant Education and Training is Hillary Gardner.*

# An Unhappy Lunch

JOHN CHENG



America is a democratic country. People are equal under the law, but in daily life there is still much discrimination.

One day, my sister and I ate lunch at an Italian restaurant on Mulberry Street. Business was not busy. Only three tables had customers of different races. The food was okay, but the waiter gave us very bad service. During that day it was very hot, and I was very thirsty. My glass was empty. I asked him for more water. He said okay.

After ten minutes, he still had not given me anything. So I got the water by myself.

At the next table, there was a black lady. He just gave her a glass of water. After ten minutes, he didn't take her order. The black lady understood that he didn't like to give her food and service because of her race. So she put down one penny on the table and left.

After lunch I paid the check. My sister put down five dollars on the table. The waiter came promptly to our table and said thanks. I said, "You just say thanks for the five dollars, not to us. If you wanted a good tip, you should have given good service to everyone. Don't practice discrimination." He said he was very sorry and felt embarrassed.



*Born in China, 67-year-old John Cheng is a student in the Family Literacy Program of the University Settlement Society. "I have been taking care of myself since I was under fifteen years old. I was a seaman who traveled all over the world. When I came to the U.S. I was a dishwasher, a very hard job. Now I am retired, so my life is very smooth now."*

# “Yum Cha” and New Yorkers

LISA LEE



“Yum Cha,” to drink tea, is one of the traditional habits or entertainments of the people of South China, especially in Kwongdong 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 AM to 4 PM 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 AM 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.



*A student in University Settlement's Family Literacy Program, Lisa Lee was born in China, where she studied at Sun Yat-sen University, and recently attended a reunion. She enjoys writing in many genres, including fiction and children's stories. Her husband, Wah You Lee, is the author of "I Came to America."*

# An Immigrant Experience

LUIS GUZMAN



This is the story of an immigrant woman from Hungary. She became a resident when she married her second husband, another Hungarian immigrant. She came from a small town in Hungary. She had worked as a farmer in her own fields. It was hard work and sometimes they worked for more than fourteen hours a day.

When her husband told her that they would be coming to the United States, she knew she was facing another big change in her life. She was in Hungary when the Second World War broke out in that part of Europe, when Russians and Germans fought to take her country. She survived the Communist regime in Hungary and witnessed the revolution that removed the Communists from power. Still, this move concerned her.

When she told her husband her fears about learning a new language, he told her everyone speaks Hungarian. When she arrived in New York and no one understood her, she figured out that she must do something. She began learning her first English words from the couple next door who argued almost every morning. Her husband told her not to learn those kinds of words and that he would help her. She decided to take care of herself. She encouraged herself to learn English and find a job.

She asked for some help from the woman who worked in the deli next door. The woman told her she could work cleaning her sister's house. She was afraid and happy at the same time with her new job. Her husband took her to the big house and picked her up. She just did her first job in the U.S.A. The next day, the woman next door had another house for her to clean. Slowly, she was working every day of the week. Her customers would pick her up and drop her off. She was happy with the extra money she made. She was beginning to enjoy her life here in America.



*Luis Guzman, who is thirty years old, immigrated from Lima, Peru, four years ago. He has a degree in Aquaculture Engineering. His teacher at the College of Staten Island's Adult Learning Center is Rayna Kaltsatis. This story is the true story of his girlfriend's grandmother.*

# Birds

ALICJA SOBCZAK



That was a really nice day. A little bit rainy, but still it was nice and fresh. I was at work putting the laundry into the washer. I saw a man in the park across the street. He was taking out the food from a garbage can. I thought, "It is for himself."

We have bagels at work. I grabbed one. I didn't care about my manager and owners. I ran quickly to give him a bagel. He was appreciative. He loves birds. He fed them the bagel.

# Only for Customers

ALICJA SOBCZAK

We have a bathroom in our work. I don't care who is using it, but my boss and the manager do.

The old man from outside asked me, "Can I use the bathroom?" I said, "I'm sorry, it is only for customers." "I knew it," he said to somebody else and he left so calmly. He understood me. I felt so bad, I cried. I wanted to run after him and tell him something. He disappeared very quickly.

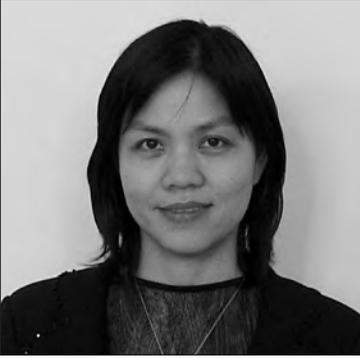
That happened more than a year ago. I remember. That was an old man. There was no bathroom around.



*"I was born in Poland in 1978. To America I came a little more than two years ago, to have a different, better life. Will my dreams come true? I believe so." Of the Downtown Learning Center, where her tutor is Cynthia Robinson, Alicja Sobczak writes: "I don't feel like I'm in school. I feel like I'm home among loving people."*

# Wild Rose

MENG YING LI



On a Saturday in June, the weather was fabulous. The sky was blue. The clouds were white. Under a shade, there was still a breeze. I was in a black dress carrying a brown leather bag across my shoulder, looking for a scene to paint.

At Battery Park, I looked at the green trees. I looked at the moving waves in the Hudson River. I also looked at the neatly lined-up river fence and light columns. I finally found a bundle of pink wild roses that I liked the most.

I sat down on a big stone. I spread out my paper and paints. I also got two cups of clear water. First, I used a pencil to sketch the shape of the flowers and the leaves. Then I held a brush deep in the water and got a little pink. I started my exploration of water color. A little pink, a little yellow, and a little green. The sunshine was very bright. My eye couldn't tell exactly what the color tone was, but I trusted my hand. When I wanted a light color I added more water. When I wanted the colors to be darker, I used more color from the paint box.

After a while my leg was numb. I changed my position. When I turned my head I found a lady holding a camera and shooting a picture of me. I suddenly cared about not only where my leg should be, but also my head and every muscle on my face. Her camera was big and it looked like a very expensive one. I believed she was a good picture-taker. I continued my painting. So I started to think as a mature artist would think. I couldn't be careless. I suddenly remembered what I read in an art book. A main object shouldn't be put in the middle and the surrounding object shouldn't be as clear as the main one. All right, I did what they said.

I continued. I heard someone behind me say, "Beautiful," "Nice color." I knew that they were just nice and generous. Or they thought a person who painted in the park was supposed to be good. More people took pictures of me.

That day I was making a picture, I also became part of a picture.



*Meng Ying Li was born in Canton, China, and now studies at Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing, where her tutor is Judith Schwartz. "I am an acupuncturist in lower Manhattan and have had a practice for ten years. I just began painting last year and enjoy painting nature. I have a loving, twelve-year-old son who makes my life fulfilling."*

# My Best and Worst Day

REGINA OYE



September 20, 2004 was my best day. It started off when I went to ask about the fare from New York to Ohio at 42nd Street. I was planning to travel to Ohio soon, so I needed that information. My son Maurice was not with me, but my daughter Gloria was. We took the #2 train from 219th Street in the Bronx to 42nd Street, Manhattan. We traveled to the Port Authority to get the train schedule to Ohio. After getting the schedule, we decided to walk around.

At first, I thought we should go to the Statue of Liberty then changed my mind. Instead, we decided to walk around and look at shops. We did a lot of walking from shop to shop, enjoying the things we saw. Gloria was very happy. I was planning to shop for her because she told me the things she wanted me to buy for her. I was thinking about where I should take her.

We went into a store that sold some beautiful clothes and jewelry for young girls. She picked out some beautiful clothes, three necklaces, and a pair of earrings. Both of us were feeling very good and happy about the shopping and everything we had seen. After that, we went to get something to eat. We went to BBQ and ordered some food.

When we were finished eating, we visited Central Park, Rockefeller Plaza, Radio City Music Hall, and then the Brooklyn Museum of Art. We returned home feeling very happy. We put the shopping bags down, then went to see a movie in Co-Op City. That was the best part of the day. I was very happy about the shopping we had done and the places we had been.

I didn't realize the bad news that I would soon hear from my employer. She was about to cut my pay, although she knew that I have five children to care for. I have sent money to my children for school fees, uniforms, and other things. What she said was a shock to me.

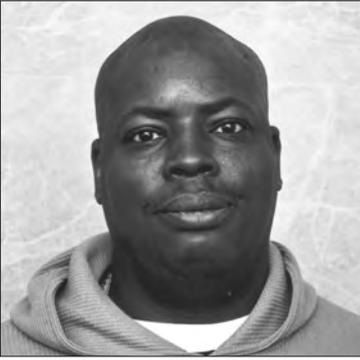
This situation has been worrying me a lot. I cannot sleep because I have been thinking about it every since she told me the bad news. I am always feeling sad. Tears are always coming to my eyes. I am just praying to Almighty God to help me get my Green Card one day.



*Regina Oye was born in Ghana, and has lived in New York City for three years. She studies at the Wakefield Center for Reading and Writing of the New York Public Library, where the site supervisor is Sherlette Lee.*

# The Burglar and Mickey

ARNOLD BLUNT



When I grew up, my mother loved plants and she used to have a bunch of plants, and she used to water them every day. When she used to water the plants, she used to have eggshells in the water and the plants used to stink. She used to water the plants and talk to the plants. And we had a cat named Mickey, who was Siamese, and he used to eat off of the plants. He used to get sick and after he got sick he would eat some plant leaves and he would feel better. The cat used

to lick himself and the hair balls would get caught in his throat. Then he would start throwing up.

One time, our cat came to my room while I was asleep and jumped on top of my bed and started scratching my leg. Then, when I woke up, I turned on the light and I saw the cat by the door meowing and the cat kept meowing and I pulled the covers off me and I saw my legs scratched up. Then I said, the cat must be hungry. My mother and my stepfather were asleep so I got up and I followed the cat. I turned on the kitchen light and the cat was on top of the floor model TV, and he was meowing, so I got him some water and I shook his box of food, and the cat would not leave the window. I said, “Why you hollering out the window? There’s nobody there.” His loudness got louder and I went to the window to prove to him that there was nobody there. Once I lifted up the shade to look out the window I saw a crowbar with two beady little eyes trying to open up my house window and I pulled the shade back down and I ran to tell my stepfather. My stepfather went up on the roof with his gun and he started to shoot and he missed him.

Then my mother said, “Oh my God.” And my mother asked me, “How did you know that there was a burglar behind the window?” And I told her, “The cat came and got me and scratched me up.” So the next day my mother got up, made fried chicken, made pork chops, made fish. Everything the cat could eat, my mother gave to the cat. And she gave me nothing. She gave me no food, not a thing. She gave it all to the cat. And that’s the end of my story. Thank you. And I love my mother.



*Arnold Blunt was born in New York City 42 years ago. He writes, “I’m drug free for nine years, going on ten years.” Maida Schwab is his tutor at St. Agnes Center for Reading and Writing of the New York Public Library, where the site supervisor is Joan Pleune.*



# Outside Our Windows

# The Park

CRISTINA ALAYO



Outside my window I can see a big park. From 5 AM it is crowded with adult people running and walking around the park, and others are inside it doing special exercises from their countries like movements of karate.

Some of them are sitting on the bench talking, laughing, reading newspapers or drinking water. Most of them are old men and old women from China or Korea, but all of them are doing exercises every day, even in winter. Also, I see homeless people crossing the street and smoking their cigarettes or drinking coffee or some of them eating. Usually the homeless people are in the park, and I see one of them every day at the same time, crossing in front of my building, holding his radio and listening to music.

Other groups are running and listening to music with their Walkmans.

The next group of people are Indians. They are different because they do not run, they only stretch all the time.

The last group of people are Hispanic. Most of them are men. They run and do push-ups. A few of them are old women, who walk around the park. The rest are men and women of twenty to forty years old; they run, jump rope, stretch. Some of them do aerobics.

And I also see all kinds of people going to their jobs, from different countries, races, cultures, and religions.

Later, the park is crowded with children of different ages, but no more than sixteen. The youngest are with their parents. The rest of them are playing handball, basketball, smoking and relaxing. You cannot imagine the noise they make when they are playing, laughing, talking and walking.

Forward to the right of the park there are buildings, like bakeries and hair salons. Forward to the left of the park there are supermarkets and clothing stores. In front of the park there are a bank, restaurant, barbershop, beauty salon, and dentist offices.

All these things happen almost every day and nobody can change them, because that is the way that people do things. It is very interesting how people from all over the world stay in the park together.



*"I am 33 years old. I came from Peru, with a lot of dreams, and one is to learn how to speak and write English correctly; then I would like to start writing about my memories and writing fiction." Cristina Alayo's teacher at Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center is Diana Raissis.*

# Looking and Reflecting

ROSA RODRIGUEZ



There are four windows in the front of my apartment. One of the windows made me have a bad experience. My younger son fell out when he was two years old. Thank God he is okay.

This window is next to my bedroom. Usually when I go in and out of my bedroom, I look outside, even if it is late at night. Sometimes I hear people screaming and I go to the window to see what's happening. It is

terrible to live in a noisy neighborhood on the first floor, especially if the windows look out on the street.

Through the windows, I see negative and positive things. I see people waiting to park their cars, talking by cell phone, old people picking up cans and bottles, children playing on the sidewalk, and other people working.

There is a grocery store on the corner of the building where I live. They are open all night. People who are homeless come to buy beer and stay outside the store drinking and talking loudly for hours. I can't sleep.

On the corner across the street, there is a vegetable store and distributor. A lot of trucks, vans, and cars come. Some come to leave deliveries and others to pick up. They open at 5:30 AM.

In front of my apartment, there is a meat distributor. They also open early, making a lot of noise when they open the gate and start to throw out boxes on the street or into a van.

The good thing I can see outside my window is how a lot of old and young men work so hard to support their families. Sometimes the noise makes me angry, but sometimes I'm proud of people like them who get up early in the morning to take a train to work.

Living in an apartment with windows looking onto the street is nice. You don't need light during the day, you can enjoy the light of the sun. In my neighborhood it is difficult to keep a window open to breathe fresh air.

Windows are very important. In case of a fire, you can get out. But windows are also dangerous. Children can jump out.

Do you have the good luck to live in a quiet neighborhood, and you can look outside your windows?



*Rosa Rodriguez was born in the Dominican Republic. "I have four children and five grandchildren, four boys and one girl. The most important thing in my life now is to take care of my oldest grandson." Rosa Rodriguez studies at the Family Literacy Program of University Settlement Society.*

# Watching and Judging

JOSEPH HOOSHMAND



I used to watch outside my window and judge the people doing wrong things. In some cases I tried to describe what I saw to others. I was happy not to be in their situation. Judging mistakes became my habit and gradually I became kind of a famous critic on these things among our friends.

One day someone who was wiser and brighter than me, heard my views and said, "I think in most cases you are right but have you ever thought about yourself and thought why you see these things which most people don't? Maybe it is because of something inside of you? I would give you some advice. From now on when you look outside your window and see something wrong, think that it's a part of you and you cannot live before you fix it in yourself."

I tried it once. Since then my life has changed. Now I have a lot of things to fix in myself! I cannot see wrong things in other people easily anymore.



*"I was born in Iran and came to the U.S. more than six years ago. First I went to Los Angeles and then I moved to New York City." Joseph Hooshmand attends the St. Agnes Center for Reading and Writing of the New York Public Library.*

# My Window, Morning to Night

BERNADETTE MORALES



It's early in the morning. I see people going to work and the kids going to school. The maintenance workers are cleaning the streets and the buildings. The security people are doing their jobs. The stray cats are running as if someone was trying to grab them. As I watch everyone going to work, I think to myself, where are they going? What kind of job do they do? It's nice to see people just getting up that early to go and do something other than sitting in the house

doing nothing. I just hope that God watches over them, because there are lots of jerks outside, thinking and doing crazy things. I feel good when I see all of the new generation going to school to do their thing. I just hope that they do what they got to do and know that they are our future.

It's windy outside, the leaves are falling to the ground and blowing around in the parking lot. I'm wondering, when are they going to put on the heat? When I see the leaves on the ground and I feel that wind I know that winter is right around the corner. When I look at the people or the kids who are not dressed properly for this kind of weather, I say I hope they don't get sick. Then that will mean days out of work or school and that's not good. If only they had just put on some warmer clothing that would not have happened. Now I'm sitting here wondering, are they going to put the heat on, 'cause I'm really cold. It's really cold outside.

It's almost time for the kids. They're screaming, talking, playing, fighting. It's good to see the kids back from a hard or good day at school. That means time to help with homework and feed them, bathe them and get ready to do it all over again. When I'm looking out my window and I see kids play-fighting, I don't like it, because it can get out of hand. Then they will be fighting for real. When I see kids outside on a school day, I sit and wonder, do their parents care to take time out to make sure their kids do their homework or see if they are hungry? I feel good when my kids come home from school. I like to ask them what they learned today, did they have fun, and what did they have for lunch? I ask them if they have homework. I tell them to do it and if they need help with something I'll help.

Now it's late, time to go to bed. Before I do that, I go to my window once again to see if there is anything else for me to see. My thoughts get ready for the next adventure. Sometimes when I'm sleeping, something might be going on outside and it wakes me up. I get up and I'm right back there, looking outside my window.



*Bernadette Morales, age 26, was born in New York City. "I have three kids who are my world. What I want the most is to get my GED and work in the medical field." In the CUNY Immersion Plus Program at the College of Staten Island, her teacher is Donna Grant and Staci Weile is the program director.*

# Finding New Windows

TEMURI AKHOBADZE



My window was so nice. I could see many trees and even a beautiful church behind. I liked very much to stand at the window and watch the life outside. Somebody was coming, somebody was going. Somebody was walking with five or six dogs, somebody was carrying children. Somebody was checking black garbage bags and somebody was coming home in a taxi, carrying many shopping bags.

Parking rules in effect? Double parking? Sanitation was right there, parking ticket already on the front window. Crisis! "Please, I left my car only for a moment. You see, my wife is in the car. I just bought a paper. Please don't give me a ticket..."

"No! You are guilty. No double-parking, period! You must pay. The city needs the money."

Even UPS and Verizon can't avoid tickets. Sometimes a big truck with oil would block our street for ten or fifteen minutes and drivers from the cars behind would come out and talk about baseball or Bush and Kerry.

All this activity was accompanied by the lovely sound of birds in the trees. It was fun to watch the real life of the city, but one day summer showed up. It became very, very hot and we decided to buy an air conditioner.

The yellow pages were opened and we called the right store.

A soft voice answered. "You are asking about one of the best air conditioners? My dear, you are in America! The best is the biggest and most powerful! Give me your address! Okay! Be home Tuesday and Wednesday between ten and five! Thank you for calling. Have a nice day."

In a few days I came home from my job and...oh, my goodness, what did I see? Instead of my beautiful window, sitting there was an enormous big metal box blocking all my wonderful view.

My wife was sitting in the corner of the other room in her winter wool sweater in front of the TV watching Channel 13 about life in Africa.

My life became miserable and sad. All the time I was thinking what to do, and one day a brilliant idea came to me. Let's go and move to another window. I jumped to the second window, looked out and oh, my...what did I see?

Nobody was going, nobody was coming. No sanitation trucks and no cars. Life was almost stopped.

Then I realized that my second window was looking at the yard to a nursing home. In a panic, I jumped to the third window in my apartment, but I only saw the blank wall of the next building a few feet from my window.

I grabbed the phone. Yellow pages were opened again.

“Hello, Is this the Apple store? Please, I would like to order the biggest and most powerful computer!”

“No problem, sir. Please be home tomorrow between eleven and twelve. We will be there.”

The next day my third window was completely blocked with a big desk with a huge Macintosh on it.

Now I am happy man! I can watch life not only on my street. I see all New York City’s streets. I learn about many different birds. I have lots of information, but the truth is I miss very much my first window.

But you know what? I prefer to be this way for now, than to look out from my second window.



*“I was born in the Republic of Georgia into a musician's family. At the age of four I started to play piano. At the end of 1992 I came to the U.S.A. and my wife and I settled in Manhattan, near Columbia University. My life is still full of music, and also I continue to improve my English at the St. Agnes Library Center for Reading and Writing, where I am happy to be with my teachers and friends.”*

# Our Beginnings

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# Showers on the Street

SORAYA RODRIGUES



My childhood had plenty of joy and freedom. I was born in a town in the northeast of Brazil in the interior of my state, Rio Grande do Norte, which was rich in the production of salt and cotton, in a dry and hot region. Today it is among the richest regions of Brazil in petroleum. Of course, I didn't care about all those valuable products when I was a child. Actually I didn't even know why I began speaking about it, probably it was to give an idea of how arid that area is,

consequently what a relief it was when it rained, making my happiness in those distant days come from drops of water falling from the sky.

Despite my father's family being afraid of rain, lightning and thunder, my mother taught us to appreciate all phenomena of nature. I remember those days, when dark clouds were gathering on the horizon, pushing my aunts inside their house, my grandmother's house. They covered all the mirrors and bright objects, what in their superstitious minds would block the lightning from hitting the house. At the time some people believed that those kinds of things attracted lightning, and also they closed all the doors of the house, remaining inside until the sun came back.

In my house, next door to them, it was totally different. I remember that I put on old shorts and shirt to go outside to take a shower under the rain. I ran up and down the street with my youngest brother, the closest to me, and also some friends. We were not frightened. We looked for the big roof gutters to stand below, feeling the cool water coming over our bodies.

As the earth was so hot and dry, it smelled of the sultriness when the water began to fall. We could feel the burning earth thanking Mother Nature for the relief of being wet from those drops of rain. For us what really mattered were our amusement and the freshness of the rain. I used to go in the street behind our house, which went from one street to the other—it was a big house. I would rather stay in there because the street behind our house was narrower than the main street, and also we seldom saw a car passing by in that street. We could run more freely.

I can't remember why we returned home, if it was because the rain stopped or because we were cold, but I remember my mother waiting for us with a towel and a big smile on her face—she was so confident and simple at the same time—pushing us to the bathroom “to finish” our shower.

Inside home, after being warmed with dry clothes and fed with milk and cookies, we stayed together, my brother and I, watching the water run on the curb, in a such a torrent, carrying all things that were on the way,

leaves, boxes, even shoes. It was funny. But the best part was the calm we felt in the air. It seemed that everything was fine, people and nature were happy with that gift from the sky.



*"I have been in New York for over a year, leaving behind me my established life in the northeast of Brazil, and the reason for me to do this is love. So I am here restarting my life with my new husband and hope that good things will happen to us in the future." Judith Schwartz and Devin Crago are Soraya Rodrigues' tutors at Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing.*

# Malian Women Suffering

OUMAR KUYATE



My country, Mali, was one of big empires in the world. It's located in West Africa. The Malian family is big, composed of grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, uncles, aunts, cousins and others. Almost all men are polygamists. More than 20 people live in the same compound. One of the customs treats women as slaves. It says women cannot participate in family meetings. One of the big issues is female circumcision.

I remember when my sister was married. It was a big argument between my father and my mother. One day it was decided by family meeting that my sister should have a husband, so she watched her behavior. My father was in charge to announce the news to his wife, my mother. She called her daughter and told her. My sister disagreed and said she wanted to make her own choice. My mother put her hand on her daughter's mouth and said, "Don't say that. Just obey, okay? Please accept it."

"Mom," my sister said, "I am thirteen years old and I go to school."

My mother said, "I know, my daughter, but if you disagree your father will put us out and divorce me. That is a shame for me and my family, so you must give up studying."

A few years passed, and after her marriage my sister passed away when she was giving birth at eighteen years old. Many women were and still are victims of the same kind, even of circumcision.

Today the government tries to emancipate ladies, to ban circumcision. Ladies can talk about family issues, they can vote.

Some international organizations help to bring women's rights to Mali.



*"I came to the U.S. to improve my knowledge of English and science, especially biology. In the future, I would like to help people who haven't had anything to survive. I would like to join a big organization to help poor countries." Oumar Kuyate is 31 years old and has been in the U.S. for six years. Diana Raissis is his teacher at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center.*

# My Polish Childhood

ALICJA NOWAK



I grew up in a small village north of Poland near the Baltic Sea. Lupawa is my village's name; it is a beautiful place. A forest, trees, and lakes so close that you can walk to them. If you like to swim in the sea, the Baltic Sea is only 45 minutes away by car. So, it is almost paradise for energetic children like my brother, Sebastian, and me.

We had a happy childhood. Our parents spent a lot of time with us and we often played together. Every game taught us something.

My mom used to read or tell us different stories, and dad used to show us places from these stories on a globe. Every day we learned something new and interesting.

I used to play with my older brother and our cousins Chris and Wojtek. They lived near my grandmother, so we saw each other very often. Chris is my brother's age and Wojtek is two years younger than I. Sometimes they didn't want to take me with them, but I called Mom and then Sebastian didn't have a choice. He had to play with me. He didn't like it and we used to fight about it, but usually I won and played with them. It was strange. I preferred to play with my brother, cousins and their friends rather than other girls. It was more interesting and more fun.

I remember one day when we had a soccer game between my brother, cousins, and their friends and the other team. I really wanted to play with them, but I knew that my brother wouldn't say yes, so I started to beg Chris and his friends. If they let me play, Sebastian wouldn't have a chance to say no. I agreed to play any position on the team, and I swore that I knew how to play. It wasn't true, but I thought that nobody would know it. They let me be the goalkeeper. The worst thing was that I didn't know any rules, and I was afraid of the ball. But I wanted to play so badly. The game started. The other team was good and they tried to shoot goals very often. I was scared of the ball, so when they came closer, I closed my eyes and tried to disappear. We won, and I still do not know how. Maybe it was a miracle.

## WOJTEK, THE CHICKEN

My whole life we always had some animals in our home—cats, dogs, sometimes a hamster, and even a chicken. The chicken's name was Wojtek, like my cousin. Because the chicken was very weak, the other chickens tried to peck it. My mom and I decided to take it home and take care of the chicken until it grew up. Wojtek lived in the attic. I remember that

during that time I tried to keep our cats far away from the attic. It was very difficult, but I was successful.

The chicken spent a couple of months with us. When it was big enough, it went back to our grandmother's chicken house. One day she made soup with our Wojtek. I remember that neither my brother nor I ate this soup. My mom had a big problem because we refused to eat chickens during the next few months.

## CATS

I love cats. I think that if you have their love too, they never leave you. Not only dogs are man's best friend.

One day when I was three years old, I tried to rescue my little cat, Funia. She was very young and she climbed up a tree, but she did not know how to come down. I climbed up the tree and caught her. Unfortunately, I didn't know that there was a wasps' nest in the tree. When the wasps were biting me, I didn't leave my cat. No, Funia was too important to me.

My dad came. He climbed the tree and took the cat and me down. He saved us. We all went to a doctor. My dad tried to take the cat away from me, but I didn't want to let her go. I held on tightly, and whenever anyone tried to take her away from me, I screamed hysterically. What I didn't know was that my father was allergic to wasps. In spite of that, when we recall these memories and many others, we laugh together.

I had a happy childhood. My parents spent a lot of time with us. I knew that they always had time for my brother and me. Even though I fought with Sebastian, we still love each other. We have a lot of funny memories, and I know I am lucky that I had such a carefree and happy childhood.



*Born in Slupsc, Poland, 24-year-old Alicja Nowak has lived in the U.S. for six months. She is a journalist who loves to travel. At the College of Mount Saint Vincent's Institute for Immigrant Concerns, her teacher is Diana Schoolman.*

# A Lesson about Jamaican Culture

PATRICIA REID



A lesson about my Jamaican culture is mostly about reggae music, the beautiful sunshine beaches and the variety of food.

When I was in Jamaica at the age of fifteen I was in a band. The name of the band was McIntyre Community Band. Any time the community would have an event our band would perform, like when it was holiday or the community was having a party, our band would perform. The community leader would hand out presents to the children. I enjoyed marching in the band. It was a pleasure for me when the people came out to see us. The smiles on their faces made me feel happy and very proud.

Our national dish is akee and saltfish. Jamaicans love to cook on Sunday. The dish they love to cook is chicken, peas and rice with carrot juice.

The music we prefer to listen to is gospel and calypso but reggae is the most popular one. Bob Marley was from Jamaica. He was one of the greatest reggae musicians and songwriters.

We also have some of the best beaches in Jamaica. Some are Duns River Falls, MilkRiverBath and Elshon. Whenever tourists, friends and family come to visit Jamaica, they always want to go to the beaches. The water is so relaxing, many tourists take vacations just to have a swim at the beaches. Most tourists like the Jamaican dishes too. Many of them like oxtail with peas and rice or the akee and saltfish.



*"I am a very caring and determined person. I try to set high goals so I can follow my goals to a better life." Patricia Reid attends the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Learning Center, where her tutor is Adele Reams, the literacy assistant is Kathy Threats-Grant, and the site supervisor is Winsome Pryce-Cortes.*

# A Visit to My Grandparents

SHIRLEY LEUNG



I remember when I was a little girl and my family went to China to visit my grandparents. We took the train. I saw a farmer and a cow working in the field while we got off the train. We walked on the path near the house and I saw many houses in the village and many people riding bicycles to work. I saw children wearing red scarves and plain clothes to school. We arrived at my grandparents' house and I saw my grandma feed chickens, ducks, and geese in the house.

We went to the farm and I helped Grandma feed the pigs and other animals on the farm. My grandpa planted vegetables and my brother helped my grandpa reap all the vegetables.

We went to a fruit farm. I saw ripe fruit on the trees. My grandpa made my sister and me bring fruit home. We took a rest in the house and my sister played hide-and-seek with me. My father cooked fish, chicken, and vegetables. We felt hungry and the food smelled good. My mother set the table and we ate dinner with my grandparents. After dinner, my grandma told the stars-in-the-sky story to us. We heard that female stars moved over the male stars and got married. We thought that was a very cute story. We slept in the bedroom at night.

After a few months, my father told his parents we were going home. We left the village and went back to the city.



*Shirley Leung was born in Hong Kong and has lived in the U.S. for ten years. She and her sisters Winnie and Marissa attend University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program, where the director is Michael Hunter. Shirley Leung writes, "I want to learn more English and learn more writing. I like to write; I enjoy the writing class."*

# My Favorite Sport

SLAVA VOYTOVICH



I was born in Ukraine. In winter time we have much snow. That is why since our childhood we used to ski. Around our city we have no mountains. We skied cross country. But all my youth I dreamed about skiing on the mountains. I imagined myself on top of the mountain. How I looked around and in front of me saw a beautiful view with snow, trees, small villages. How I went down very fast, and the wind told me how brave I was, and I felt myself very happy. But this was only in my dream.

The first time I skied down a mountain I was very scared. In my country I was in the mountains only two times because it was very expensive and far from my city. When I came here and went to the mountains I decided if I would be brave, my dream could become a reality. And something changed inside of me. I stopped being fearful. I took a ski lift to the top of the mountain. I skied down. I was happy.

Now I like to ski from high up. I can look around. The snow shines under the sun, the sky is blue, trees are green, people wear bright clothes. It looks like a picture. When I go down at high speed I hear music in my head. The wind brings it to me. I ski during the day. But sometimes I ski at night time, and it's another feeling. It's dark all around. Only the ski track has lights. The sky has many stars. The moon sends her light on the earth. I feel myself like in a fable. I don't want it to end. But nothing can be forever. The fable has ended.



*Slava Voytovich has been in the U.S. for eight years. "When I came to the St. Agnes Center for Reading and Writing, my English was very bad and I couldn't write. I am very thankful to the staff of this program, and to my tutor, Esther Kaplan, who gave me this education."*

# My Beginnings in Ghana

KWASI ATIEMO



It was one beautiful Sunday in the month of August in West Africa, in a country called Ghana; to be precise, it was in a city named Accra, in the year 1956. I was born. My father named me Kwasi Atiemu.

During my early life, I had a lot of questions, including asking my father why he gave me the name he did. He looked at me in a strange way, and then smiled. He said it was because my name means I was born on Sunday. I grew up in a community with lots of boys and, due to that, I hardly stayed home. I seemed always to be in the company of my friends, playing in the street and, most of the time, I used to come home very late at night. My parents didn't like this type of life at all.

Because my mother was able to influence my father, I was sent to a village to stay with his younger sister. At first, I did not like the idea at all. I really believed that my parents hated me. I am my parents' seventh child. Why me? I began thinking of my friends, our playing soccer and the other things I would be leaving behind me. The night before my traveling, I didn't sleep at all. I cried all night, telling myself that there were older brothers—why was I the one being sent away?

In the morning, I saw that my mother felt sorry for my leaving her, but my father stood firm that I should go. Reluctantly, I packed my few belongings, tears running from my eyes. I went to my father and said, "I am ready." I saw tears on my mother's face but, at that late hour, nothing could be done to stop my journey. I was handed over to a man who would take me to my aunt. The only words from my father were, "Be strong. You are a man. Never forget it." I really felt that my parents had betrayed me.

The journey took two days before we reached the village where I would have to stay. The first night there terrified me, because there was no electricity. Everyone was using a lamp ignited by oil. I could neither eat nor sleep. But I did remember what my father had said, "Be strong. You are a man."

My early days in the village were not easy for me at all. However, I adjusted myself and, in only a few months, I became very happy. I was taught how to make a farm, how to hunt for bush meat, and I learned how to make a trip to catch antelopes and other animals. My first day in a village school was a great joy for me. There were eight of us sitting on one bench. After finishing elementary school in the village, I came home to see my parents. Quickly, I was enrolled in high school. I later joined the Ghana armed forces. I served in the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions in

several countries—Lebanon, Israel, Kuwait, Congo and a lot of others I could mention. I am now a pensioner and have decided to spend my civilian life in America. Thanks to the Lord that I am still living.



*Kwasi Atiemo attends Union Settlement Society's ESL class, where his teacher is Miriam Lee, and the site supervisor is Maria Quiroga. "Since coming to this country, I feel as if I am starting my life all over again. Where I grew up, I had to struggle physically—for example, a twelve-mile walk to school. Here, next to my bed is a telephone and a computer. I can learn so much in so little time."*

# My Russian Childhood

NELLY BEKBERGENOVA



My childhood was a wonderful time for my family and me. I grew up in a big family in a small Russian town near the Caspian Sea. I have seven sisters and brothers, who all love me. I am the youngest. Now, they have their own families and live in different places, even different countries.

Every summer, my sisters, brothers, and I used to go to the river to swim and play games. We had a lot of fun there, but we always remembered our duties because my father was a man with strict rules and orders. On Saturday, he divided us into two teams: one team went with him into the backyard to work, and the other team went to clean the house and help mother with the cooking. In the evening, we would sit together in the living room and wait for Father to start telling fairy tales. It was an exciting moment for all of us. We imagined that we were the main heroes of those stories, either fighting evil or being good-natured pirates. All his stories had captivating twists and always ended happily. After he finished, I felt an emotional thrill. Nothing in the whole world could make me forget that beautiful time.



*Nelly Bekbergenova came to the U.S. two years ago. She is 36 years old. "In Russia I worked for a radio-television company as assistant director of the news department. I was also in charge of a mobile broadcasting team." At the College of Mount Saint Vincent's Center for Immigrant Concerns, Diana Schoolman is her teacher, Donna Kelsh is the director, and Mark Brik is the education director.*

# A History of My Town, Paillant

MARIE FLORENCE PAILLANT



Paillant is situated in the mountains of Haiti. Paillant is a town located in the city of Miragoâne. When you went by in your car or truck in Miragoâne you felt happy because you were going to Paillant. Miragoâne is a very commercial city. In Paillant, everyone is always glad to have fresh air and good temperature for their health.

I was born at Miragoâne (Paillant). I carry the name of my town. My family has two centuries of existence. They came from

France, probably before the great revolution.

Around the 1950s, the Reynolds mine, an American company, was established at Miragoâne (Paillant). They found in the soil “bauxite” called Aluminum. The American workers built a beautiful place to live. The visitors liked this place and named it Cité de Paillant. The company used to provide electricity, water, and medical assistance to the community. However, the President Duvalier, after exploitation of the land, had ordered the company to plant pine trees to restore the ground.

After the company left the town in 1982, Paillant changed. There was no electricity, no water, and many activities stopped. For example, public transportation and the exporting of agriculture stopped. However, this was not a problem for building or construction because some capitalists, church missionaries, and residents of Paillant continued to build. However, the mines were very dangerous for workers and some died. Also, mine workers don't live for a long time. There is still “bauxite” over there.

Although my grandparents died, I still have relatives and friends in Paillant. Paillant is always open to all. Paillant's natives hope that the town will open to a new future. That is my wish.



*Marie Florence Paillant attends St. George Center for Reading and Writing of the New York Public Library in Staten Island, where her tutor is Barbara Martz and the literacy assistant is Geniene Monterrosa.*

# A Russian Love Story

SVETLANA PASMAN



The first day of my new job I met a guy named Gregory who attracted my attention. We decided to meet the next day after work, and then day in and day out after work we spent time together. Then he invited me to go to a musical show on Saturday at 8 PM.

On the eve of our date, my mother started to sew a new dress for me. I wanted to arrive wearing the new dress. I assumed I could look better in a new dress. My mother sewed the dress and I stayed home waiting for her to finish. I tried it on many times.

Gregory and I were to meet at 12 noon at a small park near the theatre. He came to meet me at noon and had to wait because the dress wasn't ready and I couldn't leave. It took a long time for my mother to do all the finishing touches like the row of covered buttons. My new dress wasn't ready until 5 PM, but it looked gorgeous. It was a short, straight black dress made of crepe with a white silk collar on the low V neckline and a wide belt fitted across the waist. The long sleeves were decorated with many buttons. I wore it very happily with very tall black heels. I almost flew out the door when it was ready because it was 5 PM.

As I rode on the bus to meet Gregory, I wondered, will he still be waiting? We had been attracted to each other from the moment we met. It followed logically that Gregory wouldn't be able to wait so long for me, but when I got to the park I was surprised that he was there. He had been waiting for me for five hours, the same time I had been waiting for my dress at home. I thought he was angry, but he smiled at me. I smiled back at him. The whole world seemed unimportant to us.

The flowers in the bouquet he had brought were wilted. The rain began. We were exhilarated by our meeting. After being acquainted for one month, we got married. That was 45 years ago. We never regretted our decision.

The new dress was important years ago, but times have changed. Love is always important. Sometimes my husband reminds me of that day when he waited for me for five hours and he thinks about fate and we laugh.



*Svetlana Pisman was born in Moscow, Russia. "I started to attend the Center for Reading and Writing at Tompkins Square Library two years ago. Now it is part of my life. I have many friends here. My life became more interesting. I love books and nature."*

# My Memories of Pigeons

WEN FEI LIANG



Before China's Cultural Revolution, when I was a kid, we didn't have enough meat to eat. The government had to distribute to each resident limited meat and rice by tickets.

One day my father brought a couple of pigeons home. My dad used steel wire to make a firm cage. Since then we started to feed pigeons for many years. My father used a scientific way to raise pigeons. He gave them various foods, for example, grain, corn, red beans, green beans, and crushed eggshells. Every day he would change the menu and give them fresh water. He let them out of the cage twice a day. He cleaned the cage every day. He kept the droppings for our plant fertilizers, so my plants and flowers grew up well.

About six months later our pigeons had bred multiple times and basically we had five pairs of pigeons that were smart and strong. They could produce many eggs that became little pigeons. When the small pigeons grew up we kept the good ones and killed some of them. By that time our family could cook a pigeon every two weeks. We were so happy because raising pigeons could give us a chance. We could get meat from pigeons and improve our family's nutrition.

I remember that male pigeons were more attractive than females, but females were more graceful and gentle. The male pigeons pleased their wife or girlfriend by singing long songs, and never felt tired.

Our family also joined a pigeon association in China. Sometimes our pigeons went to a long distance competition. I wondered how pigeons could find their way home. They were very intelligent.

At the time of the Cultural Revolution a terrible experience happened that I'll never forget. Two men came to our home and showed that they were from the pigeon association. They needed to investigate the conditions in which our pigeons were raised. They walked directly to the pigeons' cage. They caught the pigeons and put them in a basket and left. They didn't allow my father to ask any questions. They put a receipt on the table. We found that on it they wrote "smuggler." After a few days, my father told us they cut the pigeons' legs, because they were afraid our pigeons could go back to their home. They put them in the market to sell them.

I thought my father was absolutely not a smuggler. However, in the turmoil of the day, the official didn't allow us to say anything. Otherwise we would be in jail. I thought it was unreasonable for them to take away our pigeons. They were like robbers in broad daylight, robbing innocent people. Since that event, we have never raised pigeons again.



*Wen Fei Liang has lived in New York City for thirteen years. She studies in the Family Literacy Program of University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program, where Michael Hunter is the director. "I joined the writing class because that would help me to write and speak good English. I think that the most important thing in my life is I should learn more English, so I can help people."*

# Our Poetry and Fiction

# I'm from the Lower East Side

MIGUEL PADILLA



I am from the Lower East Side.

I'm from a stickball game.

I'm from hide and seek and kick the can, all played in the street.

I'm from *pernil* and *arroz con pollo*.

I'm from saints' pictures on the bedroom wall.

I'm from the statue of Jesus wearing the crown with blood coming down his cheeks.

I'm from the neighbors hanging out on the stoop watching the people go by.

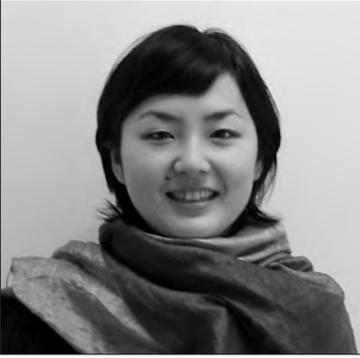
I'm from the Lower East Side and those were the best years of my life.



*"In the 1990s, I went to another literacy program before coming to the Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing. That was the first time I heard poetry. I loved it. The way poetry expresses feelings is what I like best about it. I want to try to write more of it. This was my first poem." Miguel Padilla's tutor is Gale Cowan.*

# Pale Green Night

SEIRING NAGANO



She remembers a night of snow is coming. The moon, little stars scattered on the dark sky and a few lamps light up a dark road with nobody on it. "Snow is coming again," she says aloud. Her room is not bright, but light escapes from a small lamp with a paper shade. The light from the lamp is like a wisp of cloud, and as it melts into her room the color becomes pale green. The pale green touches her eyes softly.

Her eyesight was getting worse and worse in the veiled gray city. She slipped out of her home and went to the countryside where her grandfather's place was. There she was met by green, a shiny, deep green that seemed to swallow everything. The green had a deep ruby red flower within it. Every day she sat down on the porch and looked at the green. She felt her eyesight was getting better. Only green could hug and kiss her, but that ended when winter came. Icy wind frostbit her small hands and feet and made them rosy. Before she knew it, snow was coming. She hated snow. Snow came in the night, and a pure white color covered everything: country, houses, the garden and her eyes. "Snow is like something which tries to cover my eyesight." White snow sheeted green, and the flower peeked through the white.

She remembers whenever snow is coming, wherever she smells the winter of snow, she remembers the green. Now, she keeps green in a small vase on her table in her room in the gray city.



*Born in Japan, Seiring Nagano is 22 years old and has lived in the U.S. for one year. She attends the Steinway Learning Center of the Queens Borough Public Library. "Life in New York gives me a lot of inspiration and wonderful, special friends. Moreover, these experiences led me to write this story!"*

# Where Are You, My Friend?

PANG



Early in the morning  
When I came to this world,  
I saw  
You firmly standing in New York City.  
My first sun rays touched you smoothly.  
I see you no more.  
Where are you, my friend?

I am a cloud in the sky.  
You were standing in my way like a giant,  
But I was not angry.  
I changed my way while giving you a hug.  
Now I see you no more.  
Where are you, my friend?

I am the Staten Island Ferry.  
When I left from Staten Island  
I saw  
You were at the river bank,  
When you were there  
I easily found my way.  
I see you no more.  
Where are you, my friend?

I am a flight coming to New York.  
At the far distance I saw  
You were standing high in the sky.  
Then I knew, "That's New York."  
I see you no more.  
Where are you, my friend?

I am the wind  
That goes around the world  
When I came to New York  
The twins were there.  
I passed you while giving you a hug.  
I see you no more.

Where are you, my friend?  
We all loved to see you  
You were part of our life.  
We see you no more  
Where are you, our friend?



*Pang, born in Sri Lanka, has lived in New York City for four years. "I am a Buddhist monk. I like to help people who need meditation. My hobby is photography." He attends the Adult Learning Center at the College of Staten Island, where his teacher is Ms. Avegale Torno.*

# Ambulance

YUQING GU



August in Guangzhou, a city in the south of China, is the hottest time of year.

Amy was writing an operation report in the doctor's office. This night, she was the doctor on ambulance duty.

The phone rang. The nurse, Xiao Lee, answered the phone.

"Can you say that again? I want to make sure of the address. Wangshi Dong Road, the train station, the left side under the big flag. Okay! We will leave the hospital in five minutes."

Amy took the stethoscope and got in the ambulance with the nurse.

The alarm sounded. The ambulance sped on the road. It didn't need to stop for the red light. The other cars had to stop to let the ambulance go.

On the train station's left side, about 200 people surrounded a young woman about to give birth. She was about nine months pregnant. She wore an old, big dress. Her face was pale. Her abdomen was painful. Her husband wore dirty, old blue pants and was very upset. They looked like farmers who went to the city to work from another state's countryside. She didn't have any medical insurance. The insurance was not important, however. Most importantly, she didn't have a certificate for the baby to be born.

In China, if you did not have a certificate, any hospital could refuse for the baby to be born there. This was the government law.

Nurse Xiao Lee opened the medical curtain. Amy checked the young woman. After that, Amy said to the young woman and her husband: "Everything is normal with the baby. The baby should be born in four hours. But we cannot send you to our hospital. You'd better go to a small clinic. If you go to the big hospital, the baby will be in trouble." Amy wanted to help her, but she couldn't.

A few elderly ladies said to Amy, "You should help her; this is two people's lives!"

"You are a doctor; you should not leave her here!"

"You should do something for her."

Amy took the big mask covering her face and put the mask near her eyes. She whispered to the young woman and her husband: "Don't go to the big hospital, or the baby will be in danger. Going to the small clinic is better." Amy could not say too much.

"Let's go back," Amy told the driver.

The alarm rang. The ambulance passed the roads to the city. Amy looked at the street from the window. She felt her eyes become wet. She put the

mask up close to her eyes; she didn't want anyone to know she was crying. She wanted to help the young lady. But she could not do anything.

Fifteen years later, Amy was a citizen in America. But she never forgot that day. She still worried about the young woman and her baby. Maybe the baby was fifteen years old. . . maybe. . .

Amy didn't want to think too much. She hoped the baby was fifteen years old now.



*Yuqing Gu was a physician in China, and in New York City she works as a hotel housekeeper. She attends the University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program. She writes, "We should continue to write every step of life. Never stop reporting colorful events of life on paper."*

# I'm from Cuba

GERARDO SEUC



I'm from the island 90 miles from Florida.  
I'm from palm trees and crystal white sandy beaches.  
I'm from formal Guayabera shirts.  
I'm from a former Spanish colony.  
I'm from Arroz con Pollo.  
I'm from the famous Cha Cha Cha, Salsa and the song Guantanamera.  
I'm from Cafe Espresso only three cents a cup at any corner in Havana.  
I saw a revolution that came in 1959.  
I saw Cuban people support and welcome the change from the previous corrupt regime.  
I saw the whole island turning up side down with new rules or regulations.  
I saw people cry every day, families break up, people lose houses, land, businesses.  
I saw the rich become poor and poor become poorer.  
I saw people stand in line for food, staples and medicines.  
I saw folks abandon their motherland, fear for the future.  
I saw boat exoduses to the north in 1966 and 1980s.  
I hopelessly left the loving island with only a few clothes.  
I don't care for the money I made and left behind.  
I feel freedom is more important than anything.



*Though Gerardo Seuc grew up in Cuba, he was born in China. Two days after he arrived in the U.S., he went to work in a coffee shop in Chinatown. "I speak Chinese and Spanish. Later, I owned a restaurant in Brooklyn. I worked hard to save money to bring fourteen family members to this country." At Seward Park Center for Reading and Writing, his tutor is Hal Drooker and the site supervisor is Terry Sheehan.*

# An Old Woman's Memory of Her Bridal Bath

GÜNSEL YILDIRIM FARAGUNA



Oh, my gosh! Don't look at my body. Look at my heart. My feelings are very young, as young as those of young people. Ooh! Memories, memories remind me how old I am. Where are those days? When I see youth, when I see some things, my memories come into my mind.

I am a woman named Ayse who is eighty years old. I have five children and twenty very cute grandchildren. I have been living in a nice ancient city since I was born. It is called Antakya City; it is near the mouth of the Orontes River. Antakya was once the capital of the Seleucid kings and the life they led in Antakya was renowned for its luxury and pleasures during Roman times. Also, the city was the center of Christianity and had been visited by St. Barnabas, St. Paul, and St. Peter. The Middle Eastern townhouse facades and beautiful courtyards and gardens are hidden with high walls. If you visit one day, you'll see the characteristic arched doorways with narrow old streets, shuttered windows, and the distinctive second-story architecture of Turkish houses. It is pleasant to live in these nice houses. In addition, many different ethnic and religious groups lived together in peace—Arabs, Turks, Muslims, Christians, Syrian Orthodox, Bahai, and Jewish people, for many centuries, and still live in peace.

Anyway, one morning, I was sitting in front of my window, looking through to the street, while drinking my Turkish coffee. My neighbor's daughter was going to get married. Maybe one dozen cars were riding down the narrow street. I realized that they were going to the bride's bath before the wedding party. We have some special events that take place in the Turkish bath: baths that mark important occasions, such as a newborn's bath, circumcision's bath, groom's bath, and bride's bath.

My mind returned to my bride's bath time. I remembered that day very clearly. There were many horse-drawn carriages, which were decorated nicely, instead of cars. I had prepared my bath-bundle of my trousseau. All mothers and young girls together prepared those trousseaus before the daughter got married. It was a big honor for a woman to prepare a nice trousseau. I was very excited when I woke up early in the morning. It was a big and important day. First, I had to put a pair of wooden clogs and a silver bowl with bay-leaf soap in a nice, white, silk bundle. These wooden clogs kept the wearer's feet clear of the wet floor in the bath. The bowl was for

pouring water over the body. The kese is a rough cloth, not only for scouring the dirt out of the pores, but also serving to deliver a bracing massage, and the pestemel is a large towel fringed at both ends and wrapped around the torso from below the armpits to about mid-thigh. I didn't forget three nice, matching towels to put on my torso and dry; the small one was for my head, the big one for around the shoulders, and the other big one for around the waist. The bundles were very important for a wedding. Two families were sending their wedding gifts to each other in bundles.

In the kitchen my mom and many women relatives were preparing delicious Antakya cuisine, for the bride's bath. They were joking, laughing, and giggling with one another. I had dressed in a red silk robe. The collar, sleeves, and front border were all embroidered. I looked like a princess. The bride was the star of the day. However, it was not easy to be a bride. Everyone was looking at you. All the horse-drawn carriages were ready in front of the house. We got in them. We were on the way and our convoy was stunning, with all nice decorations. A woman was beating a tambourine and another was playing a lute.

The Turkish bath where I went was over 400 years old, a nice bath. We arrived at the bath and went in. Around the pool the amusements started. The women were playing and singing. Single girls were holding burning candles in their hands, as they walked around the pool and took me around with them. My head was covered with the bridal veil and I was looking from behind the tulle. My mother-in-law and her relatives were staring very watchfully at me. Then they would continue to look at me in the bath. It was the worst thing for me. Everyone's eyes were on my body. However, it was a tradition. What could I do? Tradition, tradition! After entertainment and fabulous food, all the women and I went to the bath. I was walking on air, because I had been seeing my fiancé secretly and had fallen in love, even though it was a big shame to date at that time. Many women were not as lucky as I. When they got married, they saw their husband for the first time. What a pity! But then I was married for 55 years and was happy.

While I was dreaming of my bride's bath, all the cars had gone, and I smelled something burning. I had forgotten the meal in the oven. I moved with difficulty from where I sat to go into the kitchen. . .



*A photographer in Turkey, Günsel Yildirim Faraguna has lived in New York City for two years, and studies at University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program. "It is nice to study and share our experiences and stories with people who come from different countries to study English. I think that is the best place to understand people's lives and their cultures."*

# Rain and Snow

ADEGBOLA OLAWALE



The rain comes down in stripes,  
And hits the ground in dots.  
And wets the streets and houses,  
And all the empty lots.  
The snow comes down like feathers,  
Drifting through the sky,  
And lightly lays a blanket  
On roads and passersby.

# News of the Ocean

ADEGBOLA OLAWALE

Today it is quiet,  
Wave heights good.  
It's still rippling in  
And pulling back  
The way it should;  
The planet's pulse  
Reminding us it will go on  
Keeping its steady beat  
When we're long gone.



*Adegbola Olawale attends the Adult Learning Center at the College of Staten Island, where his teacher is Roseann O'Brien, Rose C. Lobat is the Literacy Coordinator, Joan Purow is the GED Coordinator, and Staci Weile is the director.*

# The Ride across World Traditions

CECILIA ROJAS



David was in his thirties, good looking, dark-skinned, with a bright smile and shaved head. His gregarious nature gave him the enthusiasm to enjoy and learn about New York's cosmopolitan culture. For months he was thinking about doing something special and unforgettable that involved foreign costumes and traditional music.

When the muses helped him, he began to prepare everything to turn his idea into something real. He went to Flushing to find Korean and Chinese music. He visited Jackson Heights to get Latin music from Peru, Ecuador and all the South American countries. In Astoria he stopped to buy music from Greece and Italy. He wasn't forgetting music from India, Morocco or Poland. After this tour he remembered some friends from high school. He knew that they studied dance and art, so he found and invited them to join him in his unusual project.

The Sunday after Thanksgiving, he arrived early to Ditmars station, he helped a worker with some cleaning in the subway cars and put his bags in the conductor's cabin. His shift started at 9 AM. "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to New York City. Today you are going to have the ride across the world with the MTA Entertainment Department. Please step in. This is the N train to Kings Highway, Brooklyn." No one had any idea about what was going to happen, and neither did the driver.

On Astoria Boulevard the people were amazed watching a few wonderful ladies in splendorous clothes; they were in bright blue, red, and gold colors, white foundation on their faces, red lips, colorful eyeshadow and with hair perfectly done up. "The MTA is giving thanks to the immigrants today. They made this city the capital of the world. Step in, stand clear of the closing doors, please." Japanese music was playing in all the cars while the geishas greeted the surprised public. A few stations ahead, the dancers from Turkey stepped in to petrify the men's eyes with the most sensual belly dance.

While the train was crossing Manhattan the driver reported delays. No one wanted to leave the train and in some stations it was too crowded. "There is another train directly behind us, please don't hold the doors." It was the announcement that people heard between each of the folkloric numbers. However, those who decided to stay inside of the train from Astoria to the last stop got the most spectacular free show. They cannot forget the tango dancers with Carlos Gardel songs, the cumbia dancers from Colombia or the

polka dancers with their traditional costumes from Poland.

David thanked the immigrants for their hard work in this country and apologized on behalf of his company for the future raise of the fare. He didn't forget to thank his country's musicians like Willy Nelson, Barbra Streisand, Frank Sinatra, Madonna, Britney Spears and Bruce Springsteen.

At the end of the day everybody was talking about the great surprise from the MTA that they got in that exciting ride. The MTA managers called each other to find out what people were talking about. Our conductor smiled to himself absolutely proud, already thinking about his new project for the next year.



*Cecilia Rojas was born in Colombia and has lived in New York City for five years. She is a student at Steinway Adult Learning Center of the Queens Borough Public Library, where the site supervisor is Tsansiu Chow. She writes, "I love to write and I hope people read and enjoy this new little story."*

# I'm from Fu Zhou

XIU CHEN



I am from Fu Zhou.

I'm from a special, difficult and loud language.

I'm from locally grown jasmine tea and rice from water fields.

I'm from sweet potatoes and Wobian (a kind of rice soup).

I'm from the sound of flip-flops on the muddy road.

I'm from hide-n-seek and ghost stories under a full starry sky.

I'm from eating, with the pig laying down right under the table.

I'm from the neighbors gossiping and working together outside in the summer night.

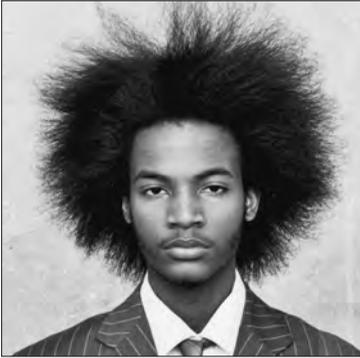
I'm from a small, beautiful island belonging to Fu Zhou.



*Xiu Chen has lived in New York City for ten years, and has two daughters, Judy, ten, and Annie, seven. At Seward Park Center for Reading and Writing, her tutor is SzePui Cheng. "I 'm happy when I come to the library to learn more reading and writing skills. If you'd like to try Wobian, I suggest you go to the restaurants on East Broadway run by people from Fu Zhou."*

# I Will Never Be Like You

KARL CONCEPCION



You helped create me, but now the smoke  
has cleared  
Frozen in my tracks like light reaching a deer  
Pondering why life is so hard  
Emotionally scarred  
But my hope is in high gear and I show no  
fear

You Mad?

Because I ain't what you want me to be  
Pay no attention when you say don't smoke them trees  
But you can't understand because you will never be me  
Rather see me fall and crawl than stand like a man  
I'm my own #1 fan  
You think you can buy my love with money  
But I just use you like a dummy  
I'm the only one acknowledges the presence my mother  
I can't even consider you my father

Sob?

Why bother. Me and you don't mix, like cereal with water  
You don't even recognize me as a son or my sisters as your daughters  
I learned to work with the hand life dealt me  
You wouldn't give me a place to rest my head when I landed in a shelter  
Cut through the wind of love and happiness like a feather  
My mind is just flaming hot like cajun cheddar

And?

Mother, if you were alive, I would ask you what you see in this bum  
How could he be incapable of raising his own son?  
People who got it hard and which are of my caliber  
Will learn to cut through veins of circumstance like the sword of Excalibur  
Serendipity won't allow me to fail  
Brain's been bruised, battered, and beaten—I'm in mental hell  
Grown to have kids of my own, I will never be the father you were to me  
I will learn to love, care, and nourish my seed  
I just have this immaculate drive that prevents me from crying  
My life is an enigma, you will never figure me out

I will continue my path and be out and about  
No one knows where life will take me, but if necessary I will take an  
Alternative route.



*Karl Concepcion turned nineteen on Valentine's Day. Born in Brooklyn to a Panamanian mother and a Puerto Rican father, he came to the Downtown Learning Center as a homeless sixteen-year-old. He has been writing since he was twelve, and is fervently pursuing further education. Last year he got his GED, and received a scholarship to the school of aeronautics he now attends. At Downtown Learning Center, Joni Schwarz was his tutor.*

Our Struggles,  
Achievements,  
and Goals

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# I Came to America

WAH YOU LEE



I came to America not to get a better life for myself, but mainly for my children. In China, I was a teacher in a teacher-training school. But because of my family's background I didn't get enough trust from the government, even in political movements. (There were a lot of political movements under the rule of Mao Zhe-Dong). I was criticized and insulted by others, but usually I was respected by my students. And I was satisfied with my life. Although at that time in China, daily necessities were lacking and I didn't have a life of luxury; I had something to eat, clothes to wear, and my life condition was better than many people's.

I came to America not for my material enjoyment, but so my children could get a good chance for an education. What was the problem with getting an education in China? In China, in the period of Mao Zhe-Dong, the Communist Party attached importance to class origins and the people who were born in the so-called bad families (which meant wealthy or land-owning families) could not be trusted. Young people from these families, even though they studied very well, could not enter universities. My children would have no chance to go to university, and at that time no university diploma meant no future. I hoped my children could get a good education, so I wanted to emigrate to America, to be a stepping stone to help my children get a good future.

After I came to America, I found America is a rich country. Food and clothes are plentiful and the prices are cheap. Living conditions are fine, transportation is convenient. But these didn't attract me so much, so I still lived a simple life in America. I worked in garment factories as a sorter, from a teacher transferring to a manual laborer. I tried hard to adapt myself to the new job, because I knew I had to keep a job to support my family, so I didn't have any complaints.

Coming to America, the happiest thing for me is that my children have received a good education and gotten some achievements, so I have attained my wish.



*Wah You Lee attends the University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program, where the director is Michael Hunter. Wah You Lee is married to Lisa Lee, author of "Yum Cha' and New Yorkers." They are the parents of two grown children.*

# I'd Like to be a Florist

STEVIE LAI



When I was much younger, I saw a movie. I don't remember the name of it nor much about it except that the story happened in a flower store. It was a love story. The main character was a beautiful woman who worked as a florist in the store, which was full of all kinds of colorful flowers. One day, a handsome young man with excellent manners came in to order a flower bouquet. Of course, the story was much more complicated. It turned out that the handsome man was wealthy

and well-educated. He liked this beautiful florist and didn't know how to approach her. So he went into the store every day and ordered a bouquet to send to his own address. I thought it was very romantic. (Don't forget, I was young and naive at that time.) Since then, I have kept a little wish in the corner of my heart: I'd like to be a florist, not because of the romance (well, I wouldn't mind if I were still single), but so that I can be surrounded by colorful flowers and green plants all the time.

I like flowers and plants and place a lot of them by the windows in my apartment. I enjoy watering them and watching new flower buds and new leaves coming out. It cheers me up to see them growing in the sunshine. Arranging flowers in a bouquet is one of my favorite things to do. And, for sure, dealing with flowers is much easier than dealing with many people.

I don't think I am the kind of person who has a green thumb, but that doesn't stop me from liking flowers and plants. It's my dream to own a flower shop to keep myself in a world of flowers and to be a florist, so I can earn my living and do the thing I most love to do.



*A woman born in Hong Kong, Stevie Lai writes, "I like reading. I am attending the Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing to improve my English. My goal is to express and communicate as well as Americans." Stevie Lai's tutor is Judith Schwartz.*

# My Son Francisco

OFELIO CHEN



I am not a superstitious or religious person but I believe in fate. There are many things in the world. We can't prejudge them or know what will happen tomorrow. You might think something will not happen, but it might. Things are hard to predict.

I will tell you a story. My son Francisco was a quiet boy. He didn't have many friends. I never heard him talk about his classmates when he studied in elementary and high school. He was a plain boy and he

was contented with his lot. He never compared himself to other people.

He thought he would be able to pass his grade and move on to the next year. I asked him, "Don't you want to improve your grades a little bit? You have an average of about sixty percent in school, is it enough?" He replied, "It is enough. I don't want to study harder and only improve a little." When I heard that, I thought he was strange. What made him think this way? But I was a liberal father. I respected his thoughts. I could not force him to do anything that he was not fond of. I asked him these questions because I was his father and I had the right to know about his studies. I considered it my duty. But I believe in fate. As Chinese people say, when one is born, his or her destiny is made. One should not treat his offspring like an animal. I could not go against heaven. I was an ordinary person. I didn't have the power to change anyone's destiny.

There is one thing I still don't understand. When my son Francisco was born in 1972, I was a 28-year-old young man. I didn't have a steady financial income at the time. When I went to the hospital to visit my first son he was a cute, handsome baby boy. He looked like a baby from a rich family. I cried until my tears ran out. Inside, my heart said to him, "Son, come home with me. You will have a hard time because your father is still very poor and can't give you an easy life." I didn't know why I had these feelings. I have four children and Francisco was the only baby that made me feel sad.

When my son Francisco graduated from his high school, I thought about his future. He did not study hard and his grades weren't high enough. I thought it was better to establish a small business for him. I asked him, "What are you going to do in your future?" He said, "I want to go to the United States, where there are more opportunities." I was very happy. I knew my son had grown up. He knew where he would go in his future. All my worries had gone. My father was right when he said that children have good luck. I never thought he would finish his college degree but he did. He joined the United States Army and he went to Kuwait. I am proud of

him. He is a brave boy. He made his old father feel sadness, worry, and happiness. No matter what, I love him.



*Born in Panama, Ofelio Chen was raised in China, and now studies at University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program. "I like my writing class. Through my writing I can share my feelings about my life and my point of view. I know if I manage to learn English I will have more opportunity to communicate my experiences with martial arts and philosophy. I think it is a helpful way to communicate with my family, too."*

# My Mother and My Children

LISSET MEYRELES



My mother is the one I will always cherish for all the things she has done for my kids and me in the past. I am also grateful for the things she does for me today, and the things she will do in the future. There were two special events in our life that have forever bonded us as mother and daughter. To me, this is a way of telling her thank you for always being there and that I will always love her.

Thirteen years ago, I was in the hospital ready to give birth to my oldest son, Justin. My mother was there throughout the fourteen hours of labor and not once did she leave my bedside. Through those long and painful hours, I cried to my mother and asked her to be with me in the delivery room. At first, she did not want to go through it. But she changed her mind when I told her that it would mean the whole world to me if she were there to see her grandson being born. My mother cried because she never thought that she would have the opportunity to actually see her first grandson being born. When Justin finally arrived into this world, my mother was so full of tears of joy and happiness, she even cut the umbilical cord. It was a kind of happiness that I hadn't seen in a long while.

What I remember the most is when the nurse was weighing Justin, my mother went over to them. She spoke so nervously, loudly and proudly. She told my son, "Hey, you! Listen, don't you dare call me GRANDMA. Call me Titi or Aunty. Not GRANDMA, okay!"

Justin burst out with a loud cry, which actually scared her. She jumped back and said, "Oh, my God, I just scared him. Now he hates me. He is probably saying, 'Oh, my God, who is that ugly lady?'" The doctors and nurses laughed so hard.

Another time my mom was there for me was ten years ago, when I gave birth to my other son, Kevin. Throughout the whole pregnancy I swore up and down that the baby was a girl. I had picked out a girl's name and everything. Never did it cross my mind that the baby was a male. My mind was programmed that this baby was a girl and that was it.

When I gave birth, I remember the doctor said, "Congratulations, you have a baby. . . boy."

I said to the doctor, "What? I don't want another boy. I want a girl. Cut his peepee. Do something, please. I want a girl." Come to think of it now, it really does sound crazy, but at the same time very funny.

My mother finally came to the hospital and I told her that I didn't have a name for the baby. So I asked her to name him for me. She hesitated because

she feared that he would hate his name when he grew up. I convinced her to name him and that it would be a blessing if she did, because after all he was her second grandson. She eventually agreed and she went home that night wondering what to name him. To my understanding, she couldn't sleep that night at all.

The next day she came back to the hospital with two names for the baby. She said to me, "Kevin Matthew or Matthew Kevin." I said to her, "Wow, you really thought this one out." So finally we agreed on Kevin Matthew. I told her over and over, it's a beautiful name. She replied, "To name a baby is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me. After seeing Justin born and now this, these are things I won't be able to see or do again in my life." This is when I knew that my mother was so proud of being my mother and a grandmother to my kids.

All of us have a great relationship that I would never want to trade for anything in this world. I know sometimes I forget to tell her how important she is to my boys and me. I hope through this story she will know. I want her to know that she will always be my shining star and will always be a special part of my children.



*Lisset Meyreles is a 31-year-old single parent raising two boys. She wants to further her education and is planning to study criminal justice. Her teacher at Hostos Community College's Adult Learning Center is Donna Grant.*

# Incognito

CELESTE CELESTE



Yes, this is incognito—my identity is disguised.

Guess what? When I was eleven, my guidance counselor told me that I could become a writer, but all of my 47 years I've learned how to hide my reading habits. I am a great speaker as a survival technique.

Because I had to take care of an ill mother, I grew up too fast. I learned how to speak English because we were both born in Puerto Rico, but I came to New York at the age of three. I finished school, but I didn't read correctly. I read, but I didn't understand what I was reading. I had no comprehension. But I was a good kid in school so the teachers passed me, which was an injustice to me because I learned nothing. I was bright and that's how I got through.

Because of my mother's illness, I became the mother and she became the child. I took care of her appointments and became an adult. I was taken out of school many times in order to take care of my mother's appointments.

Every chance I got I went to school to escape the chaos at home. Just recently, like about two years ago, I was diagnosed with ADD and High Stress Disorder. I was not helped when I was a child by taking on the role of an adult at the early age of eight.

But things have changed. Now, I take charge of my life. I am not going to let anyone control me. I am in school to learn how to read and write better. It's going to take courage and a long time to heal all the damage that was done. I pray that I am able to go to school and to learn by heart how to read and write so that I am able to do well and become a whole person, so that I don't have to be incognito, so that I am able to face my fears.

I tell no one about my school because I don't want anyone to interfere in my growth, in my growing-up chapter. This time around, it is my time, my improvement, my reading, my writing and my growing up. I pray that I continue my education at the library with my teachers, who are patient and that I am able to use all the wisdom possible to develop into a whole human being and become a dynamic individual.



*Celeste Celeste is the pen name of a student at the Aguilar Language Learning Lab of the New York Public Library. "I am a volunteer community activist in the 78th District of Manhattan. I am a campaign coordinator and I enjoy helping people."*

# The Job of My Life

BIANCA PEREZ



If I could have any job, the one I would have to choose is being a Park Ranger. I love being in the wilderness, walking in the woods, being awed by the sight of a mountain, taking long hikes and protecting the wildlife there.

I can imagine myself in Yellowstone Park, in Wyoming—living in a cabin, waking up in the morning, walking up a mountain with my backpack full of camping equipment, including a sleeping bag, a compass and a poncho. I would be feeling the grass as I walk. My lunch breaks would include swimming in the river and drinking coffee with my sandwich.

During the day, I would explore the forest, looking for the wildlife, making sure the public didn't disturb or harm any of those creatures like the woodpecker or song sparrow. Without these birds, the trees would die because the birds are responsible for removing the fungi and thereby enabling the trees to grow so tall.

I would be on the lookout to ensure that streams, lakes and ponds are clear of dead animals. Water can become contaminated due to the dead carcasses, and that would make water birds, ducks and fish sick. When animals eat dead specimens, they can become infected, thereby continuing the fatal cycle.

At night, I would camp, make a fire in front of a waterfall (which would also allow me to wash up) go fishing and make my dinner. When all chores were completed, I could lie back in the sleeping bag, gaze at the always incredible sky, breathe deeply and watch the shooting stars. What a life that would be!



*Bianca Perez attends Union Settlement Association's ESL class, where her teacher is Miriam Lee, and the site supervisor is Maria Quiroga. "I am curious and I love knowledge. That is because when I was a child my father would take me on many weekend train trips and I became full of questions. Then one day we went camping. The colors! The shapes! That was it for me!"*

# My Mother Learns English

JANE ZHOU



My mother is fifty years old. She had never learned English before she came to New York. My sister asked her to learn English at ESL school in China before she came to the U.S.A., but she said she was too old to learn.

After my mother came to New York she knew English was very important. Before, when she worked at the restaurant, she didn't need to speak English. Now she changed her job and would need to speak a little. So my sister and my nephew help her with English. Now she can speak a little, but her pronunciation does not sound like standard English.

Last night, I was doing my homework and my nephew was on the computer in the bedroom. My nephew wanted to play games but I did not allow him to. I told him he could type something instead. He opened a file to type, and typed 26 letters and some words, and then asked my mother to come into the bedroom. He asked my mother to pronounce the 26 letters. When my mother pronounced "H," it was not right. My nephew said, "Grandma, you're wrong! Look at my mouth and follow me, it's pronounced 'H'." Then my mother followed him and said that this time was better. They continued to do this. After a few minutes, my mother pronounced "W." She pronounced a word with 'W' in it and my nephew said, "Grandma, it's not double! Double means something different! It's just 'W,' look at my mouth, okay?" But my mother said it wrong again. My mother and I laughed.

My nephew started to lose his patience because he is only eight years old. Then I encouraged him to calm down so he wouldn't talk to his grandmother like that. After all, she was improving. Then he talked to my mother. "Grandma, stop laughing. If you always laugh, you won't learn anything, okay? You should be serious and look at my mouth." At that time my nephew looked just like a teacher. He was so serious and patient. My mother practiced a few times. Finally she pronounced it in standard English. My nephew said, "Good, Grandma, you got it! You did a good job! Let us continue."



*Jane Zhou has lived in New York City for about two years, and studies in the Family Literacy Program at University Settlement Society. "With the guidance of my teachers, my English has improved."*

# I Kept My Faith and Changed My Skills

SUSAN TAN



I came from Indonesia eighteen years ago to the United States. I was dying to learn English because I had a language problem. I only spoke Chinese, Mandarin, and Cantonese. I couldn't find a better job with better pay.

At this time, the only job I could do was babysit for a Chinese family. The family was a husband and wife and a one-and-a-half-year-old girl. They were living in Paramus, New Jersey. And that was for very little pay, too. But I had no choice.

The husband and wife left the house to go to work in the morning and came back in the evening. In the daytime, it was just me and the daughter. When I started this job it was winter. When I looked out the window it was all white. I was very lonely in this country. I was homesick for a year, and I cried, too.

Sometime later, I met someone in my organization known as SGI, which is Japanese Main Soka Gakkai International, USA. Every night we talked on the phone for two to three hours. All of my pay went to the phone bill. I had no money after ten years.

After ten years I decided to change my skills. A friend told me about nails. At the time I was 36 years old already. I was so worried because I last polished nails when I was eight years old. When I saw the nail design, I felt so depressed because I had no skill at all.

I kept my faith through it and changed my skills. Then I began doing manicures, and I began managing the store. I have more time for myself now, and I'm glad to attend the Downtown Learning Center. Thank you very much because I can learn English now.



*Susan Tan is a 43-year-old woman who attends the Downtown Learning Center's Adult Education Program. She says, "The main reason I came to this country is that I did not like the politics in Indonesia." She urges readers, "Never give up on your dreams, no matter what."*

# The Saddest Day of My Life

LEROY SIMPSON



The saddest day in my life was when my grandmother died. She was like a mother and father to me. We were very close. My grandmother lived in Jamaica. When she died, I was living in America. I was very sad. What made it even worse was that I could not go to her funeral. The reason I could not go to her funeral was because I was in jail at the time.

The reason I was in jail was because I was at my friend's house smoking "trees."

We were hanging out watching a ball game on TV when about seven or eight white men came rushing into the apartment. They had guns and were shouting, "Get down. Hands behind you." I was very scared. I thought it was a robbery. The men were the police.

They took us to the precinct and charged us with possession of marijuana. I was very sad and scared. I knew that I was going to jail. My family called my mother and told her that I was in jail. My mother was very sad and mad at me for doing something like that.



*"Before I came to the Center I was unable to read or write. The Center provided me with tutors who helped me to learn, for which I am thankful." Born in Jamaica, 42-year-old Leroy Simpson has lived in New York City for five years. He studies at the Wakefield Center for Reading and Writing of the New York Public Library, where the site supervisor is Sherlette Lee.*

# Be Proud

ANA HERNANDEZ



Being proud of my son Tony is a very nice and wonderful feeling. In May, 2004 my son graduated from college. He accomplished a four-year bachelor degree in science. The day of his graduation was very emotional for me. I was so happy that I cried and I felt like I had graduated too. One of my dreams had come true. His graduation meant a lot to me.

My son's elementary school years weren't easy for him. He had learning disabilities. His speech and inability to recall letters and numbers were very difficult for him to cope with. I always remember that his teachers' complaints made me feel very sad, because I didn't know where to get help. The tutor programs available at his school at that time weren't enough for my son's problems. It was not easy for me, either, but I remember that I was very optimistic and I prayed a lot and never lost faith. I always thought that help should be somewhere and I started asking for it. First, I asked his doctor. He referred him to the eye, ear and throat children's hospital for an evaluation.

There, the doctor confirmed that my son, indeed, had speech and learning disabilities. His doctor said that with speech therapy, he would be able to cope with his learning disabilities in school. I had to bring him to his therapist three times a week, after school, for a year. Also, I found extra help at Little Sister of Assumption, a center with different programs available for our community. I believe that this was where my son got the most help. It was so helpful for his development and his life, that he still actually remembers it. Especially Sister Beatriz Bernan. She was the one who helped him a lot. I always expressed my gratitude to her and thanked her for the help she gave to my son and myself. She has retired now. I don't see her anymore, but she is always in my heart.

While my son was attending speech therapy, he was a very hardworking child. He always was. When he finished seventh grade at P.S. 96 he went to the Science and Humanity School for junior high and was then accepted to the School of the Future for high school in downtown Manhattan. With great effort and hard work he graduated. His last year in high school was time for him to think about moving on and going to college. I kept motivated and I never gave up in encouraging him. I know that maybe I was too noisy and too pushy but for a good cause. I didn't care about putting too much pressure on him about his education. It was worth it, wasn't it? He will always have my love, respect, and admiration.

Before he finished high school he did the research for his next step. His counselor showed him how to fill out a school application. His grades at that time were pretty good. He filled out the applications and submitted them. He was on his way, I thought. I suggested that he apply for college outside of New York City, Sienna College, in upstate New York, was his first choice. He was very anxious until the news came that Sienna accepted him.

I remember that I was very happy for him. My husband was too but he hesitated. He didn't like the idea that my son would leave home to get his education. I was determined to convince my husband to let my son go for it. In the end my husband not only continued his support but helped him financially too. We didn't have enough money saved in the bank, only \$10,000. It wasn't an obstacle to make us stop helping our son's education. We took out loans and my son did, too. The best part of all was that my son qualified for a scholarship that Sienna College gives to their students. He was one of the lucky ones. He got \$5,000 per year. Of course, he had to keep his grades up. The rest of the money we covered.

I won't forget those years when he was afraid of his new challenge. He wasn't sure of what career to choose. I believe that he didn't know what he wanted to be or study. He decided on engineering. The following year he changed his major. But that didn't bother me: he was doing what was best for him. Finally, in 2004, he graduated.

For this and all the things he has achieved and has gone through, I am very proud of his success. I also know that this part of his life is only the beginning of his career. I know he will use his school skills and experience to help him in his personal life. Thank you, son, for making us so proud.



*Ana Hernandez is a native of Guatemala. "I want to thank all of the people who work at the Aguilar Language Learning Center of the New York Public Library who were involved in giving me the opportunity to write my composition. Thanks to Nicole Hertvik, the site supervisor, for all her help and support."*

# I Want to Read

JAMES BOOKHART



I want to read a book to my grandson. He is two years old and I love him very much. I want to read because I think it's fun. Sometimes I see people reading, and when I can't do that it's very hurtful. I want to read all about horses because I worked with them for a long time and I think that they are the most magnificent animals that I have ever seen.

Sometimes I want to read a book so I won't feel so bad. Sometimes I'll be riding the train and I see people reading books and things and I can't do that. And I would like to do that very much.



*Born in South Carolina 53 years ago, James Bookhart has lived in New York City for 37 years. At St. Agnes Center for Reading and Writing of the New York Public Library, his tutor is Maida Schwab. "I would like readers to know how hurt I am because the doctors stopped me from working. I was scared to death because I didn't know how to do much else other than working with the horses. I worked at the track for 35 years. Now I'm learning how to read and write."*

# She Was My Mother

CHRISTINA O'CONNELL



It has been told to me that almost every woman can give birth to a child, but not every woman has what it takes to be a real mother.

She was my best friend, the woman I went to with all my problems. She would always give me the best solution she thought was possible. When she couldn't think of a solution she would say to me, "Follow your heart." I followed my heart when I chose her as the woman to call my mother. Even

though she didn't give birth to me, in my heart and in my world she was my mother. She was my light in the dark, my sun in the sky. She was the arms that carried me when the road got too rough. She would give me the strength to be strong when I sometimes couldn't handle life's tasks.

As the days passed, I watched her slowly get very sick. It killed me inside to see her this way. Because of all she had done for me, I wanted to help her. But there was nothing I could do. I hoped and prayed for her recovery. She didn't want to show it but it was obvious she was getting weak. Now, it was my turn to be strong for both of us. Breaking down from time to time, she would tell me to stay strong when the time came for her to be with God. I didn't want to think of her leaving me, though. I knew nothing I could do would prepare me for her passing.

When I came face to face with the fact that she was gone, all I could think was, I'm all alone now, I'm scared and how can I go on? Part of me felt guilty for just continuing my life without her. Then I woke up one morning and realized this wasn't the way she would want it to be. She wanted me to gather all the advice she gave me while she was alive, live by it and pass it on to my children. I will always remember the woman who guided me from being a young girl to becoming a respectable woman and mother. No other woman in my life will ever measure up to her. And so I will continue my life knowing this: I was blessed to have her in my life. I will always remember the woman with the heart of gold. Miss Lucy, she was my mother.



*Christina O'Connell attends CUNY Immersion Plus, at the College of Staten Island. She is twenty years old, and the single mother of two children, Alia and Jaidyn. "I care for my children, and go to school day after day, to make a better life for me and my children."*

# Life Is Getting Better in the U.S.

WINNIE LEUNG



In 1994 Mark and his family immigrated to New York. He has two children. He was an accountant in China. His family moved to the U.S. because his wife wanted to reunite with her parents. His father-in-law came to America for a long time; he bought a house on Coney Island. When Mark's family arrived in New York, they lived with his in-laws.

At the beginning, Mark went to an ESL class to learn English in the summer, while his wife worked in a factory. When he finished summer school, he wanted to find a good job, but he didn't know much English. He got a job in the factory; he was a button-hole-machine operator. He was working hard. He worked from 9 AM to 8 PM, sometimes seven days a week. He disliked his job and went back to school to learn English in the morning, and after school he worked in the factory.

A few years later, he understood more English and changed his job. Now he is a waiter at a Chinese restaurant. His life is getting better in the U.S.



*Winnie Leung, a native of China, lives in New York City. She and her sisters, Shirley and Marissa, attend the Family Literacy Program of University Settlement Society, where Michael Hunter is the director.*

# My Dream Can Become Real

MAMOUDO DIALLO



Each of us has his own feelings about the thing he wants to do. Some want to be doctors, electricians or engineers. My feelings make me want to open a pharmacy in my country, Mali. What moves me in that direction is that I feel I owe it to set an example for other people.

Today, the poorest countries are facing serious problems around health issues. The people have become a pain in the neck, as far as the government is concerned. No one wants to take responsibility for delivering health services. The government is corrupt; it does not care about its citizens. My country is one of those nations where the population is in urgent need of medication. There are few hospitals or pharmacies. Even when a person has a prescription, it is extremely difficult to get the medication. As it is, people must walk or drive many miles from where they live to reach the closest pharmacy. There are only a few in the entire country, and those are not well organized.

Sometimes, it takes days before you get the drugs, even when it is an emergency or crisis. In Mali, where I grew up, I, too, had to bear those burdens. These people are nice people and really deserve to be happy and stay healthy. By my opening a pharmacy there, it will serve as an example for other people. The rich can afford it. However, seeing the things I saw while growing up, made me want to come to the United States and learn how to become a real pharmacist. I want my country to be similar to New York City—where all people can obtain needed prescriptions without exhaustion. What is happening to people in my country should not be. They work hard, with hope and courage.

To open a pharmacy will be a guide, a path, for others who want the same thing. When they see how people benefit from such businesses, I think other people will move in the same direction. Helping others is really helping yourself.



*Mamoudo Diallo attends Union Settlement Association's ESL class. His teacher is Miriam Lee. "Today Africa is a backward continent on health issues. I grew up in a country where people are struggling to make a decent life. I observed this and I said to myself I can help as well as others to make life easier for my people."*

# Do Not Leave Us Behind

FRANK LUGO



Dear President Bush, Governor Pataki, and Mayor Bloomberg,

We went to City Hall on Sunday, February 8, 2004, because the mayor wants to close the schools. He said, "We have no money." If that's true, why don't you stop the jobs from leaving New York City? Help jobs to stay in New York City. I can't get a good job because I cannot read. You want us to stay in school but you are closing the schools. I should give up, you say.

We need teachers to help adults who cannot read, like me. What does education mean to you? Can you tell me? How about this? Why don't you come here to see for yourself? This program helped me get my driver's license. It helped me to read newspapers and cookbooks. How are we going to learn if the schools close? We pay more taxes. Why? I am thinking about this. We should help people who are willing to work hard.

Adults need to learn a trade. I would like to drive a school bus. I would like to get a job in your company, Mayor Bloomberg, to show you I need education. But I can't fill out applications because I can't read.

I couldn't read to my baby because I couldn't read a baby book. I joined the Marine Corps. I hoped this would help me to go to school and to fight for my country. The officer told me I couldn't read the manual. I said to myself, "Not again." Some day I will get a chance to get an education back home. I don't have a chance in this world. Why? Help me. What's my next step? I liked being a Marine. I say I was in for one month. People laugh at me.

I would like to read the TV guide. What is playing in the movies? What are the healthy foods and what do transit maps say?

I am American. How can I visit the White House? Do you have tours for people who do not know how to read? We have disabilities. You list people who have wheelchairs and who are hearing-impaired. How about people who can't read? You do not have tours for people who cannot read. Why not? We are an embarrassment to the White House.

Please read this letter. This is about us. It may help people in the White House and Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki to understand us, why we can't read. We pay taxes. More people would know how to read ballots to vote. Please get back to me.

Sincerely,  
Frank Lugo



*Born in New York City, Frank Lugo has lived here most of his life. "I like to cook and I like to fix things around the house. Now that I can read more, I can try new recipes, like Chinese food. And reading helps me to learn more about how to fix things, like plumbing and buying things at Home Depot." At Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing, Frank Lugo's tutors are SzePui Cheng and Donna Cain, and the site supervisor is Terry Sheehan.*

# Statistics and Resources

# Adult Literacy Statistics

## FROM PROLITERACY AMERICA, STATE OF ADULT LITERACY 2004

### EDUCATION AND LITERACY

One survey showed that “for firms that test for skills below high school graduate level, 34.1% of job applicants lack the literacy skills needed to do the job they seek.”

Another study found that “those with the skills of a typical high school dropout qualify for only 10% of all new jobs.”

Between 1979 and 2000, “earnings for males who left school before getting a diploma have fallen by 30%, and 21% for females.”

“Workers at the lowest level of quantitative literacy have an unemployment rate of nearly 20%.”

In a nationwide study of 5,401 adults who had been in ABE programs and who had been out of the programs at least 6 months, “37% reported being employed at the time they entered their program, and 67% reported being employed at the time of the survey.”

“National Institute for Literacy figures for 2002 indicate that a high school diploma or a GED nearly doubles the probability of working and staying employed.”

One study found that of literacy programs that tracked welfare dependence, “80% reported an overall reduction in welfare dependence by their students.”

### WOMEN AND LITERACY

“Worldwide, 1.3 billion people lack basic literacy skills, and of these 70% are women.”

“In the U.S., as women gain more education, infant mortality rates drop: there are 9.1 deaths for every 1,000 live births for women with less than 12 years of education, compared to 6.3 deaths per thousand for women with at least a high school education.”

“Of adults tested at the lowest literacy level, 67.2% had never told their spouses about their literacy problem. 53.4% had never told their children. 19% had never told anyone.”

“Literacy students reported that the programs they attended were the primary or entire source of achieving improvements in their: parent/family role 66%; worker role 81%; citizen role 76%.”

“After six months in a program, 12% of students said they had participated in community organizations. After a year. . . the number was up to 31%.”

In one study of adult literacy students one year after they entered programs, “changes in social participation were as follows: voter registration increased by 13%, involvement in social/sports activities rose from 7% to 17%; involvement in PTA activities rose from 16% to 23%.”

## IMMIGRATION AND LITERACY

“The number of international immigrants, or people living outside their countries of birth, more than doubled between the mid-1970s and 2004, to about 175 million.”

Since 1980, “the number of foreign-born in the United States rose by 145%, from 14 million to 35 million.”

“Based on the 2000 census, 31% of the target population for adult education (adults aged 16 or older without a high school diploma) spoke little or no English. Add adults who have a high school diploma, but who indicated on the census that they speak English less than ‘very well,’ and this number increases by 16%.”

## HEALTH AND LITERACY

“One study of 2,659 low-income outpatients at two public hospitals revealed that 26% could not read their appointment slips; 47% could not understand written directions to take medicine on an empty stomach; 49% when reading a hospital financial aid form, could not determine whether they were eligible for free care; 81% of English-speaking patients age 60 or older had inadequate health literacy.”

“In a study of Medicaid participants, those who read at the lowest grade levels had average annual health care costs of about \$13,000, compared with the average for all Medicaid participants in the study of about \$3,000.”

## CORRECTIONS AND LITERACY

“46% of prison inmates do not have a high school diploma.”

“67% of inmates can’t write a brief letter explaining a billing error, read a map, or understand a bus schedule.”

“Only about 9% of inmates with low literacy skills ever receive literacy training while in prison.”

“The prison population has tripled since 1980.”

“For paroled inmates who had completed an educational program in prison, the figure (for finding employment) was 77.9%, in comparison to 54.6% that had no educational programming in prison.”

“Released prisoners who have been in prison education programs earn more than released non-participants. . . 30% more than inmates who had not been in programs.”

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Center for Applied Linguistics  
<http://www.cal.org>

International Reading Association  
<http://www.reading.org>

Literacy Assistance Center, New York  
<http://www.lacny.org>

National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center  
<http://ldlink.coe.utk.edu>

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy  
<http://gseweb.harvard.edu~ncsall>

National Center on Adult Literacy  
<http://ncal.literacy.upenn.edu>

National Institute for Literacy  
<http://novel.nifl.gov>

SCALE (Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education)  
<http://www.readwriteact.org>

TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages)  
<http://www.tesol.org>

Verizon Literacy Campus  
<http://www.literacycampus.org>

VALUE (Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education)  
<http://www.literacynet.org/value>

# Contact Information for Participating Adult Literacy/ESL Sites

## BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Central Learning Center

Grand Army Plaza

Brooklyn, New York 11238

718-230-2731

Winsome Pryce-Cortes, Site Supervisor

w.cortes@brooklynpubliclibrary.org

Kathy Threats-Grant, Literacy Advisor

k.threats-grant@brooklynpubliclibrary.org

## COLLEGE OF MOUNT SAINT VINCENT

Institute for Immigrant Concerns

1223 Second Avenue

New York, New York 10021

212-421-9538

Diana Schoolman, Teacher

Mark Brik, Education Director

Donna Kelsh, Director

dkelsh@verizon.net

## COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Office of Continuing Education and Professional  
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2800 Victory Boulevard, Building 2A, Room 201

Staten Island, New York 10314

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Joan Purow, GED Coordinator

Avegnale Torno, ESL Coordinator

HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE,  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Adult Learning Center

500 Grand Concourse, Room B208

Bronx, New York 10451

718-518-6723

Donna Grant, GED Teacher

Zenobia Johnson, Site Supervisor

[zjohnson@hostos.cuny.edu](mailto:zjohnson@hostos.cuny.edu)

LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE,  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Center for Immigrant Education and Training

ESOL/Civics Adult Learners

31-10 Thomson Avenue

Long Island City, New York 11101

718-482-5380

Hillary Gardner, ESOL/Civics Program Coordinator and Instructor

[hgardner@lagcc.cuny.edu](mailto:hgardner@lagcc.cuny.edu)

DOWNTOWN LEARNING CENTER

Adult Education Program

180 Livingston Street

Brooklyn, New York 11201

646-894-9303

Shelly McGee, Publications Administrator/Tutor

[shelsay@hotmail.com](mailto:shelsay@hotmail.com)

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Adult and Continuing Education

Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center

212 W. 120th Street

New York, New York 10027

212-666-1920

Diana Raissis, Teacher

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Aguilar Language Learning Center

174 East 110th Street

New York, New York 10025

212-534-1613

Nicole Hertvik, Literacy Site Advisor

[Nicole\\_Hertvik@nypl.org](mailto:Nicole_Hertvik@nypl.org)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Seward Park Center for Reading and Writing  
192 East Broadway  
New York, New York 10002  
212-529-2909  
Terry Sheehan, Literacy Site Supervisor  
tsheehan@nypl.org

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
St. Agnes Center for Reading and Writing  
444 Amsterdam Avenue  
New York, New York 10024  
212-787-4014  
Joan Pleune, Site Supervisor  
jpleune@nypl.org

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
St. George Center for Reading and Writing  
5 Central Avenue  
Staten Island, New York 10301  
718-816-1025  
Geniene Monterrosa, Teacher  
gmonterroa@nypl.org

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing  
331 E. 10th Street  
New York, New York 10009  
212-673-4528  
Terry Sheehan, Literacy Site Advisor  
tsheehan@nypl.org

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Wakefield Center for Reading and Writing  
4100 Lowerre Place  
Bronx, New York 10466  
718-652-4663  
Sherlette Lee, Literacy Advisor  
slee@nypl.org  
Charmin Haynes, Literacy Assistant

QUEENS BOROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Rochdale Adult Learning Center  
169-09 137th Avenue  
Jamaica, New York 11434  
718-723-7662  
Rifat Bhirat, Teacher  
rbhirat@queensboroughpubliclibrary.org

QUEENS BOROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Steinway Adult Learning Center  
21-45 31st Street  
Astoria, New York 11105  
718-932-3239  
Tsansiu Chow, Center Manager  
tsansiu.chow@queenslibrary.org  
Camilo Fontecilla, Teacher

UNION SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATION  
Adult Education Program, GED Class  
237 E. 104th Street  
New York, New York 10002  
212-828-6298  
Maria Quiroga, Adult Education Program Director  
mquiroga@unionsett.org  
Miriam Lee, Teacher

UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT SOCIETY  
Family Literacy Program  
175 Eldridge Street  
New York, New York 10002  
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Michael Hunter, Director  
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