

The Literacy Review

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The Literacy Review

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Welcome

Welcome to the fifth volume of *The Literacy Review*, the annual compilation of some of the best writing by adult Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL students in programs throughout New York City. *The Literacy Review* is edited, designed and photographed by undergraduates at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

The first *Literacy Review*, published in Spring 2003, consisted of essays, poems and stories by 36 writers from 16 adult literacy sites. This year, our six student-editors were thrilled to read 402 submissions, and after much discussion chose works by 63 writers from 30+ sites. Two student-photographers used professional equipment to capture the radiance of the writers who came to our three photo shoots at NYU. Each year, it's been a joy to develop and improve *The Literacy Review*.

Readers, get ready for a literary treat!

But first, a quick welcome, a farewell, and a thank you. I welcome Maura Donnelly, who in fall 2006 began to teach the Literacy in Action course that has always been the center of our Literacy Project. I bid the fondest of farewells to *LR5*'s editor in chief, Phoebe Fox, who will graduate this year. She was my student-teacher in the University Settlement Society writing class for a year, working with Chinese-Americans, and my student-teacher in the initiating semester of the writing class at the International Rescue Committee, working with West African refugees. She went on to work at the Aguilar Branch of the New York Public Library's Centers for Reading and Writing. She also has been awarded two \$500 grants by the NYU Office of Community Service, to buy books for adult literacy classes. She was a copy editor of *LR3*, an editor of *LR4* and now editor in chief of *LR5*. Her devotion to adult literacy has been truly extraordinary and has won her a 2007 NYU President's Service Award.

I thank the writer of the *LR5* introduction: Terry Sheehan, site advisor at the Tompkins Square and Seward Park Branches of the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing. Terry has been involved with *The Literacy Review* from its beginning. She has probably sent more submissions than any individual teacher, and has enthusiastically participated in the celebrations. Moreover, when Diana Raissis, then a teacher at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, suggested that *The Literacy Review* sponsor professional development in teaching writing, Terry volunteered to work with Diana and me to create the first annual *Literacy Review* Workshops in Teaching Writing to Adults in Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL Programs in fall 2005. And Terry went on to collaborate with me in organizing the second of these free, all-day workshops—12 presentations in which 150 teachers, tutors and site advisors participated. Terry is a brilliant teacher and a beautiful person, an exemplary educator.

June Foley, Writing Program Director, The Gallatin School

Introduction

“Really? They chose my story?”

At first there is a stunned look, and then a smile radiates across the face of Modou Gueye, a student at The New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at Tompkins Square, who has just been told that his writing will be published in this issue of *The Literacy Review*. His hand moves to his heart as he contemplates this great honor.

Since the fall of 2002 when adult literacy and ESOL programs around the city first received the invitation to submit student writing for the new anthology that would be edited by Gallatin School students, I have encouraged literacy students to take some of their best writing, polish it further, and send it in for consideration. Every teacher knows that giving new writers the opportunity to see their work in print encourages students to continue to grow as writers, further developing their skills. To that end, the NYPL Centers for Reading and Writing, like many other adult education programs, publish in-house journals that are read and re-read by students and tutors, and are a valuable tool for both reading and writing. *The Literacy Review* gives adult learners another kind of opportunity: the chance to be part of a citywide anthology of writing published by a university, with a photo and biographical information of the writer on each page. “It looks like a real book!” is a frequent, awe-filled comment by our students and tutors. And it is a beautiful, professional-looking book. Joseph Risi, another Tompkins Square student, had a piece about his grandmother selected for an earlier *Literacy Review*. When he saw the publication, he said, “This book looks like it will last a long time. I want my son to have it his whole life.” Joseph was proud to give a copy of the book to his mother, who held it in her hands, read her family’s story, and said to him with great emotion, “You’re a writer! Will you write about me next?”

The Literacy Review, five volumes with this issue, is a cherished part of our print collection at Tompkins Square and at Seward Park Library. There are wonderful stories and poems for tutors to use with their groups to stimulate writing, and I’d like to give a few examples. The tutor reads the story aloud, and the group talks about what the writer did to affect us, looking at the reading as writers. Then students can select their own topics, spending some time composing and sharing their own works in progress. Soraya Rodrigues’ story (*LR3*) about playing in the rain as a child in Brazil has inspired many other childhood stories from new writers. Soraya does what good writers do—she takes us to a particular time and a particular place with great details and sensuous imagery, and reminds us of some of our own childhood memories. I’ve seen some students do some of their best writing after reading and discussing her story. Another popular story from *LR3* has a provocative title: “Killing Rats,” by David Chen. He gives us lots to talk about, and additionally, students in Chinatown recognize him from his picture as a sidewalk food vendor! And when I heard MacDonald Cummings read “The Best-Kept Secret in New York” (*LR4*) at last year’s *Literacy Review* celebration, I knew immediately I wanted to use it in writing workshops at our centers, and I did, a few days later, and many times since

then. His writing, evoking the tranquility of a little Brooklyn park, touches something in New York City residents. Reading his short, descriptive piece aloud never fails to produce smiles—and sometimes a sigh—as we learn of his contentment sitting under a large cedar tree. We all want to be there, and through his writing, we are, for a moment. MacDonald’s piece gives students an opportunity to think about a place of renewal for them, and to write about those places, striving to describe those special escapes, and their feelings there, as vividly as he does.

The Literacy Review also gave birth to the *The Literacy Review* Workshops in Teaching Writing to Adults in Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL Programs, which give teachers and volunteer tutors their own occasion for renewal, in the autumn back-to-school season: a full day to hear about and try out some ideas from others in the field. The presenters have been experienced and well-prepared, and the participants eager to continue to grow as writing instructors. In these times of chronically understaffed, underfunded literacy and ESOL programs, the indomitable June Foley has provided an extraordinary opportunity for teachers, who often feel isolated in their classrooms, to obtain invaluable staff development. She has also ensured that teachers have a comfortable setting at NYU for these workshops, providing us with time to network, and fresh, healthful food to renew us during the day. We have a closing activity at the end of the workshops; we ask participants to name one idea they will be trying out when they return to their sites. The responses have been affirming for the presenters, and inspiring for all present. Sometimes the “one idea” is a particular way of starting new writing or getting students to work on a specific skill, like using more description. Sometimes a participant has shared a shift in thinking during the course of the day, and sees a whole new way of viewing what an adult classroom can be.

As you can imagine, *The Literacy Review* has become legendary at the centers where I work since students and tutors have participated for five years now. At our spring learning celebrations, in addition to our own journals, we highlight the writing of our students who had their work selected for the anthology. Students, tutors, and staff talk enthusiastically about the wonderful dinner and gathering that celebrates the publication of the new *Literacy Review* each May. Volunteer tutors are motivated further in their endeavors after seeing their students receive such an honor. Some students, like Roger Simpson, have written about the experience of being at the joyous celebration in the beautiful space at the Kimmel Center at NYU.

Recently, a newer Tompkins Square student read her story to her class to much positive feedback. Her immediate response was, “Does this mean I’m going to NYU?” It was great to be able to reply, “Keep writing like that, Agnes, and you will be submitting a story to the editors for the next *Literacy Review*.”

Thanks to all who work on this publication. Long live *The Literacy Review*!

Terry Sheehan, Site Advisor, Tompkins Square and Seward Park Branches
New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing



Living in
New York City

Offer a Bit of Love

YA QIN DONG

Whenever I hear, “If only everyone offers a bit of love, tomorrow the world will become more beautiful,” this good deed appears before my eyes:

On October 17th, in the afternoon, it was raining. I finished English class, put my handbag over my head and braved the rain to go home. Suddenly, a man ran to my right side and passed his umbrella to me. I felt very surprised. I attentively looked at him. He was a handsome youngster, with heavy eyebrows and big eyes. He wore a checked fabric jacket, jeans and running shoes. He held a black umbrella. He was panting and said, “An umbrella.”

I said, “I’m sorry. This umbrella is not mine.”

He was laughing and pointing at the sky. “Rain! Rain! Umbrella for you.”

I realized I was too excited and said, “No, my home is near. Thanks.”

He insisted on giving his umbrella to me.

I declined, and when I saw my classmate, Adrianna, holding an umbrella over me, I said, “We will share her umbrella. Thank you.”

When I turned my head again, this lovable youngster still stood in the rain. He was smiling and looked at me. He and I had never met before, but he was eager to give me his umbrella. What a beautiful heart! I shall always remember this.

I remember the ancient words, “We should do small good deeds.” In America, I have witnessed many people who offer their hearts. To relieve people in stricken areas, people contribute money. At the library, selfless tutors give us knowledge. On the street, volunteers clean. In winter, nice people give away winter clothes.

It doesn’t need to be anything big. Maybe it is one dollar. Maybe only sharing an umbrella, maybe offering one’s seat to an old man or child on the bus, maybe only picking up a stone on the street.

These good deeds all bring happiness and warmth to people, like a colorful flower blooming in our heart. Whether under the hazy sky or in hard adversity, let’s often do these “small good deeds.”

Let’s offer a little love. Let the world become more beautiful.



“I love writing, but I have to keep on working to improve my English grammar. I’m at the library every week,” writes Ya Qin Dong. Born in China, she studies with Mia Pavlov and Betty Chase at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Aguilar Branch. The site supervisor is Elaine Sohn.

Drum and Dance

MODOU GUEYE

I've been drumming almost eight years in a dance school near Union Square. It's a place I really enjoy: the music, the energy, the sound, the movement. When you get into the school, you see a studio with colorful art on the walls, and a lot of smiles. The people are happy.

What's it sound like? It sounds just amazing. The energy: you see it, you smell it, you can even touch it. And there's a lot, lot, lot, lot, lot, lot, lot, lot, lot of energy. The music talks; it's a different language. The drummers talk to each other through the music and talk to the dancers, without any words.

It's just drums and dance. People hear different types of music; people dance. It makes them feel like they're not in New York. I'm from Mali, and other drummers are from Senegal, Guinea, Haiti, Brazil, Cuba. We have different rhythms. We speak a different language inside. The dancers hear different sounds, and they wear the *lapa*, an African fabric wrap. You can see them really enjoy dancing to live music.

Drummers, dancers—we all connect. When it's good, it's good.



Born in Mali, Modou Gueye has lived in New York City for 12 years. Having learned the crafts of jewelry-making, cooking, and drumming, he is now pursuing his next goal of learning to read and write. He studies at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Tompkins Square Branch. Hilary Schenker is his tutor and Terry Sheehan is the site advisor.

I'm from Bensonhurst, Brooklyn

JOSEPH RISI

I am from my mother's bedroom. When I went inside it looked like a church with saints and pictures, but without the candles.

I'm from hide and seek and kick the can and stepping on soda cans that stick to your heels and sound like a racket.

I am from the Bible and going to church as a child every Sunday at 6:00 a.m.

I am from lots and lots of food, like ravioli and meatballs.

I am from opera that my mother sang while I listened to her.

I am from a large family. (My grandmother had seven children and then adopted two more. She had 20 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren. My other grandmother had eight children. Two of them died, one boy and one girl.)

I am from games like skelly, played on the sidewalk with bottle caps.

I'm from a park where I played stickball on the side of the building on 25th Avenue and 86th Street in Brooklyn, New York 11214.



Joseph Risi is from Brooklyn and has lived in New York City for his entire life. He says he likes to sing and to make people laugh. Donna Cain is his tutor, and Terry Sheehan is the site advisor, at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Tompkins Square Branch. The Literacy Review, Volume 2, published Joseph Risi's essay about his grandmother, "The Silver and White Hair."

What I Heard on the Street

OLIVE ST. LOUIS

The trains that passed on high made a noisy sound.

The fire alarm

The ambulance

The police cars

The sound of the motorcycle engine.

An airplane flying and then touching down on the ground.

People digging in the street with an electrical machine.

The beautiful fireworks for the celebration of Independence Day.

The thunderstorms, the severe thunderstorms.

The very strong winds inside the trees.

The sounds of the radio and television and the voices of singers.

People speaking to each other on their cell phones.

These are the different sounds I heard on the street.



Olive St. Louis attends the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Aguilar Branch. Her teachers are Betty Chase and Mia Pavlov, and Elaine Sohn is the site supervisor. Olive St. Louis writes, "I work very hard to learn conversation skills at the library. At my age it is difficult, but I enjoy being with the other students." She is originally from Haiti and has lived in the United States for four years.



The Sipa: The Message

HENRY MAPLES

Si*pha (sīfa) n. 1. A circle of people that forms around a breakdancer. 2. A circle of people from the neighborhood who pass weed or alcohol around. 3. A circle with time for real talk that passes a message and forms unity.

I'm going to take you back, way back, back like an old man's hairline. Back in time, before I was thought of.

The Sipa started in a section of the South Bronx, New York: the place where hip hop was born. This was back in the days when DJ Flash, Slick Rick, Run DMC, Rakim, Dugie Fresh and the Get Fresh crew were doing their thing. The beat box, raw hip-hop, raw sound was brought.

This was where a group of boys from the neighborhood came together and formed a circle, a circle that started the Sipa.

The older heads would give knowledge and wisdom to the younger. Without the Sipa, you would probably have no greats like Busta Rhymes, Jay-Z, Nas, Biggie Smalls, LL Cool J, all those dudes, who were cut from different cloth than today's hip-hop.

But for me, the Sipa is where I got tough, got my game, my strength, my ghetto intelligence and my street smarts. The Sipa back in the days was called "The Ghetto G.E.D."

The Sipa is more than just hip-hop. It is where you and your boys get together and spend real time, talking about life and its ups and downs. The Sipa is where you get the message. It's the outside barbershop.

Who would have thought that something so far in the South Bronx could spread and touch Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn?

Welcome to my block. Welcome to my hood. Welcome to Brooklyn. Take a walk in my shoes. And take a walk into the Sipa.

We're standing in front of Kennedy's Fried Chicken, what we call "The Chicken Spot." Toni, the owner, is cool; he understands the hood.

It's Blizz: dark skin, long braids, light brown eyes, average height. Then there's Sparks: brown skin, longer braids, brown eyes, tall. Then there's Rich: an average light-skinned dude with waves. And then there's me: caramel brown, brown eyes, tall and very handsome. We are on the streets of Brooklyn, Bed-Stuy, at the corner of Fulton and Ralph Avenue.

Ralph Avenue is a very busy street. There are buses, cabs and trucks. It's a fast-paced street. Fulton Street is very long and sunny. There are herds of girls wearing basically nothing, and there is very loud music from the cars that pass. There's the old nail place, John's old grocery, the new newsstand, the crowded bus stop, beautiful new cars passing, clothing hanging out of the project windows, loud music coming out the project windows, fighting, little kids playing tag, fly boys and fly girls walking down the street

and the people hanging in front of The Chicken Spot.

Welcome!

But let me warn you: What you hear, stays here, in the Sipha . . .

“Yo, Rich. My mom’s getting mad skinny, B. She keeps asking for bread ‘cause she know I’m getting money,” says Blizz.

“Word, that shit is crazy,” says Rich.

“I give her bread ‘cause she’s my moms, B, but I’m not going to be supporting that crack shit, on top of having no job. How I’m gonna get fresh?” says Blizz.

“Welcome to the real world, my dude!” said Haze.

“That’s why I’m on the block, B. Hard body!” says Sparks.

“Y’all niggas know what’s popping, the block is always hiring,” says Rich.

“WORD!” everybody replies.

“But getting money isn’t for everybody,” says Haze.

“Nigga, you bugging, B. Do you hear how crazy you sound? You on drugs,” says Rich.

“It’s real talk, B,” says Haze.

“Yo, Haze. You my man, but you bugging, B. How niggas gonna get money?” says Blizz.

“God forbid, but you’ll be on Riker’s Island, 3 Main or something,” says Haze.

“You acting real pussy,” says Rich.

An old man comes out of nowhere, about 5’ 11”, dark skin, long silky hair, well-dressed, real neat, and he says, “You dumb asses better listen to me.” He sounds wise. “What’s your name, son?” says the old man.

“Haze,” said Haze.

“No, what did your mama name you?” says the old man.

“Henry.”

“Well, take heed of this, all of you. The prison system is the Black Lost and Found. They waiting for you, Black brothers, they waiting for you.”

For a moment, everybody shuts up and looks around at each other. You can read the thoughts on everyone’s face. The looks are serious, like someone has just died. Like the sun just went down, but it was only 3:00 p.m. After that day, I called the Sipha “The Message.” On that day, I really learned something serious and important.

The Sipha symbolizes ghetto unity, something I’ll never forget, and neither should you. Thank you for joining my Sipha.



Henry Maples was born in Trinidad but has lived in New York City for most of his 17 years. He says he is living proof of the struggle of living in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, and that it feels good to change and better himself at the Fortune Society in Manhattan. Eric Appleton is his teacher there.

A Room or a Container?

BI MING LONG

A friend of mine, Ling, wanted to rent a room in Chinatown in order to take care of her spouse, who was hospitalized nearby. Last Sunday she learned there was a room for rent on Madison Street and asked me to inspect it with her. Before starting out, she called the landlord. We were told to wait at a certain address on Madison Street. Soon we were in front of the building. Several minutes later, a man of 40-something walked toward us.

“Did you call just now?”

“Yes,” my friend answered.

“The rental for the room is high. Do you still want to look at it?”

“How much?” my friend asked.

“Five hundred and seventy a month.”

“Anyway, we’d better take a look, so as to know whether it is worth it or not, since we are here,” I suggested.

The man reluctantly led us into the building, completed just about two years ago, with a fairly well-appointed elevator, security system and so on. His apartment was on the fourth floor. He pointed to the room on the left and said, “That’s it! There are three families living in the apartment.”

It was obviously reconstructed. Ling and I stood by the door. I couldn’t estimate the area of the room. I imagined a double bed and a desk in it, and there’d be no more room left. Perhaps a car could fit in it. Why was I thinking of a car? Was there anything unusual about this room? I quickly figured it out. It would be better to call it a small container than a room, because. . .

“No window!” Ling said, at the same time I thought it.

Now I knew why the landlord asked, “Do you still want to look at the room?”

I turned to him and said, “If we’d known there was not a single window in this room, we wouldn’t have come up.”

Unexpectedly, he complained, “You didn’t ask on the phone if there were any windows in the room.”

At that time, I really had no idea whether to laugh or cry. I noticed an angry expression on Ling’s face and gave her a hint to say nothing.

On the way out, I told Ling, “It is no use saying anything to a person like him. Be sure to remember next time: Your first question to a landlord should be if there are any windows.”

She sighed, shaking her head.

That night, after I went to bed, I thought of the small room without any window.



Without air, a creature will die. Even the old and dilapidated houses in poor areas have windows or holes in the walls. How about cells in jails? People make houses or nets for some animals, leaving holes to let air in.

I believe there are a number of “containers” in that building. How inconceivable it is!



Born in China's Szechuan Province, Bi Ming Long studied Russian in high school and college, and worked as a librarian in a middle school reading room. She is a student at University Settlement Society, where Michael Hunter is the director of the Family Literacy Program. In writing class, her skill and diligence have made her one of several students who are assistant teachers. Her essay, "My First Performance," was published in last year's Literacy Review.

Sadness of the Eyes

FRANK LUGO

I'm walking down the stairs from the E train. I'm standing on the platform and looking around. I see a man, face down against the wall, sleeping. I start looking at people's faces and their eyes—sadness—and keep on walking. I just can't understand lying there in the cold. I wonder if this is their life.

The next day, I see a lady on 42nd Street, waiting for the bus to go to New Jersey, and she has bags of clothes, newspapers, cans and bottles. She is sitting there, wiping her forehead, just looking around, wondering if she knows where she is or where she's going. Does she see what we see in life? Is there something better for her? Did nobody ever go to her and ask her if she needed any kind of help? I see the sadness in her eyes, as she wipes her face back and forth with her hand. It's either just a habit, or she is in pain.

I see a mother and daughter in the bus terminal, begging for money. The daughter is begging and her mother is watching her. She is watching her, focused on seeing if they get any money. It is a shame that she needs her daughter to beg to eat or for drugs. You can see it in the eyes; there's always something there—loss and wondering. They need something. The eyes will tell you a lot more than the rest of the face.

People go through the garbage, looking for something they can eat. The food they take from the garbage is something we would not eat, but if you are hungry you do it to survive. Why is it that in the United States of America we have a lot of resources and people are still eating from the garbage? Are the people ill, or is it that they just don't know how to get help? Do they have somewhere to go to sleep, or do they go back into the streets? This does not just happen in the United States, it happens throughout the world. You have many people throughout the world who are going through the same thing—starvation, homelessness, no medical care, no clothes—pain and sadness. Why is it that we have enough resources to help the world, but we don't use them? It comes back to the dollar. We say we don't have enough money to help, but we waste money on other things. So in the end, the unwanted still suffer. The suffering causes sadness, sadness of the eyes.



Frank Lugo was born and raised in New York City. He writes, "I like to cook different recipes. I like to fish and I also like camping." He studies at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Tompkins Square Branch. His tutor is Donna Cain and Terry Sheehan is the site advisor. His essay, "Do Not Leave Us Behind," was published in The Literacy Review, Volume 3.



Where I Belong

SUKI WONG

I have been living in New York City for more than 15 years. Do I belong here? I still have doubts. Do I belong to China? I know only a little about China now. Do I belong to Hong Kong? Maybe yes, maybe no. So what place do I really belong to? It is a difficult question I need to answer.

First of all, I was born and raised in Great China—in Xia Men, Fujian Province. It is a city famous for its university. But what I remember is my old house, made of wood, attached to another house on one side. The road was very small, with only one lane, and trees on both sides, but a big sidewalk. The people were so nice. My neighbors would play together. On holidays we would eat together, share together, clean the neighborhood together. In summer, when it was hot, we would pour water on the street around four or five p.m., to cool it off, and we would sit around from seven or eight p.m. to midnight, telling stories, news, and listening to the radio, to old Chinese folk songs.

When I was almost 17, I moved to Hong Kong. I lived there for a couple years, and it was the first time I experienced a big change in my life. Everything was interesting for a young woman who had never been to a modern city. Three things I remember best. I remember the first time I saw the Hong Kong library—the biggest library, with a lot of books. It was very exciting. The second thing I remember is the signs all lit up at nighttime. My city at home was black, but Hong Kong lights were very creative. Third, it was so crowded, with a lot of stores. The ice cream stores were my favorite. I had an ice cream cone for the first time. The place seemed to belong to me, but that was true only at that time.

Later, I moved to New York City. It is one of the biggest and most famous cities in the world. I feel lucky and happy to live here. But a certain problem has stuck with me, and other newcomers, too. It is a language problem that makes me feel out of place here. However, since I have begun to speak and understand more English, I feel more integrated in the society. I enjoy different activities, including swimming class, English class and writing class and church, too. I live in the Bronx with my husband and our son, who is 17 and goes to the Bronx High School of Science. My favorite place now is my living room, which is small, but the floor is nice wood and there is a big television set and a three-seat sofa, a computer and a bookshelf. Most of all, I like a wonderful picture, an old Chinese painting of a tree called mei hua. It has no leaves, but pink and white flowers. It blossoms in winter, in the snow. It encourages people to move forward. It tells us the future always will be bright and beautiful.





Suki Wong was born in China and lived in Hong Kong before she came to New York City, where she lives with her husband, San, and son, Johnny. Since spring 2006 she has studied at University Settlement Society, where Michael Hunter is the Director of the Family Literacy Program. Encouraged to write one piece a week, she often writes two. "I am lucky to have this chance to learn how to write," she says.



Remembering

The Store and Don Uriel

JESICA RODRIGUEZ

The place where I grew up was not like the usual house. I mean, we had bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom, but we did not have a “usual” dining room and living room. This is because since I was one year old, my parents have had a store, so we used to have our food and receive our guests in the store. All my childhood was developed there, in the store. I used to do almost everything there.

My parents say that after I learned to say “Mami a atender” (Mom, attend a customer), when I was about two, they let me sit in a big chair, and each time somebody came to the store I shouted, “Mami, a atender.” It was my first job. After that I learned to open bottles of soda.



Then I went to school and discovered the difference between coins and bills, and the value of each one, so when I arrived from school I did my homework and sold at the same time. It has been very important for me because I learned to work, to pay attention to different things at the same time, to solve a problem in my mind while somebody was talking to me and to study with noise. The customers said that they could not believe that I could listen to music, sing the song I was listening to, do my homework and pay attention to them at the same time.

About that time sometimes I felt sad because I did not have a living room and a dining room, like “normal” families. I always have dreamed of having a big house with not one, but two living rooms, and a big dining room, also a big garden. The houses where I have lived have not had gardens.

At first my parents and I slept in the same room, but when my brother was born, I shared my bedroom with him, but always I have had my own bed. My bed has been my favorite place. There I have dreamed, cried, laughed, and most important for me, slept. My bed was like a cloud, like cotton. I loved smelling it when my mother cleaned the covers. On my bed, I used to put all my toys. I slept in their company and told them all my problems.

When I talk about the houses where I used to live, I have to talk about my first friend, Don Uriel. He was 17 years older than I, but I enjoyed talking with him about my little problems, my dreams, about my routine. He lived with us in the same house, and we shared the kitchen. The kitchen was our place, because I used to speak with him while he prepared his food.

Don Uriel died 13 years ago. I miss him. His death was paradoxical because he did not like soccer, but he died because of a soccer game. It was Colombia vs. Argentina (and Colombia won 5-0, a historic event in Colombia). He had been drinking brandy

with a friend by the time the game finished. He decided to go home, and he took his bicycle and rode it. He was going down a mountain when somebody who was celebrating the game result hit him in the face. Don Uriel fell down in a puddle, and he suffered a seizure in his brain and died.

My childhood was not a usual childhood; it was wrapped up inside sadness and happiness, inside my friends, my toys and Don Uriel, between the store and my bed and missing a “normal” living room. But it has been the best part of my life.



Jesica Rodriguez studies at the College of Mount Saint Vincent's Institute for Immigrant Concerns. Donna Kelsh is the director, Mark Brik is the education director and Bill Zimmerman and Diana Schoolman are her teachers. She writes, "I am a Colombian woman who came to the United States in order to realize one of my dreams. This is to study and get an M.S. degree in biostatistics. The dream was born from my previous studies in Colombia. Maybe one day I will help the world as a statistician with an HIV/AIDS discovery."

Behind the Curtain

SYLVIA EARLINGTON

One day my mother was standing at the window. Suddenly she saw something run behind the curtain. She moved away and used a stick to see what was behind the curtain. When she lifted the curtain up, it was a grasshopper. She ran away from the window, spread out her hands and made a shout. My brother ran to see what happened to her. My brother said, "What happened, Mom?"

She said, "Something is behind the curtain. And I tried to get it off, but it won't move."

My brother lifted the curtain up and pulled the grasshopper off. The grasshopper fell on the floor and started to jump up and down.

My mother ran across the room with her hands in the air. "Get that thing out of here. I don't want to look at it."

My brother said, "Mom, I don't think you should be afraid of this little grasshopper."

My mother said, "When it holds onto something it doesn't let go of it. So that is why I don't like it." My mother said to my brother, "Stop playing with that thing. If you don't, I will put you through the door. And close it."

My sister was at school when my mother ran away from the grasshopper. My brother told her what happened. She told my mother she heard she ran all over the house from a little grasshopper. She asked, "Is that true, Mom?"

Mom said, "Yes."

My sister laughed and laughed. And she said, "I can't believe that you would hurt yourself from that little thing."

My mother said, "You don't know what that little thing can do to someone. Don't you know that little thing can send people to the hospital?"

My mother didn't know that my brother had put the grasshopper into a bottle and gone to sleep with it. While everyone was asleep, my father heard a scream come from the room. He rushed to see what happened. My father asked my brother, "What happened?"

He said, "Something's in my ear."

My father said, "What could be in your ear?"

"I don't know." But he was still crying and holding onto his ear.

My mother said, "Something must be in there."

My father helped my brother to sit up, and looked in his ear. "It's the grasshopper in his ear."

My mother said, "See what I'm talking about? I told you not to play with those things."

My father was trying to pull the grasshopper out. But my mother said, "Take him to the hospital."

When my mother took him to the hospital, the nurse called the doctor to look in his ear. The doctor pushed something in his ear and pulled the grasshopper out.

From that time my brother runs when he sees a grasshopper.



Sylvia Earlington, who moved from Jamaica five years ago, studies at the Central Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library. Her tutor is Daniel Harris, and Winsome Pryce-Cortes is the site supervisor. Sylvia Earlington writes, "I am a very quiet person. I love to read books. I love to come to the center, and my teachers try their best to help me. Without them I would not be able to write this story."

The Pen

ESTHER DALEY

One day a long time ago, I was at school. I did not have a pen, so my teacher sent me home. On my way home, a young man saw me and asked me, “Where are you going?”

“My teacher told me to go home to my mother for a pen.”

He said that he would buy me a pen. I did not tell him that I could not take the pen from him. He gave me a beautiful gold and green pen.

I did not tell anyone about the pen, but one day my mother was about to write a letter, so she called for one of us to bring her a pen. I did not think beforehand and gave my mother my green and gold pen. When my mother saw the beautiful pen, she had questions for me.

“Where did you get the pen from?”

I told her, and she let me know that I must give the pen back.

The young man who gave me the pen has been my husband now for 33 years. I asked my husband if he remembered giving me a pen. He said, “Yes.” I asked him how old I was, and he said that I was 12 years old.



Esther Daley was born in Montserrat, where “The Pen” takes place. She is a student at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Harlem Branch. The site supervisor is Steven Mahoney. Esther Daley would like to thank her tutors Louise Brown, Andrea Fooner and Nancy Davies, for helping her with this story.

My Happiest Day

NORMAN K.M. WONG

In 1938, the Japanese army conquered Hong Kong, where I was born that year. Growing up, I was afraid to be killed by making any errors of order from Japanese soldiers who kept traffic order, and I was afraid that bombs would come down from the plane that was flying above my head while I was peeing in the backyard.

Consequently, my family moved to a village. I walked to town on a big road. Sometimes there were several corpses on the roadside, and sometimes there were people starving to death.

Sometimes the Japanese planes flew very low above me, so I hid behind the mud and my soul was a little gone. When the plane left, I was thinking, *I can fight the past*. If I had a gun I would have shot at the plane.

Sometimes some villagers fled to the hills for their lives, because the Japanese could do whatever they liked. Sometimes I heard a gun fired and saw a man running from a soldier for a long distance. The bullets of artillery flew over the sky.

In 1944, the beautiful American planes appeared, instead of Japanese planes.

One day I walked into the town. The ground was all covered with red firecracker papers. People were joyfully jumping. I knew my country was victorious in war. My hatred and fear of facing death were gone. At that moment, I was happier than if I'd won the lottery.



Norman K.M. Wong studies English at University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program, which is directed by Michael Hunter. A shirt-presser in China, he became a cook in New York City. His hobbies are reading palms and telling fortunes. He lives with his wife, Sandy, who works as a home attendant. They have a grown son, Vincent, and a daughter-in-law, Stella.

Life on a Tropical Island

APOLINAR OTERO RIOS

I grew up in Puerto Rico, in a little town where the mountains collide with the valley. These mountains are very beautiful. I used to climb to the top and observe the valley. The view was breathtaking.

I remember my past—for example, when I used to go and explore the mountains. I gathered a few of my friends and we would go to the tropical forest. Deep in the mountains, everything was different. The sun's rays that infiltrated the canopy of the trees were marvelous. The sound of the birds, and the wind with its unique sounds, penetrated through the forest.



There were days that I used for hunting snakes. I could sell the oil or grease to certain people, like dancers and athletes. This oil gives them more flexibility. These snakes were boas. They are constrictors that wrap around the victims and squeeze them until the prey is dead. They're so strong that they break your bones until you die of asphyxia. A good snake weighs around 200 pounds and is nine to ten feet long.

Another thing that I did was survival. We would search for a cave and prepare to sleep for a few days. This cave had to be prepared. A big fire was lit inside to clean out the tarantulas, centipedes, mosquitoes, snakes and poisonous insects. When it was finished, we would start to build the front part of the cave with wood from the forest and build the bed to sleep in at night. The bed had to be about three feet from the floor. There were many insects, like giant ants. Also, you had the mosquitoes that bit all night. Once you spend a day in the mountains, the mosquitoes don't bother you so much because you take on the smell of nature.

I'm in love with nature, and I was surrounded by it. It was magnificent to be surrounded by such beauty. There are two rivers that divide the little town where I spent my youth. It was a beautiful experience growing up there. I learned to swim in the rivers, and in the mountains I learned to survive.

It was great growing up on a farm. On our farm, we had all kinds of animals: pigs, horses, cattle, goats and many more.

I treasure these moments. Truly, it was good growing up on a tropical island. That life was the most tranquil time I've known. I would like to live that kind of life again!



Apolinar Otero Rios, age 49, was born in Puerto Rico. He has spent 20 years in New York City. At the Fortune Society, his teacher is Linda Farrell, and his tutor is Sari Bernstein. His message is to stay away from alcohol and drugs: "I wasted 35 years of my life trapped in the addiction. It was like being possessed by an evil spirit."

Good Cooking

PANSY CAMPBELL

As a teenager growing up in Jamaica, my brother Michael would have parties all the time. He had no money, so we had to cook the food ourselves. Almost every weekend I had to cook. We would buy goat meat. I would make the curry goat and rice, and I would make carrot juice with sweet milk or sometimes beetroot and carrot with milk. I even got the name “Juicy.” It was fun.

When I got married, I had a husband to cook for. He used to say, “My wife is the best cook. She even cooks better than my mother.” As time went by, everyone would compliment me on my cooking.

I came to America in October 1980. Our first Christmas here, we ate at a friend’s house. We had the usual Jamaican dishes—roast chicken, ham, curry goat, escovitch, fish, rice and peas, sorrel and eggnog to drink, and Jamaican black cake. But I did not like the cake they had, so I started baking it myself.

I became obsessed with making this cake. And every time I would bake it, the taste got better and better. But I was still looking for that taste, that special taste I remembered. My aunt and grandmother used to make this black cake. It was so good, but I did not have the recipe. Then I remembered Joan, the lady who made my wedding cake. I called Joan, who was in Jamaica at the time. I told her my daughter Lisa was getting married and I wanted to bake the cake. I told her that I had baked black cake, but I was not happy with the taste. She told me what to do. I got the ingredients and tried again. The cake was out of this world. It was so good it was hard for me to share.

Now that I had the right recipe, and I’d found the right taste, that special taste, I baked my daughter’s wedding cake. My daughter put the icing on it because I did not know how to ice at that time. The cake came out so well, and everyone loved it. I felt so good with all the compliments I got. And every time after that, people would ask me to bake cakes. Now I bake this cake for weddings, birthdays and Christmas. I also cook for people on the side, to make a little extra money to pay the bills.

I have cooked for some very important people, too, including Earl Ubell, a distinguished editor. With a limited education, I am so glad I can cook, and not only Jamaican food, but also American food. I love to cook.



Pansy Campbell was born in Jamaica. Since her move to New York, she has worked in childcare while raising four children of her own as a single mom. She studies at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Harlem Branch. Steven Mahoney is the site supervisor; Judith Aison and Katherine Frank are her tutors.

To See the Fall Colors

CHUNJIANG LIU

Last weekend I took a short trip with my family—my husband and our two-year-old daughter. We went to Rutland, Vermont to see the fall colors.

Early Saturday morning we took the F train and the Q33 bus to LaGuardia airport from Roosevelt Island, where we live. At the airport my husband picked up the car he had rented online several days before. Then our driving trip really started. My daughter was so excited that she repeated, “Let’s go” in English, Chinese and Japanese. She speaks Chinese and learned some English and Japanese words from her friend and me.



After leaving the airport, we went over a beautiful bridge and saw Manhattan’s high buildings far away. When we were in Connecticut, we saw the beautiful fall colors beside the road. Red, orange, yellow and green colors made for many, many wonderful pictures.

At four o’clock we finally arrived in Vermont. It began to rain. We almost couldn’t take photos because it was too dark outside.

The hotel was a small inn with only two stories. But there was a swimming pool inside. My daughter was very happy because she had just learned how to swim last summer. After dinner we hurried to go swimming. The water was a little cold, but my daughter wanted to swim so much, even though she said she felt cold, too. After half an hour, we went back to our room and took hot baths.

We went to bed at ten o’clock. My daughter didn’t let me put the quilt on her. At two o’clock she was awake. When I helped her to the toilet, I felt her body was so hot. Terrible! I didn’t bring any medicine. After that time she didn’t sleep well because of the high fever. She held my hands, and sometimes she cried. I worried about her, but there was nothing I could do because it was too early.

The next morning, first thing, we went to the pharmacy near the hotel to buy some medicine for our daughter. Then we went back to the hotel to take a break before checking out. My daughter slept about 30 minutes. She didn’t cry anymore and started playing.

We left the hotel and drove to the state park to see the fall colors. My daughter was sleeping in the car during the whole driving trip.

Even though a lot of leaves had fallen, and the sky was gray, several lakes were very beautiful. But it was too cold to bring my daughter out of the car. My husband stayed in the car with her, and only I got out to take photos. The pictures were only

views, not pictures of us.

It was not a successful trip. Next year we will choose a good weekend with good weather to see the fall colors again. My daughter will be bigger, and I hope she will enjoy the trip.



Chunjiang Liu is from Beijing, China and came to New York over a year and a half ago with her husband. Two hours a day, two days a week, she attends English class at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Seward Park Branch. Her tutor is Hilary Schenker, and Terry Sheehan is the site advisor.

The Red Pony and My Life

WAYNE SHARPE

This would be the first book that I have read since I can remember. This book seems too good to just put down. The name of it is *The Red Pony* and the author is John Steinbeck. The story seems short, and I've been reading all week, and I don't think I've read 76 pages since I can remember. It's different from other books.

It's something I like to read about because I grew up on a farm, and I have worked around animals and done farm chores. We did not even have a bathroom; we used an outhouse. We cooked on a woodstove, and we used to cut and split wood in the coldest days of the winter months. Well, they felt like the coldest days. But in the summer months it felt the hottest because it's the time they cut hay and do other summer chores.

I believe the worst is when you're working in the haymow, getting sticky with hay dust, and it would stick to you. When it stuck on me, it was the worst itch of them all. You scratched so bad that you would leave red marks. The only thing you would want to do is take a shower, but there were two more loads of hay behind the first one.

All around the farm, there was always something to do to keep busy. I'd get up to do chores, and sometimes I missed the school bus, because the work was too much. Or I had too many chores. At the time it seemed impossible to do everything.



Wayne Sharpe, who comes from Boston, Massachusetts, studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Learning Center, where his tutor is Chris Li Greci and the site supervisor is Winsome Pryce-Cortes. He says, "I lived in the country half of my life and always wanted to find out about city life."

Talkative Sister

SARAH JEON

I grew up in a big family with four generations living in one house. Among the family, my grandfather cared for his grandchildren with tender loving care. He especially cared for my sister. She was the youngest grandchild and spent most of the time with Grandpa as she was too young to go to school. All the time she was with him, she talked and sang like a warbler, and that made my grandpa happy.

One sunny afternoon, my grandpa took my sister, my brother, my mother and me to *Asawon*, one of the famous Chinese restaurants in our neighborhood in Seoul. This restaurant had a red and gold interior and the waitresses dressed in traditional red costume. The restaurant also was known for its fried dumplings and noodles. Grandpa took only us because he couldn't afford to treat all the family to lunch.

My grandpa ordered hot noodles and fried dumplings for us. We sucked in the noodles with a noisy hoop-hoop and blew air around the dumplings while they were still in our mouths. We were happy.

On the way back home, my sister walked beside Grandpa, holding his hand and hopping from one foot to the next.

"Si-Soon," he said to her, "don't tell anybody that we had lunch at a restaurant."

Si-Soon stopped her hopping and skipping and looked seriously at him.

"Oh, yes, Grandpa," she assured him. "I won't tell anyone. That's our secret!" Having said this, she went back to hopping and singing to herself all the way home.

When we arrived home, everyone was inside. As we stepped into the entrance door, Si-Soon excitedly and proudly said to one of our aunts, "E-a-t Woodong!" This means, "We ate hot noodles."



Sarah Jeon, who is 58 years old, develops her English skills at the Elmhurst Adult Learning Center, with tutor Connie Sommer and site supervisor Bona Soanes. Sarah Jeon comes from South Korea and has lived in the United States for 29 years. She never thought she could write a story in English, or even in Korean, until her time at the Queens Borough Public Library. The Literacy Review, Volume 4, published her story, "The New Cab Driver."



My Childhood Adventure

GLEND A MEJIA

I remember when I was a kid, I used to play with my cousins. I had many cousins who were my age. We always played football, climbed trees and rode horses. It was a very nice time for us.

One day we decided to go to the forest without our mothers' permission.

When we went into the forest, we did not pay attention to the way we were walking because we were playing and joking. After we had walked a long time, we tried to go back, but we saw that we were lost. Then my youngest cousins started crying. They were very scared of the sounds of the monkeys and the birds. They thought that we would not find the way back home.

We were worried to see our little cousins crying and afraid that if something bad happened to them our mothers we would punish us, so we decided to calm down and try to find the way to go back home.

When we were trying to go back home, we saw a house and thought that maybe someone was inside. We went to the house, and we called at the door, but no one was there. The door was without a padlock, so we could get inside. When we got into the house, we found food on the stove and water on the sink. We ate the food and drank the water. After we were full, we found sweet bananas outside the house. We took some of them and looked for the way home. Some minutes later, we found the way.

When we were walking, we started laughing about what we had done. We got lost in the forest and found a house. We got into the house, and we stole food, water and sweet bananas. We thought that no one would know about it, just us. But when we got home, our mothers were waiting to punish us for what we had done because it was my uncle's friend's house, and we stole his food. Our mothers punished us for one long month.



Glenda Mejia writes, "I was born in Honduras. Since I came here, I have been studying English at the City College Adult Learning Center. It's been a good experience for me because before it was a challenge for me to write or say what I wanted to say. Now I can see that English is not so difficult if you have a good teacher who can help you. I would like to give thanks to my teacher, Fran Schnell, because without her help I could not improve my English."



Do You Know How Lucky You Are?

YUQING GU

This is a true story of China.

Have you ever felt you were a lucky person when you were pushing the baby carriage with your pregnant wife while walking in Central Park, or when you went to a Manhattan department store to buy new baby clothes? Have you ever felt safe when you went to the hospital for a checkup—whether you were a rich or a low-income person? Have you ever been excited when you read different kinds of books and different opinions in books? Have you ever felt proud when you studied at an American college—whether you were rich or poor?



Every time I see some pregnant women walking free in the streets of New York, I'm always reminded of something. Time flies! But I cannot forget it.

It was six o'clock on a late afternoon of winter in 1992. That night Dr. LingLing Shu was on duty in a hospital of Guangzhou city in China. The nurse received a phone call and said a company was bringing a lady who was eight months pregnant. She had a two-year-old son. China's policy was that each married couple could have only one child.

After about 20 minutes, a car stopped in front of the GYN Department. There were a few strong people, four young men and two women, who used their hands to carry the pregnant lady. The lady was 32 years old. The lady said loudly, "Help! Help!" This word filled the ward.

The lady used her feet to kick the security guard. Because two strong people held her arm, Dr. LingLing Shu felt very scared. Her legs shook; her heart ran fast. She wore a mask to cover her face. She wanted to hide her mood in the bottom of her heart. She didn't want anyone to know she pitied the pregnant lady. That night, she had to do her job according to the government law.

Four young men were security guards who were hired by the local governor. Two men caught that lady's feet, two young men caught her arms, put her on the stretcher and pressed her body.

"Do your job quickly!" the doctor and nurse were ordered. The doctor pointed down to the nurse to shoot a needle to put the pregnant lady to sleep.

After a few minutes, the lady fell into a deep sleep. LingLing Shu did the job.

She took off her latex gloves after the operation. It was very quiet in the ward. The security guards stood at the gate of a small room. They stayed in the hospital until the baby was outside the pregnant lady's body.

Two months later, LingLing Shu quit her job, transferring to a children's hospital. She said to her friends that she wanted to help people; she didn't want to kill someone.



A medical doctor in China, Yuqing Gu now works as a hotel housekeeper. She studies writing at University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program, which is directed by Michael Hunter. This story is from a series based on her real-life experiences in Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. It tells of a doctor ordered to perform an abortion against the will of a mother who is eight months pregnant, to enforce the one-child policy. Another of Yuqing Gu's stories, "The Ambulance," was published in The Literacy Review, Volume 2.

Momma Even Curses in Church

RUTHLIN CAMPBELL

One Sunday morning Momma went to church. While the pastor preached, Momma was upset because Momma thought the preacher was talking about her, but it had nothing to do with Momma. Momma just liked to curse. She would curse anyone or anything. Momma even cursed at the cats and dogs in the neighborhood. It was a shame to curse in the house of God.



Ruthlin Campbell attends the Brooklyn Public Library's Eastern Parkway Learning Center. Natalie LeBlanc is her tutor and Gladys Scott is the literacy advisor. Gladys Scott tell us, "This writing came out of a project I developed called 'Learning through the Arts.' Ruthlin Campbell's piece was from our first visit to the Skylight Gallery to see an exhibit of works by African American artists from the South."

When I Was a Little Girl

GLORIA LYNCH

I am writing a story about myself. When I was a little girl, I used to live in Oracabassa, Jamaica, near Port Maria. I used to go to the river and wash clothes. If my grandmother didn't think the clothes were clean, she would take the clothes and rub them in the dirt and tell me to wash them again. I would take them back to the river and wash them all over again.

So sometimes I was a sad little girl. I was the only girl in the family. My grandmother knew I was afraid of the dark, and she would send me in the dark to look for her shoes and water.

I loved my grandmother, but she was very strict. I remember one day I went to school and she got me out of school to wash the pot, then she sent me back to school. I went back to school and the kids in school laughed so hard at me. I felt so ashamed. However, she taught me a lesson that I never forgot. Also, the teacher would sometimes yell at the children, and I was afraid of her. She would beat the kids to get them to read and write.

I loved to play with my brother and wear his clothes. It was only the two of us kids. We would go to the river and catch fish. I used to love to eat the raw fish. I would eat the fish as soon as he caught it, and he would get angry.

I lived with my grandmother and my brother until I was about 19 years old. I then left and went to live with my mother in the town area of Kingston. I didn't have a good childhood, but it was not bad, either.



Gloria Lynch immigrated to New York City 30 years ago from Oracabassa, Jamaica. She has a 13-year-old granddaughter who suffers from learning disabilities and is diabetic. Despite a difficult home environment, Gloria Lynch attends adult literacy classes at the Brooklyn Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Flatbush Branch. Her tutor is Jennifer Martin, and Gladys Ortiz is the site supervisor.

Fish Dinner

BOBBY BLAKE

At the age of seven, I was a very mischievous kid with a faithful sidekick, Munchi. We would sit under the tree next to the shed, enjoying fried fish that my father had made for us. Halfway through finishing, my father's favorite dog out of six, Brownny, came and sat down next to us, staring at my hand, watching it go from the plate to my mouth.

I found it very amusing to see his eyes following my every move, so I started teasing him by acting like I threw the bones just to see him looking for them. My father saw what I was doing and he yelled, "Boy, if you don't stop, I'm going to flog you."

Knowing he was serious, I waited for him to turn away before starting again. The whole time Munchi was laughing out loud, so I kept on doing it.

But I guess the dog had enough because he lunged at me and locked onto my hand, and my trusted sidekick, Munchi, ran off. I was so shocked that I threw the plate on the floor and started to scream out, "Daddy, Daddy!"

As he rushed to my rescue, grabbing the dog off my arm, he turned to me and said, "Boy, didn't I tell you not to tease the dog?" As he checked my hand, he smirked and said, "By the look of this, I don't even have to beat you. You got exactly what you deserve."

Suddenly, my tears became laughter as I watched the dog eat up my fish dinner.



Bobby Blake writes, "I am a 30-year-old high school dropout who has seen the hardships my parents went through to put me through school, and has seen how I disappointed them. They always believed in me, and now, so do I." Originally from Jamaica, he studies with his teacher, Dorothy Provenzano, and the site supervisor, Frannie Rosenson, at the Brooklyn College Adult Literacy Program.



The Red Pleated Jumper

HUI WANG

It was 1961 and I was a first-grade student in China. My mother bought me a red tartan, pleated jumper. We called it the “hundred folds jumper.” The pattern was dark with light red squares. The main color appeared like dark wine with thick black and white lines. The color was so vivid and harmonious. The top of the jumper had two wide bands, so it was easy to wear on my shoulders. The jumper looked so simple and in such great taste. I loved it very much. I usually wore it to school with a white, long-sleeved blouse. Very often, one or two middle-aged women would come up to me on the street. They always were profuse in their praise. They would say, “What a nice jumper!” while touching it.



I remember one Sunday morning when I was looking out the window, and a ray of sunshine was reflecting on the window. The iron was on the stove. We had no electric irons during the 1960s in China. We didn't even have any spray bottles in our home. My mother just drank a mouthful of water and then sprinkled it on the jumper with her mouth. I saw the sprinkling drops falling very evenly on the jumper. It was a hard job ironing the jumper because it was a hundred folds jumper. She ironed each fold so seriously. Later, I found the secret of keeping my jumper well. After ironing, my mother moved the cushion off the bed and put my jumper down on the bare bed (of course, we had no spring mattresses at that time). Then she put some newspapers on the jumper and moved the cushion back. I finally knew why my hundred folds jumper was beautiful.

We lost all of the treasured family photos, including the pictures of me wearing that jumper. However, time can never vanish those things which have been buried deeply in your heart. That jumper is not only a piece of beautiful children's clothing, it is a treasured tie connecting my mother and me forever.



“I am very eager to learn everything now because my education was taken away from me during the Cultural Revolution in China. I only finished the third grade. We immigrated to the United States, and my husband and I worked hard. After our son began attending college, I decided it was time for me to learn. I have many stories I want to write.” Hui Wang studies at the College of Staten Island's Adult Learning Center. Staci Weile is the Director of Continuing Education and Professional Development, Linda Jones is the Coordinator of the Adult Literacy Program and Mary Mastrogiovanni is the ESOL Coordinator.

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Welcome

Welcome to the fifth volume of *The Literacy Review*, the annual compilation of some of the best writing by adult Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL students in programs throughout New York City. *The Literacy Review* is edited, designed and photographed by undergraduates at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

The first *Literacy Review*, published in Spring 2003, consisted of essays, poems and stories by 36 writers from 16 adult literacy sites. This year, our six student-editors were thrilled to read 402 submissions, and after much discussion chose works by 63 writers from 30+ sites. Two student-photographers used professional equipment to capture the radiance of the writers who came to our three photo shoots at NYU. Each year, it's been a joy to develop and improve *The Literacy Review*.

Readers, get ready for a literary treat!

But first, a quick welcome, a farewell, and a thank you. I welcome Maura Donnelly, who in fall 2006 began to teach the Literacy in Action course that has always been the center of our Literacy Project. I bid the fondest of farewells to *LR5*'s editor in chief, Phoebe Fox, who will graduate this year. She was my student-teacher in the University Settlement Society writing class for a year, working with Chinese-Americans, and my student-teacher in the initiating semester of the writing class at the International Rescue Committee, working with West African refugees. She went on to work at the Aguilar Branch of the New York Public Library's Centers for Reading and Writing. She also has been awarded two \$500 grants by the NYU Office of Community Service, to buy books for adult literacy classes. She was a copy editor of *LR3*, an editor of *LR4* and now editor in chief of *LR5*. Her devotion to adult literacy has been truly extraordinary and has won her a 2007 NYU President's Service Award.

I thank the writer of the *LR5* introduction: Terry Sheehan, site advisor at the Tompkins Square and Seward Park Branches of the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing. Terry has been involved with *The Literacy Review* from its beginning. She has probably sent more submissions than any individual teacher, and has enthusiastically participated in the celebrations. Moreover, when Diana Raissis, then a teacher at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, suggested that *The Literacy Review* sponsor professional development in teaching writing, Terry volunteered to work with Diana and me to create the first annual *Literacy Review* Workshops in Teaching Writing to Adults in Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL Programs in fall 2005. And Terry went on to collaborate with me in organizing the second of these free, all-day workshops—12 presentations in which 150 teachers, tutors and site advisors participated. Terry is a brilliant teacher and a beautiful person, an exemplary educator.

June Foley, Writing Program Director, The Gallatin School

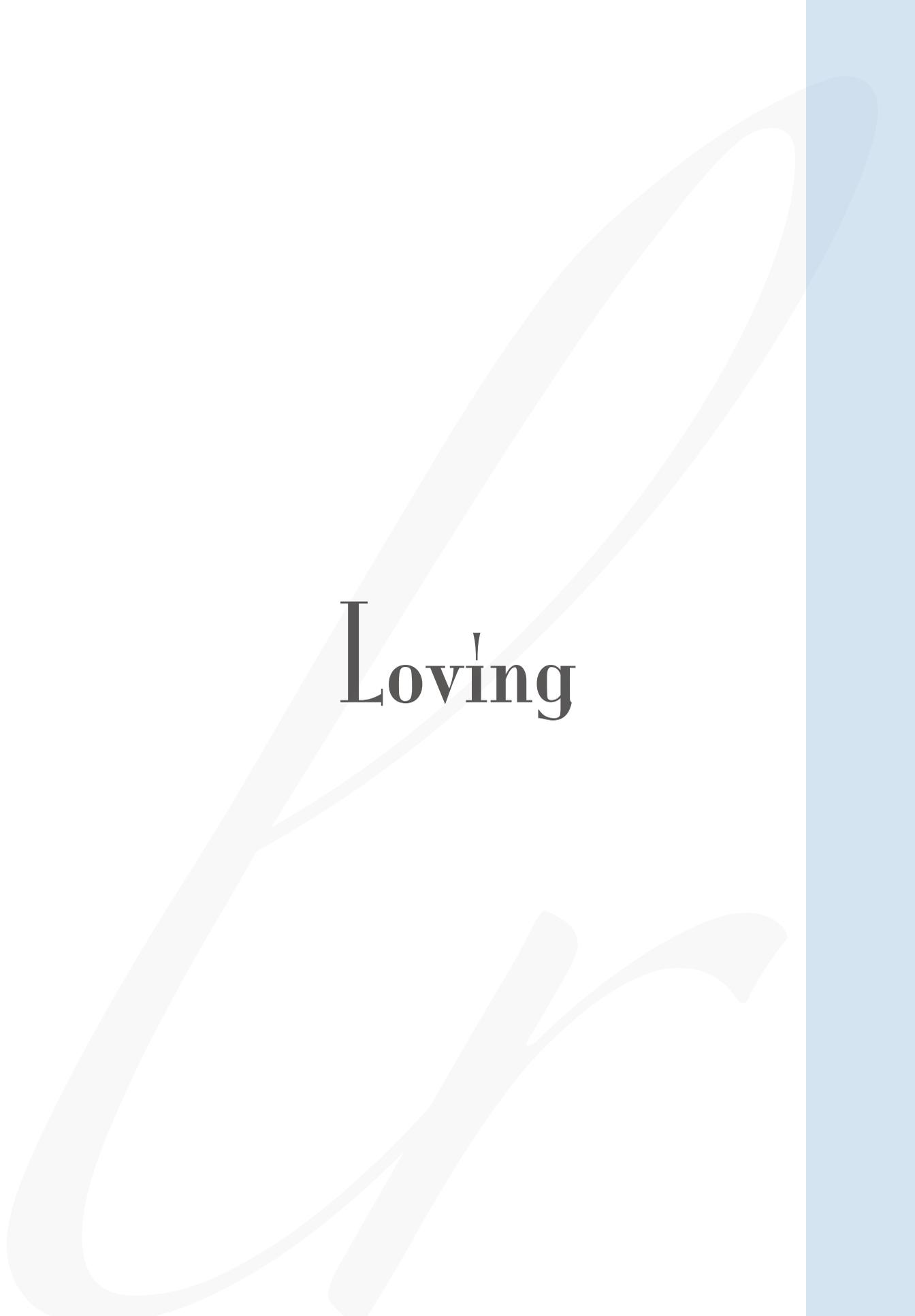
Introduction

“Really? They chose my story?”

At first there is a stunned look, and then a smile radiates across the face of Modou Gueye, a student at The New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at Tompkins Square, who has just been told that his writing will be published in this issue of *The Literacy Review*. His hand moves to his heart as he contemplates this great honor.

Since the fall of 2002 when adult literacy and ESOL programs around the city first received the invitation to submit student writing for the new anthology that would be edited by Gallatin School students, I have encouraged literacy students to take some of their best writing, polish it further, and send it in for consideration. Every teacher knows that giving new writers the opportunity to see their work in print encourages students to continue to grow as writers, further developing their skills. To that end, the NYPL Centers for Reading and Writing, like many other adult education programs, publish in-house journals that are read and re-read by students and tutors, and are a valuable tool for both reading and writing. *The Literacy Review* gives adult learners another kind of opportunity: the chance to be part of a citywide anthology of writing published by a university, with a photo and biographical information of the writer on each page. “It looks like a real book!” is a frequent, awe-filled comment by our students and tutors. And it is a beautiful, professional-looking book. Joseph Risi, another Tompkins Square student, had a piece about his grandmother selected for an earlier *Literacy Review*. When he saw the publication, he said, “This book looks like it will last a long time. I want my son to have it his whole life.” Joseph was proud to give a copy of the book to his mother, who held it in her hands, read her family’s story, and said to him with great emotion, “You’re a writer! Will you write about me next?”

The Literacy Review, five volumes with this issue, is a cherished part of our print collection at Tompkins Square and at Seward Park Library. There are wonderful stories and poems for tutors to use with their groups to stimulate writing, and I’d like to give a few examples. The tutor reads the story aloud, and the group talks about what the writer did to affect us, looking at the reading as writers. Then students can select their own topics, spending some time composing and sharing their own works in progress. Soraya Rodrigues’ story (*LR3*) about playing in the rain as a child in Brazil has inspired many other childhood stories from new writers. Soraya does what good writers do—she takes us to a particular time and a particular place with great details and sensuous imagery, and reminds us of some of our own childhood memories. I’ve seen some students do some of their best writing after reading and discussing her story. Another popular story from *LR3* has a provocative title: “Killing Rats,” by David Chen. He gives us lots to talk about, and additionally, students in Chinatown recognize him from his picture as a sidewalk food vendor! And when I heard MacDonald Cummings read “The Best-Kept Secret in New York” (*LR4*) at last year’s *Literacy Review* celebration, I knew immediately I wanted to use it in writing workshops at our centers, and I did, a few days later, and many times since

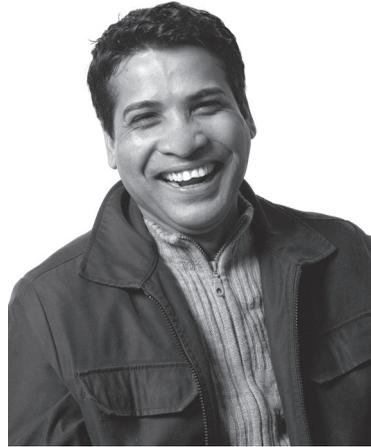


Loving

My Best Friend

ASHOOK MANKARRAN

Kishore and I have been friends since I had sense. We knew each other by sight, but did not become friends until after my dad passed away in December of 1985. Kishore and I grazed animals in the countryside of Guyana when he was 18 years old and I was 13. This is when we really became friends. His family had 60 head of sheep, and my family had 50 head of goats. Each day, seven days a week, we herded the sheep and goats out past the rice lands to where the animals grazed. There were acres of grass for them to eat, but sometimes some sheep would play wicked and get away into the rice paddies. Then we had to bring them back. We had to be careful to keep track of them in the morning. But in the afternoon, the animals were very calm because their stomachs were full. Then Kishore and I could relax. We liked to swim and catch fish like patois, catfish and flat, sweetwater fish. We had a lot of fun. We picked coconuts, water nuts and mangoes. (Oh, I miss that.)



Now that I am in New York, sometimes I ask people, “Did you ever see a chick when it hatched?” They say no. We saw that all the time. Life is so different in the country.

When Kishore and I got older (I was 16, he was 21), we liked to go dancing. We liked calypso and soca. I wore nice jeans and a T-shirt, but Kishore liked to dress like a star with a nice shirt and slacks. We went to the movies on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Sometimes he came by my house and I cooked food to share.

On June 7, 1991, I left to go to St. Maarten for vacation. I liked it there, so I stayed. It was beautiful and so different from my country. Later, I came to New York.

On November 21, 1997, my friend Kishore went to Montreal, Canada. He liked it there, too. So my Kishore got married and now he has three children in Canada, two boys and one girl. We haven’t seen each other in nine years, but we speak once a year, in June, when we each have our birthdays. We will always be friends.



Ashook Mankarran was born in Guyana, South America and came to New York City five years ago. He is the sixth of seven sons and is happy to have found the literacy program at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Tompkins Square Branch. Terry Sheehan is the site advisor and Wanda Kane is his tutor.

Dear Love

FLORENTINA CUEVAS

Dear Love,

I'm writing to you hoping you'll answer some of the questions I have here in my heart.

I heard that love doesn't judge, so I'm confiding in you to help me through this.

I love the idea of love and everything it is supposed to be.

But why does love put you through so much, if it's supposed to be a good thing?

Is there such a thing as bad love?

Why does love make you do things you never thought you would do?

When you love someone how do you really know?

Is there such a thing as temporary love?

And is it the same as puppy love or lust?

Why is it that the person you love has the ability to take over your actions?

Love, these are some of the things that I need to know.

And if you can't answer them then I guess I'll *never* know.



Twenty-three-year-old Florentina Cuevas writes, "I am a proud parent, very humorous and loving, and also very dedicated." A Brooklyn native, she studies at Manhattan BEGIN with her teacher, Sadhu Chaitanya.

Privet

SERGEY POPOV

Since I was a child in my country, I have always had the habit of feeding wild birds. When I arrived in New York, I kept up the same tradition and started buying seeds at a pet shop near my house, to feed the sparrows at my windows.

Last year there was a very colorful little parrot that caught my attention, so I bought him. Since then he has become my inseparable companion. His name is Privet. He is very sociable and possessive. In the morning he loves to come inside my bed and never makes noises until I'm fully awake. He always waits to eat until I'm eating. He loves coffee and tries to eat from my lips any food that I may consume.

Privet has a very strong character and sometimes throws a tantrum, like a spoiled child, when he doesn't get his way. He screams so loudly you'd be surprised such a small animal could have that powerful a voice and make so much noise.

Privet is extremely territorial, as well. When I have guests it is the only time I have to close him in a cage. Otherwise, with the courage of an eagle he would attack anyone, aiming at people's faces.

But most of the time Privet is a friendly bird, and in his best moments he is the most loving pet that I have ever had.



Sergey Popov immigrated to the United States from Ukraine after winning the green card lottery in 2001. He has lived in New York City for three years. After coming here, he writes, "ample opportunities opened for me." He studies at the New York Department of Education's Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, where his teacher is Diana Raissis.

A Beloved Dog

AGUSTIN VALENCIA

A long time ago, I got a pet. He was a beautiful and smart dog whose name was Conde. He was a very special dog, and was my favorite animal. Conde had an all-white body, with half of his tail black, and he had a black spot around his left eye.

I found Conde on a lonely street. He looked at me, and he started to follow me. I thought he was hungry because he sniffed around me while I carried a bag of bread. After we walked a few blocks, I decided to tie him with a rope to make a leash. I was afraid because I didn't know if he would bite me, but I touched him anyway. Conde let me tie the leash; he had confidence in me. After that, we both went home.



As soon as my family saw him, they asked how I got him. My parents and brothers started talking to the dog and gave him a name. Everyone loved Conde right away.

Conde's hair was very nice and soft. When I gave him a bath he looked very shiny and happy. Before I finished the bath, I put a little Downy in to make him smell nice.

I didn't know Conde's exact age, but I think he was about a year old when I found him. Two years after I got Conde I could see he had become an adult. He beat up all the other dogs on the block. He was the bravest dog in my neighborhood.

I remember when he climbed up on a 12-foot ladder to go to the next property to play with a bunch of pigs. When he was tired, he climbed down the ladder, like a person.

Early in the mornings, Conde would accompany my mom to work and lay down beside her all day. Late at night, he would come back home with her. I think he was protecting her.

One day Conde barked at a couple of strange men, and one of them shot and killed him. The man was an undercover cop. A few minutes later a garbage truck came, and someone picked up Conde and threw him inside.

When Conde died we felt like a family member had died. He was a very special pet. He couldn't talk, but we felt his feelings. He was an incredible and beloved dog.



Agustin Valencia moved to New York from Mexico City 10 years ago. He is a student at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Saint George Branch. His teacher is the site supervisor Geniene Monterrosa. He writes, "I started English classes to improve my language, reading, and writing. This is my first time taking English class and I want to be successful."

Fiffi

MARIANA GHIGLIOTTO

Fiffi was my companion and best friend for over 14 years. Probably you are thinking Fiffi was my dog. Well, she was a cat. The reason she was named Fiffi was because I always wanted a poodle and was ready to adopt one. My friends, who are like my family in this country, advised me that a cat was easy to keep, needing only food, water and a box with clean litter. After listening to different opinions, I decided to adopt a cat. A friend went with me to the North Shore Animal Shelter. I fell in love with a silky black and white female of approximately three months. I took her home. I had prepared the litter box for her, and I was very surprised when she used it right away. What a smart kitten! I was so proud, but then my problems started. She was wild. She started jumping all over—tables, fridge—nothing was unreachable for her. She tore down my beautiful curtains and chewed plants, etc.



I didn't know what to do. She had a beautiful bed, but she preferred to sleep with me. I couldn't sleep. She pulled my hair. My pillow was her favorite bed. One day I was so frustrated, I cried for help. I spoke with my friends who had told me it would be easy to have a cat. I said, "Maybe I am not fit to be a mother. I want to return her." I did not, of course.

Then I started reading books about cats and realized I was doing a lot of wrong things, like shouting at her when she was walking near something fragile, closing my bedroom door at night to get some sleep or trying to hold her in my arms when she didn't want it. I learned that cats—especially females—are very strange creatures. They are the queen of the house and you have to do what they want, not the other way around. Once we established that, we became the best of friends.

She used to lie down on top of me when I watched TV or read. If I was feeling sick and stayed in bed, she would stay next to me and accompany me to the bathroom. I think she followed me to be sure I was all right.

My TV was in the living room and she stayed with me on the couch till I went to bed. As she grew older, she went to bed before me, but she made a few trips to the living room and stood at the door meowing once or twice. I know it was her way of asking me, "Are you coming to bed yet?"

When I had company, I had to put out an extra chair. Because she always sat with us at the table, she had very nice manners, like a little lady.

I don't want to forget to mention that Fiffi was extremely clean, like most cats. Every morning, as soon as I went to the bathroom, she got inside the bathtub to be

brushed, before I took my shower. One of my friends stayed in my house when I went on vacations. I was curious about her morning ritual, so I asked her, “Do you brush Fiffi in the morning?” My friend answered, “I would have never been able to take a shower if I hadn’t brushed her; she would not have come out from the bathtub.”

I have so many good memories of her, and I never wanted another pet.

When I had to put her to sleep, I was devastated. I still get very emotional just thinking about Fiffi.



Born in Chile, Mariana Ghigliotto studies English at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Saint Agnes Branch. “I moved to the Upper West Side two months ago. One of the first things I did was locate the public library to see if they had any courses in English. I was very lucky to find nice tutors who helped me and even gave me my own e-mail. I want to thank Maida Schwab, Steven Mahoney, Patrick Falvey, and also Ruben Martinez and Marlene Pichardo for helping me.”

My Hero Is My Father

MARIA HERNANDEZ

The word “hero” for me means someone who is distinguished by extraordinary actions, who has powers to confront adversity, who always works hard, who inspires me and encourages me to do the best with his example. For these reasons, my hero is my father, Pablo Hernandez.

My father had a quiet way to show his love for his children. He had a hard childhood; he lost his father when he was three years old. He left school in the fourth grade. He began to work when he was nine years old. The ways he managed all of these difficulties are why I call him my hero. He always encouraged his children to finish college. He always said, “The unique inheritance I left you is your professional career.” Until I was 22 years old, every January 6th, Three Kings Day, I received a toy or a gift. The explanation was that he never received any toys, even when he was a good boy and he had a lot of hope.

All his childhood he waited for a toy, as all children expect, but he never received a toy. He told me, “The important thing is not what you receive (small or big, cheap or expensive), it is the thought. Only as a child do you have hope or dreams and you wait and expect something.” He always did something special on our birthdays. He said, “The important thing is to show our feelings, love and appreciation for family and friends.” These two paradigms and the manner in which he confronted life are the reasons I call him my hero.

He was an excellent teacher. He taught me to appreciate nature. I tred on leaves, I put my feet into a river and I picked apples. I saw and smelled flowers. I looked at the clouds, and I said what images they created. He trained me to get into the habit of reading. Every Sunday he bought me a magazine, a comic book or a children’s book. When he stayed at home, he loved to listen to music, any kind of music, or to read poems. Always he told us, “Never say you don’t like it. You have to know it first, and then you decide. Nobody is an expert in everything.” He never cursed, even when he was so mad. For me, it is difficult to say bad words. He said if you want people to deal with you with respect, you have to be respectful.

My father was a hard worker. He was the head of the family. He wanted my mother to stay at home to care for us. Some years he worked seven days a week. He told us, “I want to give you everything I possibly can. That is my job. Your only responsibility is to study hard.” We never worried about money, food, clothes or luxuries. He was an excellent provider. He never failed in his responsibility.

My father left me important lessons. Now I understand, and I use these lessons in



my life. I know someplace he sees and smiles upon us, and he says proudly, “I did a good job.” He is still with me forever. I will never forget my hero.



Maria Hernandez is 38 years old. At the Queens Borough Public Library's Adult Learning Center in Flushing, she studies English with her teacher, Adam Bubrow. She immigrated from Mexico to New York City 11 years ago. She says it was not until she learned English that she could write her real, true feelings and thoughts.

Love and Honesty

ERICA RENDON

There were no words when I found out I was pregnant. I didn't know what to do. How was I going to tell my boyfriend or even my father? What were they going to say and do?

I call up my boyfriend and say, "Babe, I'm pregnant. I need you to come home."

He says, "Okay, I'll be right there. Don't worry." He comes home.

I say, "If I am, what are we going to do?"

He says, "We will get married and we will keep the baby. Don't worry; I'll be there."

So I turn to him and say, "When do you want to tell your mom?"

"We'll tell her right now." We go to his mom and tell her that I'm pregnant. She is so glad. She loves me, and she wants us to have children.

So I turn to him once again. "How am I going to tell my dad? When and how?"

He says, "Just call him up and tell him you're coming over. Sit him down and tell him slowly and calmly."

I say okay.

I go by myself to my father's house, because my boyfriend is too chicken, and sit down with my dad and tell him, "I don't want you to get mad. I just have something very important to tell you."

My dad says, very calmly, "It's okay, tell me."

I just come out with it and say, "I'm pregnant."

He responds, "It's okay. Don't worry." Then the next thing he says is, "Are you getting married?"

And I tell him yes. It looks like there is huge relief in his eyes.

He tells me, "I am happy for you and I am happy for you and him, but mostly for myself. I can see my grandchild. I thought I would never be here for this day." And then he gives me a hug and a kiss and thanks me for giving him this day and this moment of honesty and love.



Erica Rendon was born in Brooklyn and has lived there her whole life. "I am a 19-year-old mother of one daughter, whose name is Jeanette Christine, and a wife to my husband, Carlos, whom I love very much. I want to thank my father for always being there for me." Erica Rendon studies with her teacher, Jill Siegel, at Turning Point Educational Center in Brooklyn.

Letter to My Father

LILIYA MOYZHES

Dear Father,

I tried to call you many times, but unfortunately I couldn't get through. Perhaps something was wrong with the line or the phone number.

I have your address now, and I decided to write you a letter. I remember when we met for a few hours, 15 years ago. It was the first and last time we ever saw each other. It was very important for me to know who you are because I was able to understand better who I am. I take after you in both appearance and personality. Many things inside myself became understandable for me, and I stopped worrying about them because I recognized where they came from.



When I was a child, I often imagined how we could meet each other. I dreamed about having a father and imagined us playing and talking.

Now everything is okay in my life. My mother is living with us. My daughter is a lawyer, and she lives in Florida. I miss her very much. She has four dogs and a cat. They love one another.

I am going to stop writing now. Maybe my letter is too late and you are not alive. If you are alive, I hope you are happy, and I would like to thank you for being my father.

Your daughter,
Liliya



Liliya Moyzhes is a student at the New York City Department of Education's Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, where her teacher is Diana Raissis. A native of Russia, she writes that she never liked her home country or town. She has lived in New York City for 13 years now, and writes that she has been having "an incredible experience" and loves the city very much.

I Love Mondays

GLENMORE MILLER

The day I like best in the week is Monday. There are some things that I do only on a Monday, like going to the laundry. I get up early to get my laundry done while there is no one in the laundromat. When I am done, I go home and put my clothes away. My laundry is ready for the week.

I also do my big cleaning on Mondays. I dust, vacuum and put things in order. Then I take a rest or read my schoolbooks, look at TV or listen to the radio. In the evening, I go to school at the Wakefield Center for Reading and Writing. I really like my class and look forward to going.

The thing I look forward to in the night is watching wrestling on TV. I rush home from school and get there just in time to see the first match. I eat my dinner and a lot of fruit while looking at wrestling. When I am done eating, I sit in my special chair, get comfortable and enjoy the matches before going to bed. I love Mondays.



Glenmore Miller, who is 22 years old, was born in Jamaica. He studies at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Wakefield Center Branch. Sherlette Lee is the site advisor and Charmain Haynes is the literacy assistant. "I learned how to read and write at the center," Glenmore Miller writes. "Ms. Haynes teaches me how. She helps me to break down the words. My schoolwork is very important to me."

An Impossible Love

ANA DUARTE

“Can I help you to cross the river?” asks a young man who is walking next to me. I am among a group of people on the way to a camp in the countryside, near a small city called Nagua in the Dominican Republic.

“Let me carry you,” he says.

“Carry me? No,” I answer.

He insists, “I don’t want you to wet your shoes, please.”

Finally I accept the offer. I don’t know what is happening to me, but I have never felt like this before. This is an unforgettable day because this is the first time I have had a crush on someone.

I have always said I don’t want to get involved with a man who has children with another woman, even if they separate later. It could be a problem in the future.

Time passes and on each of my birthdays he calls me. I never accept a kiss from him because I know that this is an impossible love. We are just friends.



Ana Maribel Duarte was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to New York City five years ago. She attends ESOL classes at the Lehman College Adult Learning Center, where her teacher is Sue Machlin. “I studied accounting in the Universidad Autonoma de Santo Domingo. I also studied music in ‘Ballas Artes.’ Now I’m singing in restaurants on the weekends. I am planning to make a CD soon, which will include five songs that I wrote myself. I hope to be a famous singer one day.”



Changing & Realizing

Coming to America

SULAIMAN SESAY

With a lot of kisses and prayers and promises, I left my homeland, my family and my friends to travel to America. Where I come from, Africa, going to America is as big as you can be, because America is the land of opportunity. At the age of 22, I was out in the world and on my own, not knowing what to expect for the rest of my life. *Who knows*, I thought, *I could come back to my country 10 times as rich as my father!* I didn't know what the future held, but I was ready and willing to face it.



I boarded the plane at 4:30 p.m. on August 19, 2004, not knowing what to expect or whom I would meet. My seat was 43A and in 44A was this very well-established looking gentleman. I merely glanced at the gentleman once, so I could see who was sitting next to me. Being courteous, I introduced myself. "Hi, my name is Sulaiman Sesay." The gentleman replied by saying, "Good afternoon, my name is Spike Lee." I could not believe it. I wanted to start a conversation, but at the same time I didn't want to bother such an important figure, so I waited to see if he wanted to converse or wanted to be left alone.

We were scheduled to land at JFK at 8:30 p.m. Just before we touched down at the airport, Spike asked me if I knew anyone in New York or knew where I was going to work. I answered "no," and he said he needed a driver if I was interested. I said "yes," and that was how my life in America began.



Sulaiman Sesay moved to New York from Gambia, West Africa five years ago. He is a student at the New York Public Library Center for Reading and Writing at the Saint Agnes Branch. The site supervisor is Steven Mahoney and his tutor is Phil Rossman. Sulaiman Sesay writes, "Coming to the Center for Reading and Writing is just the first step to getting my G.E.D. After receiving my G.E.D., I would like to go to college and become an accountant."

Culture Shock

TERESA TURBIDES

The world outside may be white with frost, but for me it is about warmth and glow because my soul is filling with all kinds of emotions. Maybe some people can't understand these words, but don't worry, I'll explain.

This happened a long, long, time ago, two days before Thanksgiving Day, when I was working in a factory as a belt painter. The boss came to me, and I said to myself, *What's going on with me?* He called me and gave me a big and heavy shopping bag (almost 22 pounds). I said, "Thank you sir," and I looked inside the shopping bag and I saw a



big fresh turkey. *Oh my God!* I thought. *The boss gave me this present because I'm the best worker?* But no! What a beautiful surprise! Every worker had a big and heavy shopping bag, with a healthy turkey, to celebrate Thanksgiving with their family.

That was my first culture shock. Really, it was a big surprise for me because in my country, Peru, nobody gives you anything, no matter how many years you are working. Plus, we didn't know anything about the Thanksgiving Day, the beautiful tradition in the United States of America to say thank you to God once a year at a national level.

Later, I went to my house that I shared with other friends, and gave the turkey to the lady (the owner of the house) because she knew how to prepare it in Peruvian style for dinner the next night. I was very excited because the celebration was new for me.

On the next day, I had my other culture shock, but this time it was magic, beautiful and gratifying. When I opened my eyes that morning, I saw through the window of my room a white, thick curtain. I woke up, jumped from my bed and ran to the window. I leaned my arms on the windowsill, looking and thinking about this magnificent spectacle that only God can do. I never before saw the snow falling down close to me. A lot of ideas came to my mind: God's giving to his people the "manna" in the desert for 40 years' leading by Moses; God now was giving us the snow covering the land, giving us the sensations of His power. That is why I say the world outside may be white with frost, but for me it is about warmth and glow because I know God.



Born in Iquitos, Peru, Teresa Turbides attends the Adult Literacy Center at the City College of New York, where her instructor is Bonny Hart. She says, "I'm a woman who likes to take care of my house, paint, sew, make cross stitch, crochet, knit, but most of all I like to study English, and in the future I plan to write a book."

Colleague Chong

JIAN WU LIAO

Mr. Chong was my colleague in China. He was a happy person always. He was satisfied with everything he did. He was proud of his projects, his papers in journals, his wife and his daughter. Every morning when we were ready to start work in the office, Mr. Chong came in, always smiling, and told us his good news.

One day he said, "Yesterday my wife cooked my favorite dish." On another day he said, "My daughter was first of all the class in her test." In summer, even if late at night the weather was too hot to sleep, Mr. Chong would tell us in the morning, "My home was very cool. A gentle breeze blew from the window. It felt more comfortable than an air-conditioned room." In winter he would say his room temperature was two degrees higher than any other apartment.

As time passed, everybody knew that whatever he did was the best. And although what he said was exaggerated a little bit, everybody was fond of dealing with him.

I am in a new country now. Sometimes I'm happy to be starting the new life I have looked forward to for a long time. But sometimes I'm depressed because I have difficulties, especially with language, and feel I have become a deaf and dumb person. When I feel this way, I recall Mr. Chong's perpetual smile.

I believe he was an optimist. He appreciated and enjoyed himself, his family and his environments, so he was a happy person always. I miss Mr. Chong's smile.



Jian Wu Liao emigrated from China to New York when he was 61 years old. He says, "When I arrived in New York City one year ago, I didn't know anyone except for my relatives. Elmhurst Library is my bridge into American society." Connie Sommer, his teacher, and Bona Soanes, the site supervisor, help Jian Wu Liao progress with his English at this Adult Learning Center of the Queens Borough Public Library.

Some Smart People Don't Understand Maps

ALEJANDRA LASTRA

Six years ago, my sister, my cousin and I decided to go on a vacation together. We rented a car and went to a city on the beach, but I had to drive all the time because they were scared to drive in any place they didn't know.

One day, we decided to go to visit another town. I said I would drive, but I gave the map to my cousin while I was driving. After a little while, I asked if we were close to the exit because I thought I had read a sign. "No," he said, "it is far away."

We drove for many more miles, until I looked at him and realized that he was reading the map upside down! He is smart and a university graduate, but I guess some people are not so good at map directions.



Alejandra Lastra was born in Cordoba, Argentina. She came to the United States 15 years ago with her husband and son. She says, "We really enjoy living here, on one hand, but we miss doing all the things we used to do in Argentina. Most of all, we are very happy to see our son studying in college here." Alejandra Lastra studies English at the Queens Borough Public Library's Steinway Adult Learning Center. Her teacher is Suzanne Wiedel Price, and Tsansiu Chow is the site advisor.

Never Thought of It

JUAN MERCED

While I was free
I never thought
of the things
I had.
Never thought of it.

Never thought of
being a husband
a father
a brother
an uncle.
Never thought of it.

Never thought of
being true
to myself
and to those
that love me.
Never thought of it.

Then came prison...

Then...
I thought of it.



Juan Merced has lived in New York City all his life and now attends classes at the Downtown Learning Center, where the site supervisor is Joni Schwartz. "This poem says what I learned about myself and what it means to lose freedom," he writes. He thanks his roommate for helping him with his writing.

My Communion Changed Everything

ADRIANA SERNA

My special memory is my first communion. I was nine years old. I remember my mother bought me a short white dress, a pair of white gloves and she made a flower crown for my hair. That day we went early to church. There were a lot of little girls like me, making their first communion. We all stood on line to speak with the priest. I was so shy and afraid, I had to go to the bathroom.

Then, when it was my turn to speak with the priest, he said, “Tell me the bad things you have done.”

I remember I said to him that when I was brushing my cousin Victoria’s hair, I always hit her on her head.

He said, “Why did you do that?”

I answered, “I don’t know. Her hair is very curly and it’s difficult for her to brush by herself.”

He said, “Don’t do that ever again. You have to love and respect everybody. Please, pray to Padre Nuestro and Ave Maria and listen to the mass. God is with you.”

After he said those words, I felt like I woke up. In one minute, my mind changed from a little girl to a young woman. Everything looked different, including the church. It seemed like the saints were talking to me, and they were happy with me.

My special aunt and my cousins were at my communion, including Victoria. I told her, “I’m sorry I hit you. I will never do it again.” We listened to the mass together.

When we went home, my cousins and my mother said, “You look different.” My mother also said, “My little angel, now you are not a baby. You will think differently.”

After those words, I felt so comfortable and proud of myself. It felt like God had spoken with me.

The day went fast. That night I went to my bedroom. I took out my white dress and looked at it for a few seconds. I still felt so happy. My mother came to my bedroom and sat next to my bed and spoke with me. I don’t remember all of the conversation, only a few words. “You will be a young lady very soon.”

I said, “Why do you say that?”

She said, “That’s life, everybody has to change.”

“Mami, I love you. I will always remember you. You are a special person. You are my hero.”

She said, “Please go to bed. Don’t forget to speak with God, not only in the night, wherever you are, in any circumstance. If you’re in danger, pray. He will always be there for you.”

I still remember that day and those words. It’s true. This is my favorite memory.



Adriana Serna was born in Colombia and has lived in New York for 12 years. She writes, "I'm married and have two children. I'm a quiet person. When I have time, I like to read stories, but almost all the time I like to stay at home cleaning or cooking or talking to my family on the phone." She studies at the Staten Island Jewish Community Center's Family Literacy Program. Joanne Springstead is the site supervisor and Caryn Davis is her teacher.

How My Father Became a Sailor

CHOI SIN CHAN

My father is 82 years old. He lives in New Jersey with my brother now. Sometimes he tells me how, when he was young, everything was different.

When he was a child, my country, China, was poor. There were no cars, no roads—only paths. Almost all the people worked in the fields. During the Second World War, life was very difficult. People didn't eat enough. Many people and children died in the Second World War.

After the war, my father married my mother. He was about 16 and she was about 14. He worked very hard in the fields. He just made a little, little bit of money. Then my mother's brother went to Hong Kong and came back with money. He told my father Hong Kong was a good place to find a job. After that, my father did not spend any more. He worked for a long time just to save a little money, but the money was not enough. He sold my mother's gold wedding ring, and it was still not enough. My aunt gave him some money, too.

In about 1952, with that money he and a friend took a boat and left home. Later they changed to a train. After many days, he arrived at the China-Hong Kong border. The train stopped on the China side because my father is Chinese and was not allowed to cross the border legally. He had to cross the river at night, quickly, in a boat. The trip took maybe three hours, but he had to wait many days, with others, to get on the boat.

Finally my father got into Hong Kong. At that time, finding a job was difficult. Everything about living in Hong Kong was a big problem. Many people lived together in one tiny room the size of a small bed. Bunk beds were three layers high. A bowl of noodles was five cents, but most people had no money because they had no job.

My father didn't speak Cantonese, but his friend did, a little bit. My father paid some money to his friend to help him find a job. His friend paid the money to a shipping company to give my father a job. That is when my father became a sailor. He sailed with that ship around the world for 30 years. For my father, life was very difficult.

Now life is very enjoyable and happy. Now people have cars; they don't need to walk outside. There are watches, cell phones, computers, TVs, lots of clothing, refrigerators, and more, more, and more new things all the time. Life is very different now.



Choi Sin Chan came to New York 15 years ago from China. "I like walking in Seward Park almost every day," she says. She studies at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Seward Park Branch, working on her English and computer skills. The site advisor is Terry Sheehan and her tutor is Hilary Schenker.

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Welcome

Welcome to the fifth volume of *The Literacy Review*, the annual compilation of some of the best writing by adult Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL students in programs throughout New York City. *The Literacy Review* is edited, designed and photographed by undergraduates at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

The first *Literacy Review*, published in Spring 2003, consisted of essays, poems and stories by 36 writers from 16 adult literacy sites. This year, our six student-editors were thrilled to read 402 submissions, and after much discussion chose works by 63 writers from 30+ sites. Two student-photographers used professional equipment to capture the radiance of the writers who came to our three photo shoots at NYU. Each year, it's been a joy to develop and improve *The Literacy Review*.

Readers, get ready for a literary treat!

But first, a quick welcome, a farewell, and a thank you. I welcome Maura Donnelly, who in fall 2006 began to teach the Literacy in Action course that has always been the center of our Literacy Project. I bid the fondest of farewells to *LR5*'s editor in chief, Phoebe Fox, who will graduate this year. She was my student-teacher in the University Settlement Society writing class for a year, working with Chinese-Americans, and my student-teacher in the initiating semester of the writing class at the International Rescue Committee, working with West African refugees. She went on to work at the Aguilar Branch of the New York Public Library's Centers for Reading and Writing. She also has been awarded two \$500 grants by the NYU Office of Community Service, to buy books for adult literacy classes. She was a copy editor of *LR3*, an editor of *LR4* and now editor in chief of *LR5*. Her devotion to adult literacy has been truly extraordinary and has won her a 2007 NYU President's Service Award.

I thank the writer of the *LR5* introduction: Terry Sheehan, site advisor at the Tompkins Square and Seward Park Branches of the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing. Terry has been involved with *The Literacy Review* from its beginning. She has probably sent more submissions than any individual teacher, and has enthusiastically participated in the celebrations. Moreover, when Diana Raissis, then a teacher at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, suggested that *The Literacy Review* sponsor professional development in teaching writing, Terry volunteered to work with Diana and me to create the first annual *Literacy Review* Workshops in Teaching Writing to Adults in Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL Programs in fall 2005. And Terry went on to collaborate with me in organizing the second of these free, all-day workshops—12 presentations in which 150 teachers, tutors and site advisors participated. Terry is a brilliant teacher and a beautiful person, an exemplary educator.

June Foley, Writing Program Director, The Gallatin School

Introduction

“Really? They chose my story?”

At first there is a stunned look, and then a smile radiates across the face of Modou Gueye, a student at The New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at Tompkins Square, who has just been told that his writing will be published in this issue of *The Literacy Review*. His hand moves to his heart as he contemplates this great honor.

Since the fall of 2002 when adult literacy and ESOL programs around the city first received the invitation to submit student writing for the new anthology that would be edited by Gallatin School students, I have encouraged literacy students to take some of their best writing, polish it further, and send it in for consideration. Every teacher knows that giving new writers the opportunity to see their work in print encourages students to continue to grow as writers, further developing their skills. To that end, the NYPL Centers for Reading and Writing, like many other adult education programs, publish in-house journals that are read and re-read by students and tutors, and are a valuable tool for both reading and writing. *The Literacy Review* gives adult learners another kind of opportunity: the chance to be part of a citywide anthology of writing published by a university, with a photo and biographical information of the writer on each page. “It looks like a real book!” is a frequent, awe-filled comment by our students and tutors. And it is a beautiful, professional-looking book. Joseph Risi, another Tompkins Square student, had a piece about his grandmother selected for an earlier *Literacy Review*. When he saw the publication, he said, “This book looks like it will last a long time. I want my son to have it his whole life.” Joseph was proud to give a copy of the book to his mother, who held it in her hands, read her family’s story, and said to him with great emotion, “You’re a writer! Will you write about me next?”

The Literacy Review, five volumes with this issue, is a cherished part of our print collection at Tompkins Square and at Seward Park Library. There are wonderful stories and poems for tutors to use with their groups to stimulate writing, and I’d like to give a few examples. The tutor reads the story aloud, and the group talks about what the writer did to affect us, looking at the reading as writers. Then students can select their own topics, spending some time composing and sharing their own works in progress. Soraya Rodrigues’ story (*LR3*) about playing in the rain as a child in Brazil has inspired many other childhood stories from new writers. Soraya does what good writers do—she takes us to a particular time and a particular place with great details and sensuous imagery, and reminds us of some of our own childhood memories. I’ve seen some students do some of their best writing after reading and discussing her story. Another popular story from *LR3* has a provocative title: “Killing Rats,” by David Chen. He gives us lots to talk about, and additionally, students in Chinatown recognize him from his picture as a sidewalk food vendor! And when I heard MacDonald Cummings read “The Best-Kept Secret in New York” (*LR4*) at last year’s *Literacy Review* celebration, I knew immediately I wanted to use it in writing workshops at our centers, and I did, a few days later, and many times since

then. His writing, evoking the tranquility of a little Brooklyn park, touches something in New York City residents. Reading his short, descriptive piece aloud never fails to produce smiles—and sometimes a sigh—as we learn of his contentment sitting under a large cedar tree. We all want to be there, and through his writing, we are, for a moment. MacDonald’s piece gives students an opportunity to think about a place of renewal for them, and to write about those places, striving to describe those special escapes, and their feelings there, as vividly as he does.

The Literacy Review also gave birth to the *The Literacy Review* Workshops in Teaching Writing to Adults in Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL Programs, which give teachers and volunteer tutors their own occasion for renewal, in the autumn back-to-school season: a full day to hear about and try out some ideas from others in the field. The presenters have been experienced and well-prepared, and the participants eager to continue to grow as writing instructors. In these times of chronically understaffed, underfunded literacy and ESOL programs, the indomitable June Foley has provided an extraordinary opportunity for teachers, who often feel isolated in their classrooms, to obtain invaluable staff development. She has also ensured that teachers have a comfortable setting at NYU for these workshops, providing us with time to network, and fresh, healthful food to renew us during the day. We have a closing activity at the end of the workshops; we ask participants to name one idea they will be trying out when they return to their sites. The responses have been affirming for the presenters, and inspiring for all present. Sometimes the “one idea” is a particular way of starting new writing or getting students to work on a specific skill, like using more description. Sometimes a participant has shared a shift in thinking during the course of the day, and sees a whole new way of viewing what an adult classroom can be.

As you can imagine, *The Literacy Review* has become legendary at the centers where I work since students and tutors have participated for five years now. At our spring learning celebrations, in addition to our own journals, we highlight the writing of our students who had their work selected for the anthology. Students, tutors, and staff talk enthusiastically about the wonderful dinner and gathering that celebrates the publication of the new *Literacy Review* each May. Volunteer tutors are motivated further in their endeavors after seeing their students receive such an honor. Some students, like Roger Simpson, have written about the experience of being at the joyous celebration in the beautiful space at the Kimmel Center at NYU.

Recently, a newer Tompkins Square student read her story to her class to much positive feedback. Her immediate response was, “Does this mean I’m going to NYU?” It was great to be able to reply, “Keep writing like that, Agnes, and you will be submitting a story to the editors for the next *Literacy Review*.”

Thanks to all who work on this publication. Long live *The Literacy Review*!

Terry Sheehan, Site Advisor, Tompkins Square and Seward Park Branches
New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing



Overcoming

A Special Day

SAIDA NASR

A lot of ideas cross my mind about a special date in my life: the day when I first came from Morocco to the United States. It was 02/02/2002. What does this coincidence of the succession of the number two mean? Will I have a second country, a second culture, a second life?

I left my parents, my country and everything else behind. I knew only a few English words. My husband was the same way. My children didn't know any English at all. When we first came here, we left the airport and we faced a hard cold that we had never experienced in our country. It is hard

for me to remember the first day, the first week and the first month. I was like a puzzle with important pieces missing. We had to start from the beginning, to look for a home to rent, to search for schools for the children and to find jobs, all without speaking English.

As an adult, everything was different for me. The culture, the language, the food, the weather, and even the relationships between people. I took a lot of time to familiarize myself with and adapt to this new world. This adaptation was easy only for my children. It seemed like nothing was new to them. They were happy and excited, like they were on vacation.

As time went by, my husband and I were transformed into babies, and our children became parents and teachers. They started to teach us how to speak, how to shop and how to deal with people. Nobody can feel this transformation or imagine this hard situation except adult immigrants like us. Most of the time I was smiling to my children's faces, but inside I was crying. I often told my husband, "What did we do with our lives? What a big mistake we made!" My husband's answer was always, "Be patient; be patient; your children's futures are here." The struggle took a long time and a lot of patience, but it made us strong. We learned a lot from this country. Our culture became richly diverse. We met a lot of friends from different countries, and we learned from each other's cultures. One of the things that is really amazing here is that there are many different nationalities gathered in the same neighborhood, sometimes in the same block or in the same building. They share love and good times, and become like a family.

My experiences in the United States really changed my life in many ways. I learned how Americans work hard and fight, dream and plan, struggle and challenge themselves, need and hope. Most importantly, I really like this country's educational system. It helps and encourages everyone to study and reach their goals. Teachers run



on pure dedication and commitment.

I would be lying if I said that I don't miss my country. I'm still preserving my culture. My traditions, my loved ones and my past go with me everywhere, like a shadow. And I would be lying if I said that I don't miss New York when I go to my country for a visit. After only a short period of time, I feel like I'm missing something important and I have to go back to my second country, to my second life.

My culture has become mixed. My blood is Moroccan, the air that I breathe is American and I can't live without either one.



Saida Nasr was born in Casablanca, Morocco, and has lived in New York City for four years and nine months. She came to the United States seeking a good education for her children, and hopes to go to college herself someday soon. Saida Nasr likes to read and write in her spare time, and says, "Thank you very much to my teachers for their help and dedication." She attends the Hunter College SPELL program, where she is taught by Ruby Taylor MacBride.

Hurricane Katrina

ONIKA AUSTIN

The worst time of my life was in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina hit where I lived in New Orleans, Louisiana. I was at my best friend's house sleeping over, when my dad called me to tell me to come home. He watched the news and heard there was a class five hurricane coming. My uncle picked me up and drove me to my house.

My dad told me to pack some clothes because we were going uptown to sleep in the hotel where my aunt works, so I did. As my uncle and I were leaving, my dad said, "I'm not leaving."

My uncle asked, "Why not?"

"No hurricane is going to run me out of my house," my dad replied.

My uncle said, "Come on, Onika, let's go," so I left. On the way to the hotel, we stopped at my cousin's home to talk them out of staying in their house. When we got there, they were having a barbecue with a big sign on their window that said, "Katrina is not running us out of our house; we are staying right here." So my uncle and I got some food and left

When we got to the hotel it was packed; 12 or more of my family were there. They gave us two rooms, and my family decided to put the boys in one room and the girls in the other. Later on that night, when it started to rain, I thought about my dad, my cousins and my family. I talked to them on the phone and they said they were okay. I decided to call my boyfriend. His grandmother answered and said that he was not at home; he was at his mom's. I asked her who was at home with her and why she didn't leave. She said her grandson was with her, and no hurricane was going to happen.

When I got off the phone, I went to sleep. A big flash of lightning woke me up. My dad and my cousin called, and said water was in the house and they were stuck in the attic and couldn't get out. Then the cell phone cut off on us. I started to cry, as I thought about my dad and my cousin. But I thought to myself, *My dad and my cousin can swim*. Then I thought about my boyfriend's grandmother. I hoped she and her grandson had gotten out of the house and were all right. Finally, I went back to sleep.

Early the next morning, the bathroom ceiling caved in and woke us up. We all jumped up, then the window glass broke, and we all screamed as the wind blew in. We pulled the mattress, our clothes and other stuff out of the room, into the hall. I took a walk on the landing to see outside. Then I saw a tree split right down the middle. The roof came right off of someone's house. I couldn't believe this was happening.

That whole day it rained and rained. My family and I and the rest of the hotel guests sat out in the hotel hall. Everyone was burning hot that day. You'd think that if it was raining it would be cool, but it wasn't. Most of the people in the hall were hungry and starving, so that by the next day everybody was trying to get something to eat. Most of the people were going into stores and taking food and clothes to survive on.

After my family finally ate, we tried to drive past the Ninth Ward, where we lived,

but it was still filled with water, so we went back to the hotel. A couple of days went by, and at last my dad called and said he was okay and that he was at the Superdome. Another day went by, and my family and I saw my cousin walking up the street. Most of my family and friends survived.



Onika Austin, 20, is originally from Guyana. She lived in the Ninth Ward in New Orleans until Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005. She now lives in New York City and studies at the Brooklyn College Adult Learning Center, where her instructor is Dorothy Provenzano.

The Dirty War

FULVIO TRAVERSO

When I was 15, growing up in Argentina, my older brother, Alex, was kidnapped by paramilitary groups and nearly disappeared. This started a sequence of events that changed my life forever and made me an adult overnight.

During the “Argentine Dirty War” of the 1970s, nearly 30,000 people vanished without a trace. My parents thought Alex was going to be one more victim, so they mobilized early and asked everyone for help. From Amnesty International to the Papal Nunzio, everyone got involved in trying to find my brother. My parents thought I would



be next, so they pulled me out of school. It is hard to explain in a few lines the degree of paranoia that existed in Buenos Aires in the 1970s. For example, we would hide whenever we saw a police car, and it wasn't uncommon for entire families to vanish.

Until then, I had been an average kid—careless, playing outdoors, going to my music lessons. Overnight my childhood came to a screeching halt. I couldn't go outside anymore; I couldn't go to my guitar lessons. We had to be together at all times, watching out for each other.

Just before my parents pulled me out of school, my grades started to suffer. Ironically, I failed Spanish, Italian and Latin, yet I passed English. It was a sign of what was about to happen. Eventually my brother was found, but was still detained, so my parents decided to sell everything and work towards having my brother released.

In the meantime, they sent me to live in New York City. I was 16 years old, no longer a kid, trying to pay bills on a \$90.80 weekly paycheck, from cutting chickens at a local Pioneer Supermarket.

Boy, did I grow up quickly! Reflecting on my life today, I don't know if I should look at these events in a positive or negative way. I could write a book about them. To paraphrase a famous Venetian, I haven't told you the half of it.



Fulvio Traverso moved to New York City from Argentina 27 years ago. He now studies at the New York City Department of Education's Bronx Adult Learning Center, with his teacher, Pat Marin, and the site supervisor, Linda Pelc. "I had a fairly normal childhood until the events described in my essay. I have since lived and worked in New York City and hope to continue studying and pass on my life experiences to my beautiful daughter, Isabella."

I Can't Fake It

HERMAN CHAPARRO

I can't fake it because my color changes. I turn red. I get nervous. For me, it is not easy to fake.

One day at my first job in New York, when I was 18 and had hair, my boss said, "Herman, bring your timecard." I told him I couldn't find my timecard. I felt embarrassed. After this my boss remembered I couldn't read. He changed the system. He wrote numbers on all the timecards. He said, "Your number is 10." For me, it was a relief because I could read and write numbers.

After the problem I had at that job, I went to school to learn reading and writing. It's not perfect now, but my life is better. I have lost my hair, but at least I can read and write!



Born in Puerto Rico, Herman Chaparro has lived in Manhattan, but now lives in the Bronx, which he prefers. He describes himself as "a hard-working man" and is proud to do his job. He is a student at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Saint Agnes Branch. He would like to thank his tutors, Jane Purcell and Santana Williams, for helping him to edit his story. The site supervisor is Steven Mahoney.

Looking Outside Our Window

JOSE SANTIAGO

My sister and I ...

Young and full of life,

Not knowing about any future strife.

As seasons change and days pass . . .

Looking outside our window.

Like birds caged, Perched on a window sill,

We trembled at night . . .

Fearful of dark days ahead.

We remembered the beautiful skies and the

Snow trickling down.

Looking outside our window.

Wonderfulness of traditions,

Food,

Language,

Living in the projects,

Reliving all the headaches,

Watching families go to church on Sunday,

Children playing,

Sound of . . .

Ice cream and fire trucks,

Made us impatiently restless

Looking outside our window.

Time goes by . . .

Parents divorcing,

Shooting heroin,

Smoking crack,

Addictions,

Well in place,

My sister,

14



Me,
17

There's nowhere safe,
Too ashamed to say . .

Now
My sister,
HIV,
For some time,
Like the wind she goes . . .
A flower never fully blossomed.
Her petals fall off before her season.
She's gone,
28,
Me,
31,
Left embracing the memories
we once shared,
Looking outside our window.



Jose Santiago was born in New York City. At the Downtown Learning Center, he writes poems and other works with the help of his tutor, Barbara Marengo. "I had not written or read anything until I came to the Downtown Learning Center in 2003." Joni Schwartz is the site supervisor.

Civil War

ROBERT MOSES

The most profound memory now in my heart is the civil war that took place in my country, Liberia. It is a memory that is going to be with me forever. The impact of this war continues to influence who I am, how I think and who I will become in the future.

I was eight years old and in the fourth grade. Sitting in class, I listened to guns firing in the distance, coming closer to us. We had to leave school and run for our lives. I remember my parents were looking everywhere for me that night.

In the heat of this war, there was no food and no drinking water. Worst of all was when we ran out of electricity. Can you imagine what it means to be out of electricity and thinking what will happen to you overnight? That was the time when President Samuel Doe would send his death squad into villages and kill thousands of people. We were terrified.

Sometimes in the morning when I arose, we saw bodies over the street. We looked over the dead, and many times there were friends or family just lying there dead right in front of us.

In the next few months, the war got worse. My father decided that we should leave the country, but how to leave? There were no cars allowed in the streets. The rebels had burned every car in the town as well as many of the buildings. The decay from all the dead bodies in the street was so bad you had to hold your nose when you walked past. It was so horrible.

The worst memory of all was the day my uncle got shot right before my very eyes. I couldn't eat, drink or think for days. My father and his friends had to bury him without a funeral in a mass grave. There was no one to talk to, no questions we dared ask. We had no recourse but to run for our lives. Among bloodthirsty rebels, we managed to go into exile in Ghana, another West African state.

From Ghana, my family and I were lucky enough to be granted political asylum in order to come to America. While I miss my homeland and what it used to be, I am very grateful to be alive and safe. I am thankful every day for a country like America, which was willing to give my family and me refuge. I dream of the day that I can return to Liberia the way that it was, but for now, I just live each day trying to remember the good and erase the memories that have scarred me forever.



Robert Moses moved to New York City four years ago, and says, "I am a native of Liberia who has now adopted Staten Island as a surrogate country. I am very happy to be here." He studies at the College of Staten Island's Adult Learning Center with his G.E.D. teacher, Iris Napolitano. Staci Weile is the Director of Continuing Education and Professional Development, Linda Jones is the Coordinator of the Adult Literacy Program and Mary Mastrogiovanni is the ESOL Coordinator.

The Angels of the Mud

ALESSANDRO BARTOLINI

November 4, 1966 was a terrible day in the life of my city, Florence, Italy. The Arno, Florence's river, flooded the city with millions of tons of dirty water, oil and mud. The water rose very quickly. In a few hours, it reached over six meters next to the banks. The people were desperate. Thirty-seven people died, and hundreds lost their homes. The National Library, near the river, was flooded completely, and thousands and thousands of ancient and rare books were damaged gravely, in some cases destroyed. A huge number of art masterpieces of the Renaissance were damaged.

The Uffizi, Santa Croce and the Ponte Vecchio were all damaged.

Those were terrible days; all the people were worried about the future of Florence. I was a young child and was frightened too. Even though I didn't live in the central city, I felt as if I were an inhabitant. At that time there were only a few network TV broadcasts and no internet, but the news of the Florence disaster was known in a very short time all over the world. When all seemed lost, suddenly, like a miracle, hundreds of young people—mostly students from Europe and the United States—came to Florence. They worked long days to help the Florentine people, and saved thousands of precious books and many Renaissance art masterpieces. They worked next to soldiers, firefighters and ordinary people, to save those cultural treasures that belonged to humanity. The young people, who were later named the Angels of the Mud, made a decisive contribution.

I wanted to contribute to help the city. I absolutely wanted to do something to help those people who had lost everything. My family owned a drugstore, so with my Uncle Elio we loaded a truck with cases of mineral water, some food, oil and wine and went to Florence to distribute these goods to the people in need.

Today, when I think of this time, my main regret is that I didn't meet and thank any of the Angels of the Mud. I wish I could do this today.



Alessandro Bartolini writes, "I am a liaison at the Italian Consulate, working to foster the inclusion of Italian subjects in schools and universities in America. I have been in New York for two years." Vicki Raikes is Alessandro Bartolini's English teacher at the College of Mount Saint Vincent's Institute for Immigrant Concerns. Donna Kelsh is the director, and Mark Brik is the education director.



The Shallows of Water

LISSETTE PEÑA

Life has not been beautiful for me. From the beginning, it has been a struggle to survive, but I kept my head above water. Still, I never swam out too deep. If I swam out too deep, I probably would have drowned.

It was very hard for me to raise my children. It took a lot of hugs and “I’m sorrrys.” I needed to remind my children that I was a young parent. I didn’t want them to grow up the same way I did.

My only son is 19 years old now. I was 19 years old when I gave birth to him. That was when I felt love for the first time in my life. I called my newborn son “The Knight.” He and I experienced great hardship, but still we both turned out fairly well.

Despite few clothes and little money, my son managed to graduate from high school. I am very proud of him for that.

I had to continually counsel him. I never hid anything from him. I would kiss him and tell him how much I loved him. When I tucked him into bed every night, I wanted him to feel safe in a way I never had.

I was afraid to leave him alone with anyone. My favorite spot to talk to him was in the bathroom. When anything was wrong I would say, “Time out: Let’s go to the bathroom and talk.” I drilled it into his head to tell me if anyone mistreated him, such as if anyone touched his private parts. I wanted to become the ruler of my children’s kingdom.

Unfortunately, my children watched and learned from every move I made. I had to be cautious with all my decisions in life.

I came to believe that communication is the fruit of life, especially when it comes to our children.

I encountered so much pain from my early childhood. I was a prisoner of myself, and self-destruction had a great hold on me. I lived through child molestation and brutal beatings. My mother was the first person to bring violence into my family. She believed if you hit people you could make them understand and get them to do things the right way. She treated me as if I were her slave.

I crawled on this earth like a poisonous snake, because I was brought up in a den of snakes for many years.

One summer night I had a dream. In the dream, I was leaving a nightclub, and I was trying to get home. As I tried to cross the street, it suddenly became a river. A tall dark man was standing by the river. He said the only way to get to the other side was



to swim across. It seemed like I had no choice, so I jumped into the river. As I was swimming, I felt what seemed like a hand grabbing my left ankle. At first I thought the river was shallow, but the hand made me feel that the river was actually very deep. It was as if the hand was keeping me from crossing the river, and it wanted to pull me down deep. I kept swimming until I reached to the other side of the river. As I lifted my head out the water, I woke up staring at the ceiling.

This is the way I interpret my dream: The shallow water kept me from moving on to a better life. My dream, or nightmare, became reality. I could not escape the demons that led me toward entering the gates of hell. I did not know freedom until I started talking and writing about the molestations and other horrible experiences in my life.



Born in New York City, Lissette Peña has learned that life isn't beautiful for everyone. "But," she says, "we can make change. The little child in us needs to be embraced and we need to love ourselves in order to love anyone else." Lissette Peña studies reading and writing at the Fortune Society with her tutor, Lauren Gonzales.

Public School

GEORGE WILLETT

When I was a kid, I didn't know how to read or write. All the schools that I had gone to were "special eds."

All the schools, like P.S. 154 and P.S. 68, were Uptown. P.S. 154 is on 127th and St. Nicholas Avenue. P.S. 68 is between 127th and 128th on Lenox Avenue.

Many times the teacher, Miss Fits, didn't come to teach us because there was a lot of noise and distraction from the students. They would play tricks on the teacher, like putting things on her chair. For example, they would put toilet paper, thumbtacks, or other stuff, to make her angry. Kids would also blow spitballs through a straw at her. Lots of times Miss Fits would call in sick, probably because she didn't want to be there. They sent substitute teachers to take her place. The same thing would happen with them.



I remember one substitute teacher. She was a heavy-set white lady. She would stay from 9 am to 3 pm. She wouldn't get up and look at our work very much. She would sit at her desk drinking Chock Full O' Nuts coffee and eating coffeecake. Sometime she would send me to go get the Chock Full O' Nuts for her from the restaurant around 125th Street.

As I got older, I realized that the reason I didn't know how to read was because I wasn't taught.

My mother didn't have too much education because her mother passed away when she was young. My mother's aunt took over and raised her to the best of her ability. My mother did the best she could to take care of the kids. There were 10 of us, but two passed away very young. Now, there is just me, one other brother and four sisters.

I decided I needed to better my education because I would like to go further in my life. I now have a daughter who is seven years old, and I would like to read to her. She is a happy little girl who likes to tell jokes and is smart in class. I would like her to get her education and better her life, so that she can go to college. I'm hopeful that will happen.



Born in New York City, George Willett writes, "I am very open-minded. I like to ride bikes, dance, and also be responsible for my actions." He studies at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Aguilar Branch. His tutor is Joan Long, and the site supervisor is Elaine Sohn.



Dreaming

An American Dream: Spa, Nails & Music

TEMURI AKHOBADZE

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

“Hello, is this Mr. Temuri?”

“Yes, Madame,” I answered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now I am rich and happy. I like to make other people happy, too. Two times a week my driver brings me to my library in a fancy Bentley. Here at Saint Agnes I am improving my English. Now I can donate half a million dollars to my library.



Temuri Akhobadze, a concert pianist from the Republic of Georgia, has lived in New York City for 14 years. He is a student at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Saint Agnes Branch. Steven Mahoney is the supervisor, and Temuri Akhobadze's tutor is Maida Schwab. This is the third year he has been published in The Literacy Review.

My Dream

YOUNOK CHANG

I dream
I am speaking English
perfectly
I want to dream again

Tonight I'm going to have an English conversation
with someone
so I go to bed
I lie down
I close my eyes

I never dream in English
always my dreams
are in Korean
In Korean I climb mountains
I fly across the sky
I argue and win

I want to climb English mountains
I want to fly across English skies
I want to meet people who speak English
I want to win my English arguments

Someday I will speak English
in my dreams



Younok Chang was born in Seoul, South Korea, and moved to the United States five and a half years ago, when she was 42. Since she has been in New York, she likes to watch people enjoy her cooking at a restaurant. Younok Chang studies English with her teacher, Connie Sommer, and the site advisor, Bona Soanes, at the Queens Borough Public Library's Elmhurst Adult Learning Center. Her essay, "Marriage Proposal," was published in The Literacy Review, Volume 4.

A Photo of Two Young Dreams

STEVIE LAI

On the sidewalk in front of the small park I frequently pass by on the way home, some old items are exhibited for sale when it is good weather. These old accessories are hardly valuable: pairs of half-worn-out shoes, used garments, faded costume jewelry, old pictures, aged china and glasses.

In the piles of old pictures, I pick up one because we—the people in the photo and I—have something in common: we are Chinese. The hoary black and white photo is of good quality, and intact as well. A little golden circle logo with the shop's name on the right bottom corner proclaims that it is the product of a prestigious photo shop.

On the photo, there are two young men in their early twenties in traditional Chinese old-style costumes: light color *cheongsams* topped with dark mandarin vests, shiny silk round black hats, neat long white socks and black Chinese shoes. From the way they are dressed and their clean-cut foreheads, I can easily imagine that their hair must be braided into long “pigtails” hanging down their backs. One man is sitting, and the other is standing beside him. They are both looking straight into the camera with a subtle smile.

How old is the photo? Fifty years? Eighty years? Over a hundred years?

The two young men, to outlive their poverty and fulfill their dreams of freedom and a future, left their own country to go to the other side of the globe as laborers. In an era of discrimination and a completely strange place in which people spoke a totally different language, they needed more than luck and hard work to survive. After several years of struggling, they became a little more stable and had accumulated a small amount of savings. Their venerable parents back home sent them letters, which said:

“My dear son... We are grateful that you have a great opportunity to work overseas, so that you will be able to improve our family's financial situation... Son, we are proud of you... We are getting old, and you're so far away from us. We miss you very much and are anxious to know how you are. Have you gained weight? Do you have enough food? Do you sleep well and dress warmly? Send us your picture, so we can see how our son looks now. Meanwhile, you have reached the age to get married; we need grandchildren in the family to carry on our surname. With the picture, we'll ask the marriage maker to find you a nice, virtuous wife. . .”

To ensure to their respected parents that they were safe and sound, the two young men, putting on their brightest smile and their best traditional outfit, which they brought from their homeland for special occasions, stood in front and looked right into the camera to pose for the picture.

Did these two young men find their wives with the help of this picture? Did their wives come to the U.S.A. to be united with their husbands? Did they have children? Were their children well-educated, and did they become successful scholars, lawyers,

doctors or engineers, like most Chinese parents wanted their children to be? Or, since there were too many tragedies happening in the early nineteenth century to Chinese labor immigrants, did these two young men even survive to go home to see their parents again and find their wives?

I have no way to find out from this photo only. However, at the moment the photo was taken, the two young hearts were filled with enthusiasm, confidence, optimism, and love. They were ready to pursue their dreams, even though they realized it wouldn't be an easy path. How do I know? I know because all this is written on their faces, in their eyes and their smiles.



Stevie Lai was born in Hong Kong and has lived in New York for 10 years. She enjoys reading novels and likes flowers and plants, especially the African violet. She attends classes at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Tompkins Square Branch. Her tutor is Jacqueline Helpert, and Terry Sheehan is the site advisor. Stevie Lai's essay, "I'd Like to Be a Florist," was published in The Literacy Review, Volume 4.

It's Never Too Late to Dream

NANCY LIN

I've dreamed about the university many times. There are a lot of buildings, trees, ponds and grass all around the school. A lot of students are walking around the buildings. They talk, laugh and walk. Some students walk very fast to their next class. I want to go into the classroom, but too many people are in the room. There are even students stuck in the doorway and against the windows. I can't go into the room, so I feel upset. I try to go in, but I can't.

At last the class ends. A teacher comes out. She is an old lady with silver hair. She walks to me and asks, "Why don't you join the class?" And I tell her what's happened. She tells me, "This class is about the philosophy of life. Maybe next time you can go in."



I think I always dream about school. That probably means that I miss my old life in Taiwan because I taught Chinese literature in a high school there. Another reason is probably that I want to go to school to learn English for my new life in America.



Nancy Lin was born in Taiwan, where she taught Chinese literature. For eight years now, she has lived in New York City, where she takes classes at the Queens Borough Community College Literacy Program. Her teacher is Janie Nathanson. Nancy Lin writes, "Whether you're a teacher or a student, you're still learning something brand new each day."

I Dream of Better Days

ANTHONY DAVIS

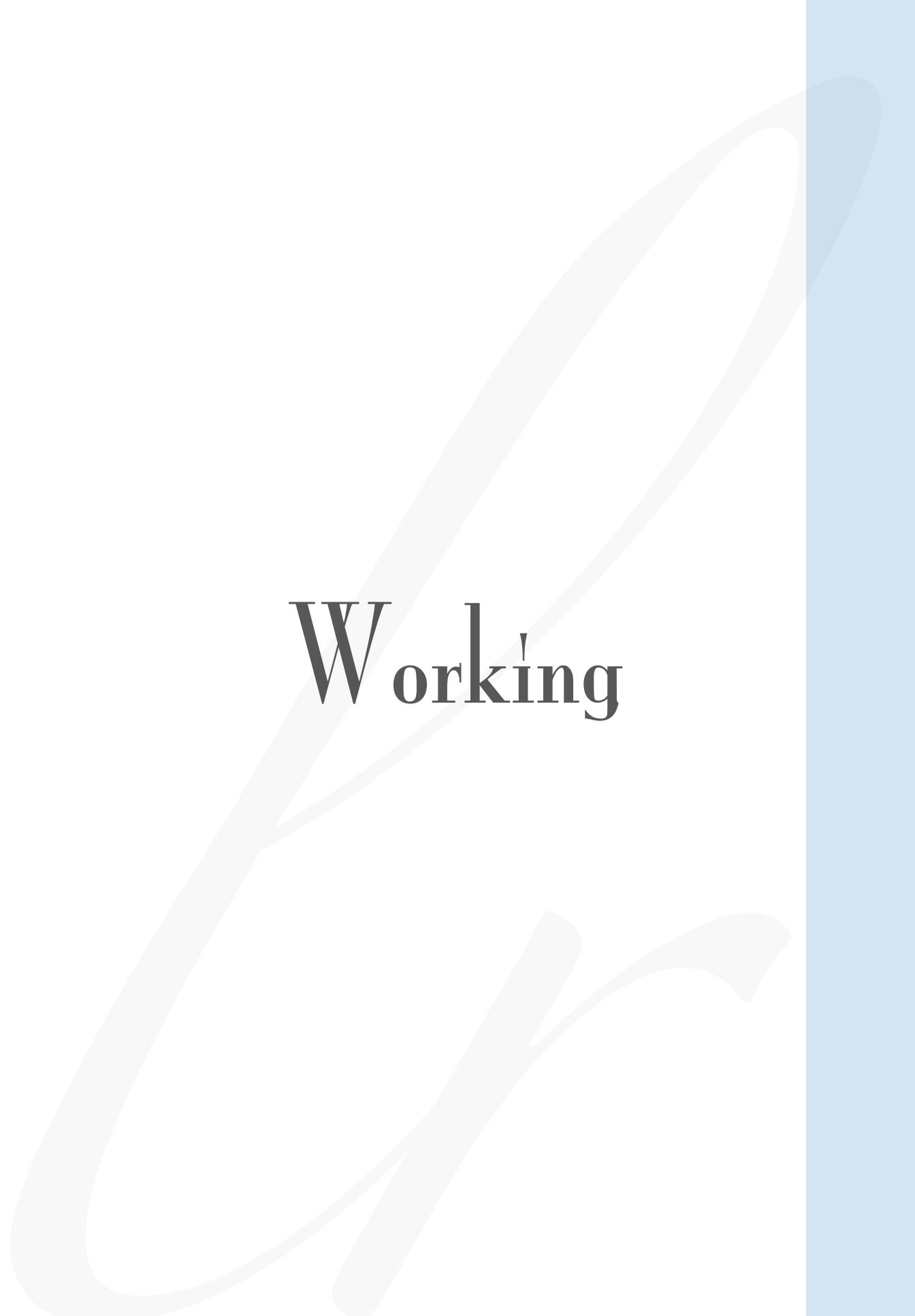
I dream of better days

When there are no knives or guns
And darkness puts fear in a soul
When next to death, your heart is full of holes
Or the devil's on your back telling you things you should not know
When a wolf cries a scary moaning sound
And smoking makes you feel like you're in hell
The sound of cups beating on bars in jail
Or people screaming, but there's no sound
The smell of death lurks in the air
And blood drops hit the streets as if they were rain
Or maybe war with two gangs
And everybody's fighting over money, power and fame

I dream of better days



Anthony Davis is a 20-year-old New York native. "I am from Harlem," he writes, "and I want to say: If I can make it, you can, too. Never give up on your dreams or goals. Respect life and the people in it." Eric Appleton teaches Anthony Davis at the Fortune Society in Manhattan.



Working

Mom as Nanny

NAYELI MAYEN

My husband is taking the CPA (Certified Public Accountant) exam, for which he must spend a lot of money. Three months ago I thought, *I don't have any job! I care for my baby, but I need to earn money for my family.*

I made an advertisement: "Mom as Nanny." I waited for three weeks, and then my first call was my new job. I was scared because in my building there are just English speakers and I don't speak very well. But now I babysit a baby. He is five months old and he is part of my family. He is like my second child.



He comes every morning at eight o'clock and I feed him, and then he plays a little bit with a walker and he takes a nap for 30 minutes. Finally, I take my girl and the baby outside. Sometimes we go to the park, to Barnes and Noble, to the pet store or to the museum, and last time we went to the Bronx Zoo.

I am crazy. It was very difficult with my girl, who is two years old, with the baby, and with the double stroller.

Now I am very excited because next week the baby is going to eat for the first time. I am thinking of preparing some Mexican food for him. I know he loves Mexican songs because when I sing them to him every day he stops crying, but if I sing in English he does not stop crying.

One day I was at his house and I did not see any Christmas tree, so I thought I would buy him a small one, but his mother then mentioned to me that they do not believe in Christmas because they are Jewish, and I felt so embarrassed and thought, *It was good I did not buy it before asking.*

My daughter is jealous because I take care of the baby. Sometimes I think I should stop taking care of the baby, but then I think, *We need the money, and his parents don't have enough money to pay for daycare or a real nanny.* I believe God is telling me they need my help to take care of their baby and they are helping me to make some money.

I'm so tired, but every day I say to myself, *Don't worry. You can do it.*



Nayeli Mayen studies at the Hunter College SPELL program, where her teacher is Gale Shangold. Born in Mexico, she came to New York City three years ago. She writes, "I think that you need to give everything of yourself; I don't care if I receive the same thing in return."

My Employee Was Stealing

ELIJAH BONNEAU

One of my employees was stealing. She was 15 years old. Her family wasn't doing well financially. She used to take home food every day. It didn't bother me, but she began to take money. How was I going to face her and tell her that I knew she was stealing? I loved that kid very much, but it was time to tell her that I knew she was taking my money. She said, "I am very sorry. Please don't fire me. My sister needs some shoes. I will pay you back."

I felt sorry for her, so I gave her another chance. She worked, and every week I took some money out of her paycheck until she had paid back what she took. She turned out to be the best cashier I have ever had. She went on to be my manager, and from there she went on to college and came to be a very nice and proud young lady. I am glad to still be a friend of hers.



Born in South Carolina, Elijah Bonneau often returns to his home state, where he loves to visit his grandmother's farm. He says, "I love my grandmother because she was always there for me." He is a student at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Harlem Branch. Steven Mahoney is the site supervisor, and Elijah Bonneau's tutors are Louise Brown and Nancy Davies. "Without Louise and Nancy to help me, I couldn't write any of my stories."

I Am a Builder

JOHN FOTHERGILL

As a child, I loved making things with my hands. The older I got, the more I saw that I was good at building things with my hands. My father was a builder, and on the weekends he used to take me to his job site. Every time I asked him a question about a certain thing he would say, “Boy, be quiet and watch.” As I watched, I learned.

I saw how careful you had to be when building things. You had to have accurate measurements, or things wouldn’t fit, and then you would be wasting material, especially if something was made too small. I became very fascinated with working on old buildings and rebuilding them so that they looked as good as new. I enjoyed building cabinets and installing locks and windows. I also liked to redo ceilings, build wall units, beds and closets.

I knew what I wanted to do with my life. This is my favorite job. I’m a carpenter. I am a builder.



John Fothergill moved to the U.S. in 1978 from Jamaica. He studies at the Bedford Learning Center at the Brooklyn Public Library, where his tutors are Magda Aboul-fadl and Rhonda Lipscomb, and the site supervisor is Haniff Toussaint.

Underpaid, Unappreciated, Yet Fulfilled

CHRISLA NAZAIRE

The sound of a cold and dangerous wind vibrated my windows. As the aroma of the lavender potpourri filled the air, I was transported to a relaxing world. Oh, God! It felt good, and I surrendered my body, my mind, and my spirit to a deep sleep. Suddenly, the shrill sound of the alarm clock brought me back to reality. It was time to go to work, for my grateful patient and her unappreciative daughter awaited me.

I thought about the unpleasant weather and the difficult chore that I had to face on that day. I said to myself, *I am calling in sick. Besides, I only earn seven dollars per hour, so I would never get rich doing this job.* I looked at the clock. It read 5:30 a.m. I picked up the phone and dialed my agency, but before someone could answer it, I hung up because I felt guilty.

I had worked with Ms. X for two years. She was a bed-bound patient, and she relied on me to take care of her personal hygiene. My responsibility to her consisted of bed, bath, dressing and grooming. I cooked her meals, and I fed her. I also paid her bills while her daughter, a high school teacher, went to work. If I had called in sick on that day, by the time they found a substitute it would have been around 11 a.m. Ms. X would be hungry, dirty, terrified, and she would break down and cry like a baby. Therefore, I had to reconsider my decision. So I got ready and I left for work.

It was 8:55 a.m. when I reached my destination. I pulled myself together and rang the bell. My patient's daughter opened the door and said, "I was wondering if you were going to show up or stay home because of the bad weather."

I retorted, "Good morning to you, too, my dear."

She went on about other aides who had called in sick every time it snowed or rained.

"Enough!" said my patient. "She has been working here over a year, and she has never been absent or late. Please leave her alone!" To me, my patient exclaimed, "Good morning, Sugar Pie!"

"How are you feeling today, Ms. X?" I asked.

"I am feeling well, now that you are here," she replied. "Come here, baby," she said, and I approached her bed. With her weak and shaky fingers, Ms. X took my hand and kissed it. "Thanks for coming. It must have been hard for you to leave your cozy home."

"My pleasure," I said. "It was no trouble at all," I lied.

The daughter glared at us with disgust. She slammed the door, and she left without saying goodbye.

The day went well. At nine o'clock at night, it was time for me to go home.

"Baby, thank you for everything. May God bless you and keep you," said Ms. X. She blew me a kiss, and I did the same.

Even though I was underpaid and unappreciated by her daughter, in the end I was fulfilled by Ms. X's gratitude.



Chrisla Nazaire was born in Haiti and has been in the United States for 15 years. She writes, "I have been working as a home attendant for 12 years. My goal is to become a registered nurse." Chrisla Nazaire studies at the Brooklyn College Adult Learning Center, where her teacher is Mona McLellan, and the site supervisor is Frannie Rosenson.

Sewing Clothing in a Factory

TOCK CHAN

When I look back 35 years ago to sewing clothing in a factory, it really makes me feel sick. There were a lot of loud noises from machines. The place was dirty and the hours were long. There were many immigrants who didn't speak English at all.

The way I earned my wages was calculated per piece. The range per piece was from 10 cents to 50 cents. I had to move fast and accurately, since my earnings depended on how many pieces I could sew in a day. Sometimes the designs were difficult to sew. Those pieces definitely took extra time to work on. The small amount of money I earned made me feel sad and annoyed.

I thought to myself, *What is going to happen to me in the future? I must get a better life, especially to advance my career.* I left to go to school at night and took English classes. Even though there have been a number of years of struggling, I've started to make progress and now have the opportunity to work on Wall Street as a computer operator and focus on new, exciting ventures.



"I'm a widow and raised two children, who are now grown. I love playing tennis," says Tock Chan. Born in Singapore, she now studies at the Coney Island Learning Center. Her teacher is Barbara Matthew, and the site supervisor is Michael McDuffie. Tock Chan also would like to thank her daughter for helping her with her studies.

Ode to My Job

ROGER SIMPSON

I have been working for a gym in lower Manhattan for six years. My job is to keep the gym clean. You can tell when I'm there, because the gym begins to smile. In the morning when I stick my key in the door at 3:00 a.m., the gym says, "Here comes Roger. I know that he is going to help me to shine." Some of the members come to the gym because of the cleanliness. Some could care less because they just come to work out. But I keep the gym clean because it's my job.

After a year of working six days a week, I have earned four weeks of vacation time with pay. The funny thing about it is I have nowhere to go and nothing to do. So I'm going to walk all of Central Park, from 110th to 59th Street, a couple of days of the week. I want to go to Atlantic City someday and sit on the boardwalk, and play the slot machines and walk around. I will be by myself, so I can stay as long as I want to, as long as I don't miss the bus to come back home. I love to walk, but not from Atlantic City.



Born in North Carolina, Roger Simpson has lived in New York City for 39 years. He is a church deacon and works for a gym in Manhattan. He writes, "I do try to stay busy every day of the week. It helps me to keep a good mindset and stay in shape." He studies with Terry Sheehan, who is the site advisor at the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Seward Park Branch. His story, "Living Down South," was published in The Literacy Review, Volume 3.

Two Stolen Bikes and a Guy with a Gun

NELSON FENG

One day in my second week delivering food for a Chinese restaurant in the Bronx, a doorman ordered food from my restaurant in the evening. I delivered the food to the building, and parked my bike in front. When I was bringing the money back to the bicycle, I saw a young guy riding my bike as fast as he could. I was very angry. I ran after him right away. I ran almost 20 blocks. When I almost got him, it was very sad because a car almost hit me from the other side. So when I jumped back, I lost him. That was the first time I lost my bike.

The same week, I lost my second bike. Because of the first experience, this time I locked the bicycle very well. But unbelievably, just three minutes after I delivered food to the apartment building, I didn't see my bike anymore. Of course, my boss was very angry, because both bikes were his. And he told me that he wouldn't support bikes for me anymore. I had to get them myself.

Some of my friends and relatives asked me to change to another place to work. But you know you feel *It can't happen to me*, so I truly never felt scared. Then, the last day of the month, something happened.

It was about eight o'clock at night. I was just riding my bike on my way to a delivery, when suddenly a guy with a gun jumped into the street from the sidewalk. He looked like he wanted to shoot me. He pointed the gun toward me and told me to stop. He pushed my bike and me down to the ground, made me put both hands behind my head, robbed my wallet, cell phone and several orders. I was very scared. I thought he might be scared, too, because his hand with the gun always shook. When he got the things that he wanted, he ran away immediately.

At the same time, there were many cars with some people on the street. I thought that they were chicken. They didn't give me any help at the dangerous time. Just after the guy left, some of them came close to me and tried to help me. They asked me whether I needed to go to the hospital, or if they needed to call a police officer. I responded, "I'm okay. Thanks anyway." Then I went to the restaurant, told my boss what had just happened, asked him to give me my salary and told him I wouldn't work there anymore.

That was the last day I worked in the Bronx in my life. I've never forgotten it.



In Fu Zhou, China, Nelson Feng was a teacher. In New York City, he studies English at University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program, where Michael Hunter is the director. Last year's Literacy Review included his story, "Why I Go to Church in New York City." This is one of a series about his many jobs in New York City.

My Worst Job Ever

MARLENE CONCEPCION

My worst job ever would have to be when I worked at Starbucks. I have to say that it wasn't the job that was bad; it was my co-workers and my boss. I worked there for almost six months before the real problems started. One of my co-workers who had been there for a while treated the new workers as if we were supposed to know what to do, and when to do it, without anyone telling us how. My boss wanted everyone to learn the hard way, each of us by ourself, which is why we made so many mistakes. Many of the regular customers never came back.



One day my boss told me that it was my fault that the dishwasher and the refrigerator were both broken. He also told me that maybe I was in the wrong job because I didn't care that I broke those things and that it was also my fault that he wouldn't be getting his bonus for that year. Why would I break the dishwasher and the refrigerator? What did I have to do with his bonus?

I finally gave up and told him that I couldn't work like that anymore. I didn't mean to, but I started laughing in his face for blaming me for breaking those things. I gave him my one week's notice right there and told him that I would be picking up my check the following week. I finished our conversation by saying that he was the worst manager that Starbucks could ever have, and then I felt better.



Marlene Concepcion is a 22-year-old who was born and raised in New York City. She considers herself a very shy person. She is family-oriented and believes that the support she has received from her grandmother, mother, and sister were most influential in making her the person she is today. Adjowah Scott, Marlene's teacher at the Hostos Community College Adult Learning Center, helped her edit this piece and encouraged her to submit it to The Literacy Review.

My Job

ODELL GRIGGS

I was a porter at Hunts Point Market. I used to take the fruits from the boxcars and put them on the platform. It was a very good job. Sometimes when my boss sent me to the boxcar to get fruits, I had to look in the boxes to see what was in them because I could not read the labels.

My bosses were Moe and Max. I had two people working with me. Their names were Tyrone and Gilbert. The three of us were very good friends. Moe and Max always fought with each other. They were always telling the main supervisor on each other because they were both trying to score points with her.



The workers would stop their work to listen to the bosses argue. Then when we stopped for lunch, we would laugh at them behind their backs. The job was hard, but it paid very well. There was a union, with good benefits. I worked there for about eight years before I retired.

One day a few months later, I went back to the old job to visit my old friends. I was sad and surprised when I was told that it went out of business. I haven't seen my friends since and I don't have their numbers. I hope I run into them sometime soon.



Born in Mississippi, Odell Griggs attends the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Wakefield Branch. Mary Bailey is his tutor and Sherlette Lee is the site supervisor. His true story, "A Robbery," was published in last year's Literacy Review. "I am a 10-year volunteer at Albert Einstein Hospital in the Bronx. I visit patients and sit with them and talk and listen to them. It helps them to feel better, and it makes me happy, too."

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