



The Literacy Review

Volume 6
2008

The Literacy Review

Volume 6, Spring 2008

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DESIGN/LAYOUT

Brian Wang

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June Foley, Writing Program Director

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

A Gallatin Writing Program Publication
The Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University
715 Broadway
New York, New York 10003
www.nyu.edu/gallatin/writing

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Design: Lise Friedman, The Gallatin School

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

Gloria Cahill, Director, and Lisa Kail, Assistant Director
NYU Office of Community Service

&

Claire Morris Stern, Gallatin, B.A., 1989; M.A., 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Learning

- 9 **The Word That Changed Me** by Tony Robbins
Eastern Parkway Learning Center, Brooklyn Public Library
- 10 **Encore!** by Marissa Garay
City College of New York, Adult Literacy Program, City University of New York
- 12 **Islam Is My Guide** by Serbeina Ndregioni
College of Staten Island, CLIP, City University of New York
- 14 **A Learning Moment** by Guadalupe Florentino
United Bronx Parents of School 2, New York City Department of Education
- 15 **A Folk Treatment** by Svetlana Pasman
Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing, New York Public Library
- 16 **My Second Day in New York** by Julio Benites
Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, New York City Department of Education

Teaching

- 19 **Teaching a Song in English** by Aracely Sanchez
City College of New York, Adult Literacy Program, City University of New York
- 21 **Police Harassment** by Glenmore Miller
Wakefield Center for Reading and Writing, New York Public Library
- 22 **If I Were . . .** by Cristina Moran
Lutheran Family Health Center, Brooklyn
- 24 **I Am a Shining Stone** by Lifang Zhang
College of Staten Island, CLIP, City University of New York
- 25 **PTA President** by Martha Gary
Rochdale Adult Learning Center, Queens Library
- 26 **The Most Important Thing in Life** by Mariame Traore
Aguilar Center for Reading and Writing, New York Public Library

Overcoming

- 29 **I Want to Become a Literate Person** by Ming Xian (Cindy) Lin
University Settlement Society, Family Literacy Program
- 31 **Going Home** by Caretha Brown
Fortune Society, Education Program
- 34 **Cooking with Experts** by Fernando Trujillo
City College of New York, Adult Literacy Program, City University of New York
- 35 **Milk Baby** by Elvira Luy
City College of New York, Adult Literacy Program, City University of New York
- 36 **Standing Up to an Abusive Husband** by Patricia Baio
College of Staten Island, Adult Learning Center, City University of New York
- 37 **Just Three Words** by Stacy Mantz
College of Staten Island, Adult Learning Center, City University of New York
- 38 **Taking a Stand** by Merrick Roper
Central Learning Center, Brooklyn Public Library
- 40 **This Crazy World** by Nohel Marte
LaGuardia Community College, Adult Learning Center, City University of New York
- 41 **I Am the Hero** by Irene Laos
Hunter College, SPELL Program, City University of New York
- 42 **Contact Information for Participating Sites**

Welcome from Dean Susanne Wofford

As the new dean of The Gallatin School, I welcome you to Volume 6 of this annual compilation of some of the best writing by adults in Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL classes throughout New York City.

This year, the five undergraduate editors—Abbey Fenbert, Carol Gottshall, Allyson Paty, Peter Torre and Samantha Wolf—read 325 essays, stories and poems by writers from 50 countries, which were submitted by 50 teachers, tutors and site advisors from the adult literacy centers of institutions including New York City public libraries, City University of New York community colleges and the New York City Department of Education.

This year, for the first time, the five editors were aided in their selection by an editorial board of 17 more Gallatin undergraduates. Together, the 23 students chose the 63 superlative pieces you'll read in this book, from Bienvenido M. Richiez's "The C3lon Theater Sunday Matinees" to Irene Laos's "I Am the Hero." The five main editors went on to edit, copy edit and proofread the writing, and maintain contact with the sites.

The undergraduate photographers—Dave Aakhus and Laura Senteno—photographed 50 writers at three photo shoots and dozens more when they visited adult literacy sites.

Brian Wang—another undergraduate—designed and laid out the book, placing those 50 writers' wonderful faces not only with their writing but greeting us on the glorious cover.

Allyson Paty, an editor of Volume 5 and 6, who also tutored at the International Rescue Committee and studied in Peru, has written an introduction that expresses *The Literacy Review's* meaning to her.

I am a strong advocate of community service, and of *The Literacy Review's* bringing together the students of Gallatin with their New York City neighbors. I am as eager as you are to read Volume 6!

Introduction

Allyson Paty

The Literacy Review Editor, Volumes 5 and 6; B.A., Gallatin, 2009

The best evenings when I was a child were those when my father told me stories from his boyhood. Through his stories, I could understand part of what it was to be a boy in the 1960s, running wild in a tangelo grove.

As I've grown, storytelling has only become more important. In my last three years as a student at Gallatin, my studies have increasingly focused on the relationship between art and empowerment. While I am interested in intentionally activist art, I have become more invested in the idea that the process of making creative decisions (i.e., making art) is inherently political. I understood *The Literacy Review* as an immensely important project from the moment I heard about it. What could be more beautiful than a space that gives a public voice to those whose experiences might otherwise be unknown?

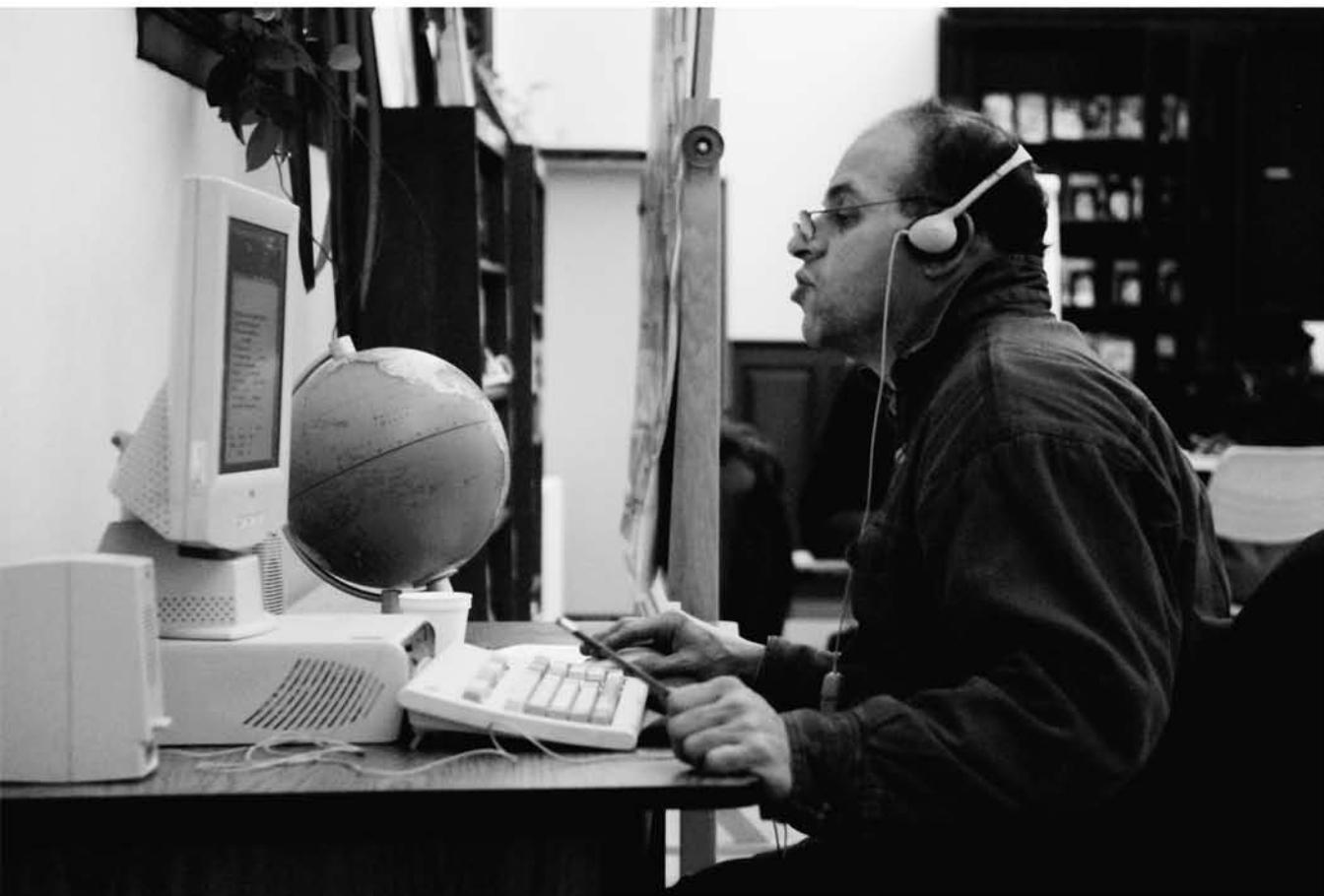
In every issue of *The Literacy Review*, one encounters stories from people living through diverse realities. Whether a story of hardship or joy, each piece offers readers a chance to observe the world through the writer's eyes. In Volume 6, Elvira Luy's "Milk Baby" transports us to a food line in the U.S.S.R. and makes us aware of the rare abundance we encounter daily in a New York City grocery store. Tony Robbins's "The Word That Changed Me" offers a spare and poignant reminder of the power of hope.

To work as an editor of *The Literacy Review*, Gallatin students must first take the course "Literacy in Action." In addition to acquainting students with the philosophies and methods of adult education, it requires students to volunteer at adult education centers in New York City. In the fall of 2005, I had the great fortune of taking this course and becoming a tutor at the International Rescue Committee. At IRC, I worked with refugees from all over the world, to further their grasp of English and literacy. As they gained proficiency, everyone expressed themselves more freely in class. From observations of a story we'd read together to bits of information about life in their home countries, their contributions helped me to look at life from new and different perspectives. In that classroom, I learned that education is not a process in which one person acquires knowledge and then neatly passes it along to someone else. I came to see knowledge as a human activity, and learning as the practice of familiarizing oneself with various ways to understand the world around us. *The Literacy Review* is a prime example of education as a mutual exchange. The adult students use the tools they develop in the classroom to translate their experience into written language. They become teachers for all who read their work.

My experience editing Volume 5 of *The Literacy Review* inspired me to study in Peru, a country with a rich oral history and storytelling tradition. For the last month of my semester, I investigated a project of Ana and Debora Corraera, original members of the political theater group Yuyachkani. Hampiq Warmi, Quechua for "Healer Woman," is an effort to revive a positive female identity for the victims of sexual violence during the armed conflict from 1980 to 2000. In this project, Ana and Debora travel to rural communities throughout Peru to perform a piece called "Kay Punku," Quechua for "This Door." The script is created from the testimonies of real women, for whom the government has taken no legal action to find justice. In telling these brutal stories, "Kay Punku" gives legitimacy to the experience of victims. It shows that what happened is inexcusable, that the victims are not alone and that they are not at fault. In this work, storytelling becomes the means through which a marginalized population can find power. Returning from Peru, I became an editor of Volume 6 of *The Literacy Review*.

As my experience as an undergraduate draws to a close, I hope to continue to learn about the world through other people's stories. In an age when much of the information we receive is mass-produced and impersonal, the practice of sharing stories connects us with a more intimate way to share knowledge about our world.

Thank you to all the contributors for your stories and your courage to share them. Thank you, as well, to the teachers, tutors and site advisors whose dedication makes this education possible. From these efforts, we can all learn.



Learning

Sometimes the stories of people's lives begin before they are born. I wasn't born yet when my parents lived under the regime of the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha. From what my parents told me, I learned that a dictator can destroy religions. My family believed in the Muslim religion despite the fact that Hoxha hated and persecuted our religion very much. During my childhood, my parents told me everything that happened during the dictatorship—how Hoxha executed, tortured or put into prison all the people who dared practice their religion. For me, there were

The Word That Changed Me

Tony Robbins

My word is “hope.” That word makes me feel that I have a chance to reach my goal in reading and sounding out words. I have tried so many times in different schools and given up, but that word, “hope,” is something to hold onto.



Tony Robbins was born in Brooklyn and has lived in New York City his entire life. He writes, "The only way I could get a better position is learning how to read and write. That's why I decided to come to Eastern Parkway Learning Center. I have bigger goals in life, and in order to get ahead I need to learn more." At the Brooklyn Public Library's Eastern Parkway Learning Center, Benita Primus is Tony Robbins's main tutor, and Gladys Scott is the literacy advisor.

Encore!

Marissa Garay

When my ESOL classes started, I never thought they would include some outside classroom activities as part of the curriculum. On one of the first days, our professor told us, “We are going to the theater on Thursday,” but during the first weeks I could not understand clearly most of her directions; I had to ask about details in order to be properly notified. Some questions were hovering in my mind: *A theater designed for English learners? How might it be acted? Will the actors speak in a slow flow? Am I going to be able to understand it?* After the play would be a discussion. The audience would ask questions, and the performers would answer as if they were still the characters they had portrayed. I was extremely excited, thinking and waiting for the play.

The days passed and I just wanted to tell my sister—whom I lived with until I came here—that after all these years living here it was my first time going to the theater. We used to go to the theater in Lima, Peru—sometimes with our mom and sometimes as a part of our sister sharing time. Those moments were special because our work schedules were totally opposed. We had to find one specific day to go, and we also had to find ways to save some money when we bought the tickets. Theaters in Peru are mostly directed at wealthy people. Right now, I am remembering our first play, *El Quijote de la Mancha*, and the beautiful display of costumes, multicolor lights, changing scenery and polite speeches, all perfectly harmonized for our hypnotized eyes. We learned how to behave in places like that, and also how to dress stylishly, because the first time was quite awkward when we were waiting to enter and some people turned around to see us. We had been wearing casual clothes, and most of them were elegantly dressed. But when I came here, suddenly the experience of going to the theater stopped. There were many reasons: little time, my newborn son, not enough money and especially because I did not feel able to understand an English-speaking play.

After my classmates and I went to the theater to see “The Safari,” I wrote to my sister: “I could UNDERSTAND the play!” I felt a strange sensation writing those words. I wanted to write more about it, but it felt difficult trying to explain to her how different my experiences were. In Lima’s theater, I was an inexperienced spectator who was trying to capture all the scenes, the characters and the dresses in my retinas, in my memory; speeches were important but not as much as the inflections because I could follow the complete plot. But here I was trying to hear accurately, to be conscious of any pronunciation, of any voice modulation. The most important element for English learners was the interaction between actors and public, when we could request repetitions and ask questions of the characters. I overcame my shyness and shame and

asked a question that was unintelligible, but fortunately the moderator helped me to translate the question for the characters.

My sister was happy for me. I felt really elated not only by understanding the play, but also because I recovered one special part of my life.

I hope we go to the theater again, to have the opportunity to share the pleasure of watching how plays carry an audience toward imaginary places and transmit their plots in unique and incomparable ways.



Marissa Garay was born in Peru and moved to New York City four years ago. She takes ESOL classes at CUNY's City College. Her teacher is Tamara Kirson. "When I came to New York City," Marissa writes, "the key point was that I was not ready to speak or understand English, even though I had studied it before. Some years later and with a three-year-old boy, I realized that my time had arrived and I must study and reinsert myself into life."

Islam Is My Guide

Serbeina Ndregjoni

Sometimes the stories of people's lives begin before they are born. I wasn't born yet when my parents lived under the regime of the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha. From what my parents told me, I learned that a dictator can destroy religions. My family believed in the Muslim religion despite the fact that we didn't practice our religion very much. During my childhood, my parents told me everything that happened during the dictatorship—how Hoxha executed, tortured or put into prison all the people who dared practice their religion. For me, these were just the dark times that my parents lived through. The stories that my parents told me remained only in the world of stories. Yet the roots of ignorance of religion run very deep in my country.

I was 14 years old when the tragedy of the Twin Towers happened. From that day on, I believed that all Muslim people were a bad influence, and I should be careful of them. After a short time, my family and I migrated to Durres, another city in Albania. I was depressed because I had heard that some friends of mine from Durres, who had started the public high school before me, had experienced discrimination because we had different accents. One day, a neighbor who lived close to my house told my parents that she knew about a private Muslim high school, and she assured my parents that I would be safe there. Although we hesitated, my parents' only concern was that I should be safe. In fact, my mother kept using many traditions from our religion, because she knew, deep in herself, that Muslim people aren't as bad as they seemed.

On the first day I walked to school, I felt horrible because I was imagining the students laughing at me because of my accent. To my surprise, that didn't happen. I was also surprised that the first idea I learned was that Islam means "peace." I asked myself how Islam could mean peace if the tragedy of the Twin Towers happened. I was really interested to learn about the real Islam. Fortunately, I discovered a new face for my religion. I was taught in my high school that Islam is against terror and murder because the only one who has the right to take someone's life is God. I was taught many virtues, like helping other people, respecting parents and everyone else and the most important—to wish for peace and harmony for all people.

Today I'm living in New York City, but I don't forget these virtues. These virtues

are helping me every day to make my life easy and happy. I was taught the new face of Islam and it was different from what people had taught me before.

Serbeina Ndregjoni emigrated from Albania to New York City one year ago. She aspires to go to college and study nursing. She writes, "I am working very hard to learn English, and I'm sure that sooner or later I will be very fluent." She studies at the College of Staten Island in the CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion) Program. Her teacher is Caryn Davis.

A Learning Moment in My Life

Guadalupe Florentino

One day when a soldier knocked at the door of our classroom, I was the first one to see him. Who came to visit us? A soldier? Later, I knew he was Folly. I heard about him from my teacher, Ms. Wen. She talked to us about him several times before.

Folly was a student in an ESOL 4 class two years earlier. He was a wonderful person. Everyone knew that he was very smart. He left this ESOL class when he signed his name to join the U.S Army. He signed his name by mistake. He misunderstood what the officers talked about. They told Folly, “If you sign your name to go to the army, we will help you to go to college and continue your education if you want.” They also told him that he would get good benefits for him and his family. Folly thought if he did all that, he would get money and help. At that time, he had not known enough English. For this reason, they got him. Soon, Folly had to say goodbye to us and leave his class for the army training.

The war continued. More American young soldiers died in Iraq. Ms. Wen had been worrying about Folly. Folly wrote four letters to our class while he was in the training place. But later, there was no contact anymore. Ms. Wen did not know where Folly was. What could we do? We looked with more and more worries at the photos we took with him before he left. When the teacher saw him, she was so happy that she cried in front of the class. It was a great time for our teacher and us.

Folly was sent to Iraq, indeed. He couldn't remember how many times he saw people die in front of him, but he had never forgotten he made a big mistake. Folly told us his experiences in the war. We could see that he was controlling his emotions when he spoke. I guess in his heart he did not want to go back to Iraq, where thousands of innocent people and young soldiers died.

I learned from Folly that life is very important, and the world would be nice without war. We also learned that we have to study English very hard to understand any forms before we sign our names. Folly taught us good lessons.

Born in Mexico in 1982, Guadalupe Florentino has lived in New York City for 10 years. She wants to learn more English and get a G.E.D., in hopes of obtaining better employment. She is proud to be Mexican and glad “to have an excellent teacher”—Wendy Wen, at the New York City Department of Education’s United Bronx Parents of School 2.

A Folk Treatment

Svetlana Pasman

Once in a while we heard about our aunt. I was seven and my brother was eight when she came to us. My mother was in the hospital. She was expecting to deliver a baby, and the aunt arrived to help our father to take care of us.

Our aunt was the complete opposite of my mother. She was big, fat and seemed strict. When we saw her the first time, we were a little afraid. The next morning after her coming, she woke us up very early and told us that we should go to the well to draw water and shouldn't be bums. It was the beginning of January and all schoolchildren had two weeks of rest from school. My brother and I hoped to sleep much longer than usual, but the tone of our aunt forced us to leave bed.

We each took two buckets and went for water. We obeyed our aunt. January in Moscow usually is cold, snowy and frosty. The temperature outside was about negative two degrees Fahrenheit. The well was three avenues away. When we came to the well, we saw a huge deep, puddle near it. Thin ice covered the puddle. While my brother took water, I went around the puddle and touched the ice with my feet: one, two, three...and I fell down suddenly, slithering into the puddle. My coat became wet and my boots were full of water. We ran home in a hurry, carrying only one bucket of water.

I was completely frozen when we reached home.

When our aunt saw me, she threw up her hands and shouted ferociously that I would be unavoidably sick. She took off all my clothes, pushed me into bed and began to cure me. She chafed me with turpentine. Then she went to the kitchen, washed potatoes and boiled them. She brought a *huge* pot of potatoes to my bed. In spite of my protestation, she covered me with two warm blankets and told me I should breathe in hot steam. She kept the blankets so tight that I couldn't open a small hole.

I inhaled the hot steam and wept because it was as hot as hell. My strict aunt told me: "The more you shout, the better for you. You will not be sick. Be patient!" It seemed cruel. When she opened the blankets, I looked like a boiled lobster and was wet from head to toe. She was right. The next day I was healthy. Later, I understood that our aunt was a very kind woman. She passed away long ago, but her great treatment has really stuck in my head.



Born in Moscow, Russia, Svetlana Pasman has lived in the United States for 14 years. She has studied at the New York Public Library's Tompkins Square Center for Reading and Writing. There, her tutors were Jacqueline Helpern, Hilary Schenker and Allison Hughes. The site advisor is Terry Sheehan.

My Second Day in New York

Julio Benites

At 9:30 a.m. in August 2000, I finally arrived in New York after a long and exhausting trip of 10 hours from Trujillo, Peru. I was happy to be with my family again.

On my second day in the city, my mother, before leaving for her job, asked if I wanted to go around the city alone. Emphatically, I replied, “Yes!” She gave me three tokens, a subway map, a 20-dollar bill and her phone number. “Be sure to call me if you are lost.” With that, she sent me off on a day trip I would never forget.

I took the 1 train to the World Trade Center. I had always wanted to see the Twin Towers. I had seen pictures of them in newspapers and magazines and also on the Internet. I felt I finally got the opportunity I wanted. I walked six hours from morning to afternoon, West Side and East Side. After the first three hours, I felt thirsty and had to eat something. I looked for a store that carried some cookies and drinks. K-Mart, there it was. I bought two small packages of cookies and one small bottle of orange juice. I chose the cookies in the blue package. They were light brown, slightly deformed; I devoured several of them even before paying. At the checkout counter, the clerk helped me with a perplexed look on her face, but I didn’t know why. When I threw the empty package into the garbage can, I noticed a small black terrier on the package looking at me. That moment I understood why the cookies had a slight meat flavor.

Now my life has changed. I know the city. I don’t need a subway map. The Twin Towers are gone, and I am learning English. I can read every word on cookie packages. I don’t need the help of pictures to tell which cookies are for animal or human consumption.

Julio Benites is 28 years old and was born in Peru. He writes, “I came to the United States, like many other immigrants, looking for something better in life.” He is a student at the New York City Department of Education’s Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center. The instructional facilitator is Diana Raissis, and his teacher is Jung Sin Lee.





Teaching

Over the last eight years, I worked in Hangzhou City in China. I was an international cosmetics company manager. I enjoyed my work. I brought beautiful self-confidence to all of our customers. Every time I saw them smiling, I was glad that my own radiance made them happy. Sometimes I even changed their lives. I recall that once I met a girl in front of my counter in the shopping mall. She was young, and she was very timid. She softly asked me what things could make her beautiful. I told her, "You are so beautiful. If you usually wear

Teaching a Song in English

Aracely Sanchez

In my life I have had the fortune to teach music to a lot of people, from children to adults, but in my own language, Spanish. I remember that spring morning in 2007 when my teacher, Tamara Kirson, asked me if I would like to teach my classmates “Over the Rainbow,” one of the most beautiful and famous songs in American culture. Of course I said, “Yes!” immediately. Why? Well, one of my dreams is to apply my knowledge of the English language to my vocation as a musician. I was very happy that she was going to give me the opportunity to share that song with my classmates.

I did not worry about the music because it is part of my profession. The problem for me was that I had to teach the song “Over the Rainbow” to my classmates in English. In the process, I had to face the limits of my pronunciation and vocabulary. However, despite those limits, I summoned my enthusiasm when I witnessed the majority of my classmates’ lack of interest in learning something new. Maybe they thought that they were going to waste their time learning a song with me. I had to apply the holistic method, using different kinds of activities, like searching for the meaning of “Over the Rainbow”; looking for vocabulary, main idea and key words; and analyzing the tone of the lyrics and the pictures through the words.

I saw the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, and I reflected on the speech “There is no place like home,” in preparation for teaching the song. My classmates and I discussed the significance of the Scarecrow (the brain), the Tin Woodsman (the heart) and the Cowardly Lion (the courage). Next, we listened to, wrote and sang the song. I told my classmates one of the adaptations of Confucius’ proverb: “If you listen, you might forget it. If you write it, you might remember it. If you do it, you will never forget it.” Finally, I recounted the Ann Beattie quote, “People forget years and remember moments,” taken from the short story “Snow,” hoping someday my classmates would relive that wonderful experience. I was patient and persistent because I wanted to convince my classmates that life always can offer the opportunity to learn something new. Step by step, my classmates relaxed and I accomplished everything with responsibility and joy.

Finally, our teacher, Tamara, had the chance to listen to the result of only two hours and 11 minutes of rehearsal! My classmates sang the melodious song, “Over the Rainbow.” The song was a symbol of their welcome-back to her, and they sang with a lot of eagerness and tenderness. We had really missed our teacher. The presentation was at the end of the class. She looked moved by happiness.

In spite of the fact that the English language wasn’t easy for me, I am highly pleased because my ESOL level 5/6 classmates sang with a lot of fervor that unforgettable

day. After our premiere, we continued to rehearse, and the last day of class in the spring semester we performed “Over the Rainbow” to students of other levels and to administrative personnel. My classmates and I sang with enthusiasm, excitement and joy. We are still proud of what all of us could achieve!

Aracely Sanchez is a native of El Salvador and has been living in New York City for six years. She studies English in the adult literacy program of CUNY’s City College. “I would like to express my gratitude to my teacher, Tamara Kirson, because she trusted me as a music teacher,” Aracely Sanchez writes. “She also supported me to achieve the beginning of my dream to apply my knowledge of the English language to music.”



Police Harassment

Glenmore Miller

I was coming from work when I decided to visit my friends, Jeremy and Dwayne. We left to go to the music store that was a few blocks away. When we almost got there, a police car drove up. There were two cops in the car. They came out and stopped us.

One of the policemen asked Jeremy what he had in his pocket because it looked very fat. He told them it was his wallet. They looked at each other and went up to him. I was afraid. They asked him for his I.D. and his address, and he gave it to them. They pushed him on the car bonnet, spread his legs and arms and searched his pockets. They patted him down. They searched every pocket in his wallet. They searched everything he had. They found nothing illegal, so they gave him back his stuff.

Then they started looking at Dwayne and me. I was nervous. I had some money in my pocket, and I didn't know if they would take it. I was also afraid that I might be accidentally shot, so I stood very still, barely breathing. They got into the police car and burst out laughing because I looked so scared that I was shaking. Then they drove away.

I think that was police harassment because there was no reason for them to stop and search us. We were not acting up or doing anything illegal. I think the police should go and look for real criminals and stop harassing decent citizens.

Born in Jamaica, 23-year-old Glenmore Miller studies at the New York Public Library's Wakefield Center for Reading and Writing. Charmain Haynes is the literacy assistant, and the site advisor is Sherlette Lee.

If I Were...

Cristina Moran

If I were a famous person, I would like to be Mother Teresa,
a woman who was dedicated to give help, hope, and love,
a person who never waited to receive something back,
a person who will never be forgotten.

If I were a tree, I would like to be a pine tree
to grow beautiful and luxuriant
to challenge the height, the weather and the seasons,
to be the winner against the adversity of time.

If I were a lake, I wouldn't dry,
I would struggle to be wide and deep,
to become an ocean
and someday embrace wonderful species.

If I were an instrument, I would like to be a flute,
sounding soft, fine and delicate,
a small instrument
with big value.

If I were a color, I would like to be pink,
a light innocent color,
a color recognized by love,
a color of happy women.

If I were a flower, I would like to be a rose
to diversify colors for a delicious smell,
a fountain of love, generation after generation
from a son to a mother and from a husband to a wife.

If I were an insect, I would like to be a bee,
a wonder of God that nobody could imagine
would provide humanity with its delights.

If I were a season, I would like to be spring,
to see the first flowers blossom,
the first season, the beginning of the best,
to make nature flourish, coming up.

If I were part of the house, I would like to be a kitchen,
the best place to come for everybody,
the family discussion about a good dish,
witness to flavors and smells.

If I were a letter, I would like to be letter D,
because I can say I am Distinct from others,
express Deep love in my language
and the Destiny I don't know.



Cristina Moran was born in Mexico. She is a single mother, positive and happy. Her goal is to continue to study and improve her knowledge of English, in order to help her children. She is grateful to this country because she has found an opportunity to learn a second language. Cristina Moran is a student at the Adult Education Program of the Lutheran Family Health Centers, and Lydia Zaneghina is her teacher.

I Am a Shining Stone

Lifang Zhang

“It is real gold wherever it will shine!” This is a Chinese proverb. Although I want to be gold, I don’t think I have the radiance of gold. I can’t be gold, but I’m willing to be a piece of shining stone.

Over the last eight years, I worked in Hangzhou City in China. I was an international cosmetics company manager. I enjoyed my work. I brought beautiful self-confidence to all of our customers. Every time I saw them smiling, I was glad that the radiance I brought them made them happy. Sometimes I even changed their lives. I recall that once I met a girl in front of my counter in the shopping mall. She was young, and she was very timid. She softly asked me what things could make her beautiful. I told her, “You are so beautiful. If you usually wear makeup, you will be even better!” She looked at me with a puzzled face. I carefully made her up, taught her how to use makeup herself for ordinary times and for important times. She was surprised to see herself in the mirror, a more beautiful face. She was moved to tears. After a few days, she came back to thank me. I found that she was different that day. She was so confident and pretty. She told me that before she met me she didn’t have self-confidence, and she had lost her job. But now she had found a better job. She felt that she never had so much happiness.

When I recall these things, I remember I was a shining stone in China. But four months ago when I came to the United States, I had lost my stone’s light. I left my country, my job and my friends. Here, I couldn’t speak the language. Here, I didn’t have friends. How could I find my light again? Fortunately, I’m studying in the CLIP program at the College of Staten Island. My English is getting better. I can have a simple conversation. I have friends and classmates in the college. A little light is appearing inside my stone again.

One day I was at the bus stop on Richmond Avenue. An elderly man with an anxious face came to ask me, “What time is it now? I have to pick up my granddaughter.” I told him, “Don’t hurry! It’s two o’clock. You have time to get her at school.” I saw his reassured smile. I felt that my stone is shining again.

In the future, I want to find more chances to help others. The stone wants to shine again and again. I am looking forward to my stone shining forever in my new country.

Lifang Zhang studies at the College of Staten Island’s CLIP—CUNY Language Immersion Program. Born in China, she moved to New York City just four months ago. She writes: “I was eager to go to college when I was 17, but my father died. I had to raise my family. . . . Now I might get a chance to go to college. I can achieve my wish.” Her teacher is Caryn Davis.



President of the PTA

Martha Gary

Motherhood has always been a challenge for me because we are always faced with many choices to make. Sometimes the choices are right yet very difficult to do but must be done.

When my child started elementary school, I took her to school the first day. She was excited seeing a new place and so many people.

After a few days, I decided to volunteer to help her classroom teacher. I got to know her teacher and some of the parents, as well as the principal. It was easy for me to volunteer my services helping and supporting the PTA, whether it was by fundraising, photocopying the monthly meeting agenda or just setting up refreshments for the planned meeting. After a time, I was asked to become a member of the executive board. This was the time when so many changes in policies were happening.

I thought I would just be a member, but later was informed the executive board had nominated me to become president. I declined because I didn't have the confidence, but the board recommended me strongly.

When I raced home—excited and overjoyed because I was asked to be president—my husband burst my bubble. He laughed and said, “You? Oh, not you. You are too quiet.” I went back to school, broken-hearted and discouraged, those words repeating over and over in my mind.

The board members said, “Martha, we are going to help you.” And with their promise of help, I was determined to prove to my husband that maybe I was quiet but I was also capable. I was faced with challenges, but we worked as a team and guided our school through the many changes.

Some of our children transferred out because that's what their parents wanted. But we worked together for all of our children. Busing was one of our major problems. I believed that our school was good or could be better than where our neighborhood children would be going, and we did it: we brought up standards, got better teachers and more educational programs.



This was one exciting part of my life, and I'm glad that I did accept the position as president of the PTA.

80-year-old Martha Gary, born in Virginia, has lived in New York City for "50+" years. A widow after 51 years of marriage, she writes, "My husband and I raised two lovely children and I have two grandsons. I enjoy being president and a senior choir member of my church." Martha Gary studies at the Queens Library's Rochdale Adult Learning Center, where the site advisor is Michael Semple and her "great" tutors are Sarah Payne and Vivian Roberts.

The Most Important Thing in Life

Mariame Traore

The most important thing in life is to learn how to give love. As soon as you come into this world, you feel love around you. Love is a very important thing in life and so special. Without love, there wouldn't be any new lives at all. People would be killing their babies and animals would be killing each other.

Some senior citizens who live alone for so long get so lonely that they don't know how to give love. They have nasty tempers because they think no one cares for them. They are nasty to others because they can get people to pay attention to them that way.

I'm teaching the old man I work for, Mr. R., about loving someone. When I started working for Mr. R., he was a very nasty old man because he had lived alone for over 40 years. He lost interest in love, and it got worse when he lost his two daughters in the same year. From then on, Mr. R. didn't think he could receive love from anyone else or give love at all.

He always said he was afraid to love people because they always left him without even saying goodbye. I said, "You are not a bad person. If you let me in, we can work together." Each day, I asked him another question. I had to find a way to show him that I care and that I can help him.

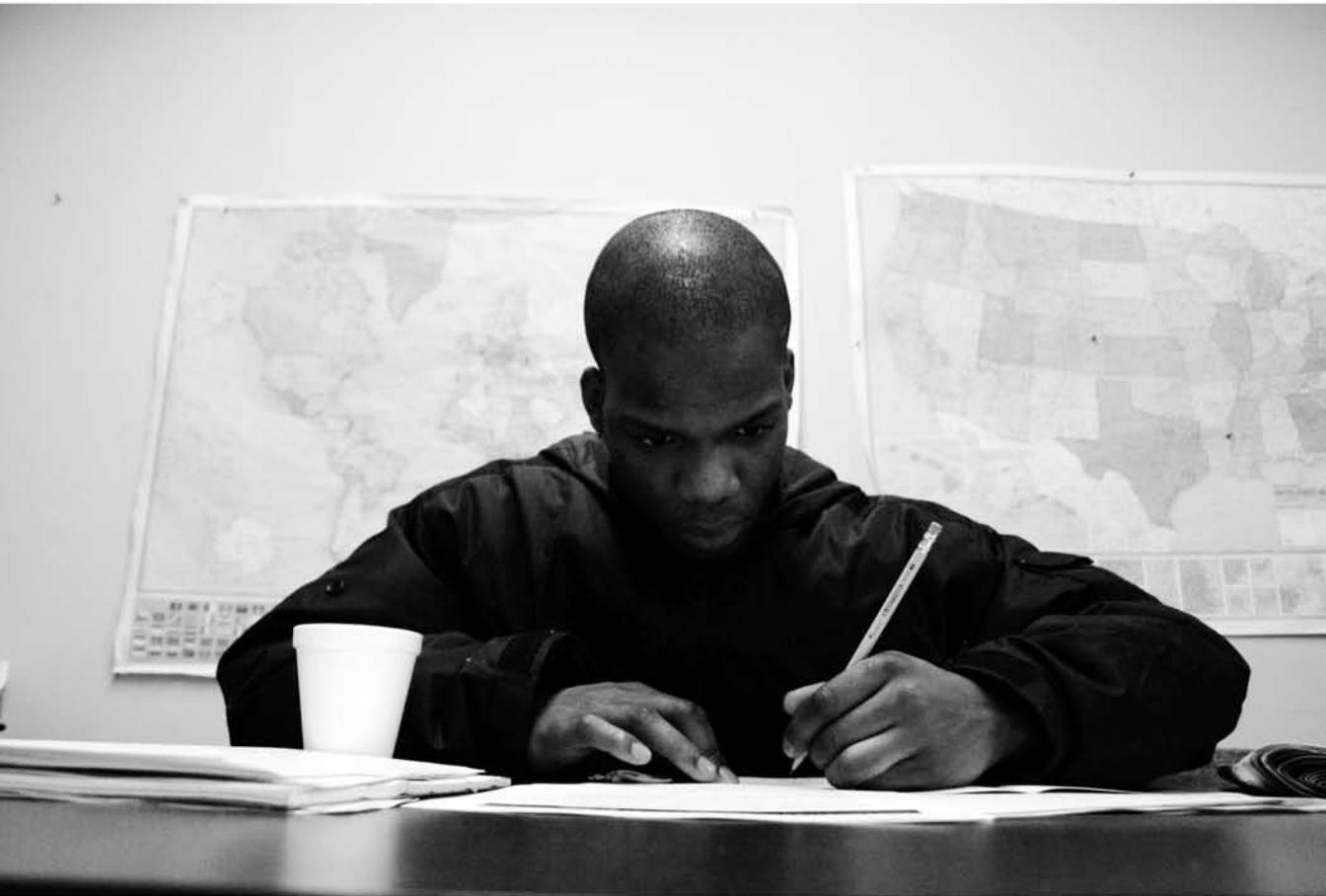
This Thanksgiving, I organized a little something with Mrs. Thompson and Ms. Joseph, the upstairs neighbors. They cooked some Caribbean food that Mr. R. liked. They came over to surprise him with dishes from his country.

He was so happy and joyful. This was the first time I saw him laughing with tears in his eyes. He told me that this was the most wonderful Thanksgiving in 40 years.

He hoped he and I could be friends for a long time.

Mariame Traore, who is 36 years old and the mother of four, was born in the Ivory Coast in West Africa and has lived in New York City for nine years. At the New York Public Library's Aguilar Language Learning Center, she writes stories and other works with the help of her tutor, Betty Gerstein. "I thank my literacy provider," she writes, "for making writing and reading possible and for believing in me." Elaine Sohn is the site advisor.





Finally, Erick got what he wanted. The objective was reached. He knew this was going to happen, I thought. I cut my finger. Then everything changed. He reacted kindly and gently to me, but in my head were embarrassment and sadness only, telling me I had to say goodbye to the 15 dollars an hour that I had just earned. Then, there he came with some papers in his hand, explaining the restaurant policy and my starting schedule. "Wait a minute. Am I hired?" I questioned. "Yes, you are!" was the answer. The result was three days of training

Overcoming

I Want to Become a Literate Person

Ming Xian (Cindy) Lin

I have been studying English for several years. I still have only a patchy knowledge of it, and I don't quite understand it.

When I came to the U.S.A., I didn't know any words in English. I used to sign my Chinese name on the payrolls when I worked in garment factories. I signed my Chinese name on checks all the time, even now. I told the bank clerks two years ago, "I want to change my signature from Chinese to English." They told me, "You don't have to do that. We think your Chinese signature is safer than English."

I also remember the first time I went for an English lesson. Our teacher asked a question in Mandarin. All my classmates answered the question except for me. The teacher repeated the question and pointed his pointer in my direction. "What book do you like?" "A, B, C, D—alphabet book." I answered it also in Mandarin. All my classmates in the room laughed heartily at me. I felt a rush of blood to my cheeks. But I was neither afraid nor laughing. I stood up and said boldly and assuredly, "What are you laughing at? I have not studied English. I do not know the alphabet. It is normal. There is no reason to make a fuss." I said this in Chinese. They stopped laughing. The teacher began to teach us A, B, C, D. I said to myself, *You must get a good grasp of English. Catch up with them and exceed them. As soon as possible, become a literate person.*

I encountered a number of difficulties in my first school years. The teacher paced his teaching to his/her students' abilities. I was on the lowest level. In the summertime, I studied, improving by learning English at my leisure. In the courses of study I often have a lot of difficulties. My dictionary is always my teacher when I study English grammar. Still, I'm often all adrift (too distressed and confused). Some English words have no Chinese equivalents, and sometimes I do not even know the Chinese word it translates to, either. Most of the time I tell myself, *I think I can. I will become a literate person in both Chinese and English. Keep at it. Do not give up.*

In a few more years, I'll listen to the radio in English. I won't be deaf anymore. I'll speak with my teachers, friends, classmates in English. I won't be dumb anymore. I'll read English books, letters and newspapers. I'll watch TV in English. I won't be blind anymore. I'll write letters in English, and I'll write compositions in English. I'll send my e-mails to my friends in English. I won't be an illiterate person anymore! I'll find a good government job. I'll be very happy!

I hope that I become a literate person as soon as possible. It sounds crazy. But you should believe me, anyhow! I am determined.

Ming Xian (Cindy) Lin was born in Pudong, Shanghai. As a child, she endured the famine of 1960 to 1963, and as an adolescent, the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976. "At only 14 years old, I was forced to become a child farmer in a rural area with no electricity, gas, not enough food or water. But I never backed away from difficulties. It made me more daring and strong." Today, Cindy Lin studies at University Settlement Society's Family Literacy Program. Michael Hunter is the director.



I'm Going Home

Caretha Brown

I'm going home. This is some of what I go through daily on my way home. There is much more than what you are about to read. The rest of what I see could be more than a long chapter in a novel. I kid you not.

I step off the 6 train at Grand Central, where I transfer to the uptown 4 train. I can hear a train pulling into the station. The crowd moves closer to the edge of the platform, and the train hasn't come to a stop yet. I can see now that it's the 4 train.

Everyone is on their toes, like it's a race, in position for when the door opens. You know how it looks at a race when everyone positions themselves? When the referee says: "Get on your mark. Get set. Go!" That's the way the crowd is looking right now.

The doors to the train open, and people push their way on, without any concern for the other passengers who are getting off. I'm tired, and I want to get home, so I join the madness.

I make my way to the middle of the car. As the train pulls out of the station, there's not much being said between any of the passengers. I guess they're just as tired as I am.

I see the other passengers looking toward the other end of the train. Then we hear a woman as she makes her way through the car, pleading for food or money. She says she is homeless. The closer she gets to where I am standing, the more I hear the clanking of metal. It is her walker. I look at her, and she looks back at me. I saw her earlier this morning on the downtown 6 train on my way to the Fortune Society. What can you expect? It's the holidays. Every pickpocket, con artist and panhandler is running a game right now. Some people give her money, and the others just ignore her. Then she makes her way into the next car with the same story.

I'm holding onto the pole because the train is speeding like an out-of-control roller coaster from 86th Street to 125th Street. I'm trying to manage my bulky backpack. People are so uptight these days. Who knows what little thing could possibly set someone off? I'm too tired to fight or argue, and my feet are killing me. As the train pulls into 125th Street, for a brief minute I think about getting off to stop by Mom's house. But I decide to just go on home. I'm really exhausted.

The woman sitting in front of me realizes that this is her stop and that the doors are about to close. She jumps up, grabbing her things, yelling, "Hold that door for me, please!" The minute her butt leaves the seat, I immediately sit down. *Thank you, God,* I say to myself. I relax, wiggling my toes in my sneakers. That feels good. It will feel even better once I get home, take a shower and climb into heaven—my bed.

I lean back on the seat, wrapping my arms around my backpack. I close my eyes

to ease the tension that's surging through my body. My thoughts are racing from one thing to the other—the kids, my mother, John and his craziness. I hope that Dad's cancer stays in remission. Then I imagine myself at one of my many book signings. I smile and think, *It's going to happen, it's my time*. Then, out of the blue, thoughts of my good friend Brian M. flood my mind. Nope. You won't be reading any of my thoughts about Mr. M. Those are private. Now let me continue with my ride home.

My thoughts are interrupted when I hear over the intercom, "Next stop, Mount Eden Avenue." *Damn*, I say to myself. It seems like I just sat down. The next stop is mine; I get up and put on my backpack, waiting for the door to open. The minute I step off the train, I can hear Spanish music blasting. I don't know what the lyrics are saying, but it really sounds upbeat.

I get down the stairs and put on my gloves. Somehow it seems colder in the Bronx than it did in Manhattan. I dread going up that long flight of marble stairs that leads to Davidson Avenue. There's always some kind of drama going on at the top of the stairs, but I'm too tired to go the long way around tonight.

I look around, checking my surroundings. I can see that the hookers are already out on Jerome Avenue under the L, looking for customers. I look at the corner *bodega* and think about going inside to buy two bananas, but I don't want to be left out of the group that is heading up the stairs.

I look to my right and my left at the garbage. There are broken Corona beer bottles, empty cigarette boxes, dog shit, a used Pamper, and a few scattered used condoms on the ground. I'm doing my best to avoid stepping in any of the mess. I look back briefly at those nasty-looking hookers out there, selling their ass. Anyone who has sex with them has got to be desperate. Those are some busted-looking hoochies.

So I hurry along with the group. My legs feel like they can't go any farther. I'm short of breath. *I have to stop smoking those damn cigarettes*, I think. There's supposed to be a light at the top of the stairs, but the neighborhood kids and the drug dealers are always busting out the bulbs.

At the top of the stairs, I try to catch my breath and keep moving along. Who knows when the police are going to drive up? They'll move the neighborhood drug dealers, who sit on the railing at the top of the stairs, face-down on the ground, searching them. And if you're caught up in the mix, you'll be face-down with them.

I head for my building, where I see a group of four guys standing under the tree in the shadows, blowing it back. The super puts out the garbage, for Sanitation to pick up in

the morning. The smell from the blunt and the garbage makes me sick to my stomach.

I'm glad to see there's light in the small courtyard. I take out my keys as I enter the lobby to check my mailbox. Inside the lobby, there's a boy who looks to be no more than 13 or 15 years old. He asks me, "Yo, do you need anything?" Meaning drugs. I just ignore him and lock my mailbox. I go over to the elevator and press the button. I feel the kid's eyes on my back. I turn, looking him straight in the face, and shake my head, thinking, *It's a damn shame*. His little ass should be home getting sleep for school tomorrow, but instead he's out here selling drugs. Where the hell is his momma?

The elevator is taking too long. I press the button again, praying that it's working. In my building, one minute the elevators work, and the next minute they don't. I'm tired, and I don't feel like walking up any more stairs. I watch the kid, while he watches me and glances back and forth, looking through the glass hallway doors for the police. Oh good, it's working. I can hear the other tenants talking as it reaches the lobby. They get off, and I get on. I can hear the young kid yelling obscenities at me after the elevator door closes. When I get inside my apartment, I drop my backpack by the door, take off my sneakers and jacket, throw my keys on the dresser and climb into heaven—my bed. I live alone. I'll get up and shower later. I'm too damn tired.



Born in South Carolina, Caretha Brown has lived in New York City her entire life. She is the oldest of six children and is also the mother of six children. Caretha studies at the Fortune Society. Her passion is writing, which she says relieves a lot of stress and allows her to express herself. Her dream is to become a well-known author. She writes, "Dreams do come true."

Cooking with Experts

Fernando Trujillo

I still have the marks of this experience on my hand.

This story took place in one of the nicest restaurants in Times Square. I was very excited about the interview right in the heart of Manhattan. There was an idea in my head about cooking, but it was certainly wrong. My self-esteem was higher than ever, and I was elated about the interview in this well-known restaurant. Everything looked easy to me at that time. I could “eat the world” was my favorite phrase. Until I met Erick. He was the second chef in the seafood restaurant and the person who interviewed all the new cooks. Erick looked friendly and calm at first glance, but once I was back in the cooking line he became the devil, asking for the most perfect dishes in the world, such as *foie gras* and scallops. He scolded me for every single mistake and looked at me with evil, trying to scare me. I was completely lost. I did not know what he was talking about. In my mind were just disappointment and fear. That was an awkward situation. The boy who was going to eat the world was being eaten!

Finally, Erick got what he wanted. The objective was reached. *He knew this was going to happen*, I thought. I cut my finger. Then everything changed. He reacted kindly and gently to me, but in my head were embarrassment and sadness only, telling me I had to say goodbye to the 15 dollars an hour that I was going to earn.

Then, there he came with some papers in his hand, explaining the restaurant policy and my starting schedule. “Wait a minute. Am I hired?” I questioned. “Yes, you are!” was the answer. The result was three days of training followed by months of comfort and a good salary, plus a beautiful lesson in life. You have to taste the bitter in order to know how sweet the sugar is.

Fernando Trujillo comes from Mexico and has been living in New York City for six years. He takes ESOL classes at CUNY’s City College with instructor Tamara Kirson. He tells us, “When I write about my life, I feel comfortable. This is an amazing therapy that makes me release my feelings and thoughts on a piece of paper.”



Milk Baby

Elvira Luy

This is the kind of story that amazes or sometimes shocks people who are not from the former U.S.S.R. It's a story of my childhood memories. The 1980s were a time of food deficit in the Soviet Union. Long lines in the stores for milk, bread, meat, fresh vegetables and other consumer products were common. My hometown, Jalal-Abad in Central Asia, had only one milk and dairy factory. Daily production of milk, sour cream, *kefir* (drinking yogurt), heavy cream and cottage cheese was not enough for a small town like mine. You had to stand in line at sunrise to be able to buy dairy for your family.

I started to buy dairy products when I was a seven-year-old girl in elementary school. I did it every other Saturday or Sunday. It was a normal routine for my family and for children my age. My parents used to wake me up around 5:30 or 6 a.m. My two bags were prepared already. Those bags were full of empty glass bottles for milk, *kefir*, sour cream and heavy milk. I had to bring empty bottles to be able to exchange them for other ones filled with dairy products. The store was about two and half miles away from place where we lived. There wasn't any public transportation going to that store from our house. I had to walk for about 20 minutes with empty bottles, and it took me twice as long to come back home with full bottles. The usual crowd was made up of retired old people, mothers and children. Everybody waited patiently for the truck to arrive. During the winter, it was very cold, so you had to wear wool socks, a scarf and a hat in order not to get sick, standing outside while waiting for the truck.

I hated to wake up in the early morning, stand in line for two hours and carry heavy bags home. Sometimes I couldn't carry them and had to take a break because my hands were burgundy red, tired and numb. But I didn't have a choice; I was the eldest child in the family.

I'm happy it's over. I'm glad my siblings didn't have to experience the same thing. Nowadays, I can go to the grocery store any time of the day and night, and I don't have to carry empty bottles. I can choose from the different brands of dairy I want and from so many other things. Viva Capitalism! Viva!



Elvira Luy was born in Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia. She came to New York City four years ago and has been taking ESOL classes at CUNY's City College since 2007. In Kyrgyzstan, she worked as a human rights activist and attorney. "I'm very thankful to my dearest husband and family, who are giving me so much love, encouragement and support," Elvira writes. She'd also like to thank her "wonderful teacher," Tamara Kirson, for her "professionalism, enthusiasm and support."

Standing Up to an Abusive Husband

Patricia Baio

It all started in the spring of 1992. She was just a young girl who had met the man of her dreams. They fell in love at first sight. They married one year later. Over the years, they had three wonderful children together.

As the years went by, circumstances changed. That man of her dreams turned into her own living nightmare. One day in 2005, her husband of 13 years started to verbally and physically abuse her. The first time he hit her, she called the police, and he was taken into custody. She later dropped the charges out of fear for her future, as far as financial matters were concerned. Her biggest fear was how she would provide for her three children alone. She would be an under-educated single mom.

A few months passed, and her husband repeated the pattern of verbal and physical abuse. It was at that point she thought, *I have to stand up for myself*. She called the police once again, and he was taken into custody. This time she stuck to her decision, even though she felt like she had just entered a dark tunnel of fear that at times had no light at the end. This tunnel was filled with overwhelming hurdles. She felt completely powerless. Then, somehow, she slowly started to jump one hurdle at a time.

The first thing she did was go back to school and complete her education. Then she obtained a good job. She realized that there was a light at the end of the dark tunnel. The tunnel was no longer a tunnel of fear and hopelessness, but a tunnel of hope and strength. As her journey through the tunnel continued, and she jumped over one hurdle at a time, she became brave, strong, confident and independent. She learned that whenever fear overcomes her, she need not doubt her own abilities. She determined to use the feeling of fear to summon the power to overcome these fears.

Yes, she does get lonely at times, but the gift of having peace of mind, body and soul, knowing she is now safe from her abuser, keeps her plenty content. She has given herself the priceless gift of life.

Born in Brooklyn, Patricia Baio has lived in New York City all of her life. She studies at the College of Staten Island's Adult Learning Center. Paul Katz is her teacher, and Donna Grant is the director of the program. She writes: "I enjoy spending quality time with my children. I also like to walk on the beach, listen to music, and I love to cook and bake." She believes that "the key to a good life" is "work hard, play even harder."



Three Words

Stacy Mantz

Out of all the things that many different people have said to me, “You’re an alcoholic” are the three words that changed my life forever. Those three words forced me to learn about my disease, to get the right help and to open my arms to a better life.

Alcoholism is a disease that made my life unmanageable. I didn’t go to school, I worked dead-end jobs, I spent my entire paycheck at the bar and I refused to live independently because I never had money for anything other than my addiction.

I realized I put myself in so many dangerous situations, like going to parties with people I didn’t know, driving while intoxicated, mixing drinks with drugs, and constantly having blackouts and waking up in strange places. Looking for people who could help me fill in the blanks of my mad-lib life was becoming more frequent.

I had been arrested and was on my way to prison when someone told me I was an alcoholic and needed help fast or I was going to die. I found my way to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting where I heard familiar stories, and I realized I wasn’t alone. This was a turning point in my life. I changed the people, places and things in my life and my thinking became clearer. I went back to school after I realized that I wanted more for myself.

Finally, today I am sober. I no longer hurt myself or others because of my addiction. Today, I have won back my family and loved ones. Most importantly, I have won back the respect and love of myself.



Stacy Mantz recently moved to New York City from a small town in Pennsylvania. She writes: "Reading, being outside, and trips to the city are the things I enjoy. Unwinding with my family and card games are fun for me. Curling up with my cats and watching movies is my favorite pastime." She studies at the Adult Learning Center of the College of Staten Island. Her teacher is Paul Katz, and the director of the program is Donna Grant.

Taking a Stand

Merrick Roper

Taking a stand was what I finally had to do after a three-year period of my life. I worked in a restaurant in Brooklyn, where business was good. I was happy to be working at Jimmy's restaurant, and I loved my job, but my boss did not trust me. I thought he did, but I guess he did not think anyone could be so honest because he himself was not trustworthy. This was my second job in New York City. It caused me to take a stand to help myself and my family.

I was a hard worker, and getting the job done was something I loved to do. I started working at Jimmy's restaurant with 15 co-workers. After working for a few months, I noticed that my co-workers were quitting or getting fired; in fear of losing my job, I began to work even harder. Later, I found out that I was partially the cause of the other workers leaving or being fired. The reason is that I didn't know how to pace myself. As a result, I was trying to get everything done as fast as possible. Mike, my boss, loved the way I was getting the job done quickly, so he saw that as an easy way to take advantage of the situation. He started firing the other workers because he saw that was a good way to keep money in his pocket, since I was doing so much extra work.

After he was down to 10 workers, I was the dishwasher, the cashier, the stock person, the delivery man and the banker. I even cooked all the food every day. I practically ran the restaurant. Mike would come in and ask, "Nick, is everything done?" "Yes, sir," I would reply. After two and a half years of my working with Mike, there were six workers left. He hired someone to work because I was slowing down. His name was Peter. He was very lazy and came to work when he felt like it, and he also got paid a lot more than me. Everyone was earning more money than me, even though I was the hardest worker. Peter often took things in the restaurant that did not belong to him. One day, Peter took some phone cards that I was responsible for; I did not see when he took them, but I knew it was him since he and I were the only two people in the restaurant at the time. Mike called me to find out what had happened to the five phone cards that were missing; he wanted to know where the money was. I was surprised because I had not sold any phone cards. I felt lost and disappointed. All the years of working with this man, and he didn't trust me a bit. I had worked so long with Mike, and I thought he had some trust in me because of all the money I brought to the bank every day for the last two and a half years.

I didn't know what to say. Mike decided to take the money for the missing cards from my pay. Peter left the following week. We thought that it was one of his two or three days off, something he usually did, but he never came back. Mike hired someone else,

and one and a half weeks later, he sent this man to the bank to deposit some money. The man ran away with \$3,500 of the breakfast money. We never saw him again.

After a few months, things became normal again. I decided to ask for a pay increase. Mike's wife said yes. She added 20 dollars to my pay, but I was still getting less than everyone else. In spite of that, I still felt good about myself. The next two weeks, he paid me, but I was still short by 20 dollars. I told him that his wife had given me a 20-dollar pay raise. He was very upset when he heard that. I didn't go home with my pay increase; that is when I started to realize he was just using me because I was a hard worker.

I started to take a stand by refusing to do any extra work, but this made my environment very difficult. I stood firm, and I saw him for what he was. I started disliking him. I worked for him for seven more months, then I quit. I was sad to go, but that was the best decision for my family and me. I found out later that many of my co-workers were stealing from him. The restaurant lasted for 18 more months, and then it was closed down. I am glad I took a stand because I am much better off now. I am currently in a job that pays me three times as much as he was paying me. I now pace myself on my job. Working for Mike was a lesson I will never forget. It was a hard dose of reality, but I used it as a tool to better myself.

Merrick Roper moved from Jamaica to New York City 12 years ago. He studies at the Central Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library, where Susan Knott is the literacy advisor and Winsome Pryce-Cortes is the site supervisor. He writes, "I am working hard to improve my writing, and this was a good exercise to get my thoughts down."

This Crazy World

Nohel Marte

I'm just a young man in this crazy world. I am 21 years old and was born and raised in East New York, Brooklyn. My neighborhood, people say, is tough, but all I see is the struggle to survive. When you look up, you see no stars in the sky in Brooklyn, because the stars are the shattered dreams of the people walking the streets. It's hard growing up in the world and bad enough in Brooklyn.

The world is full of things that many people glorify, like sex, money, drugs, cars, your image, guns, violence, greed, power, fame and much more. That's the new version of the American Dream. It's sad, but that's what the world wants.

Movies and TV shows are entertaining, but they are also brainwashing us, the viewers, on how we think and behave. For example, in the movie *Scarface*, Tony Montana comes to the United States as an immigrant. He gets a normal job, but the money isn't good enough. That is when he decides that selling drugs is better than a 9-to-5. This is a good movie, but it sends the wrong message. It changes the way people think. The movie glorifies drug dealing and makes people with weak minds think that this is the way to go. People look at the character Tony Montana and think, *That's what I want— money, power, respect*. They believe that's the key to life. Money, power and respect are what they are seeking on the streets of Brooklyn.

There's a junkie on the corner. If you look at him you would think he had no dreams. When he was younger, he had dreams of being a boxer. I remember when I was younger, I would watch him in the parking lot, showing off his skills. The man had talent! He even knew the heavyweight champion of the world at that time. Trainers wanted him to fight pro. Unfortunately, he took the wrong path. He wanted it now and fast. So he started dealing.

This is one of the many stories that show how people are influenced by the things they see. This is what I see when I'm walking home, all the stories of missed opportunities.

I almost became a product of this environment. But I saw an opportunity to do the right thing, and I didn't miss it. This world isn't that crazy if you don't follow the crazy guidelines. I realized that going to school, getting an education and learning a trade are slow but worth it. I'm going for my dreams.

Twenty-one-year-old Nohel Marte is a native of Brooklyn. He studies at the Adult Learning Center of CUNY's LaGuardia Community College, with instructor Miriam Fisher. "I am the only boy in my family," Nohel Marte writes. "I am charming. I am strong and independent. I am trying to make it in this world."



I Am the Hero

Irene Laos

When I look at the people surrounding me, I cannot find an everyday hero better than myself. I came here five years ago with my husband and my children. Nobody knew English. My children came here when my first child was 15 and the second one was nine years old.

One week after arrival, they began school. My husband found a job quickly, and we lived in a basement. We didn't have anything. One day, we were going to Roosevelt Avenue. We were looking for a language institute to study English, but it was too expensive. Then I saw a sign that said "Help Wanted" to pass out flyers, but it was too far from my house in Glendale.

A week later, I came back to the job, and I got it. It was to give flyers to people to inform them about English classes. My job required me to stand up for eight hours in the street with a lot of cold or heat, with rain or snow. When it was too cold, I wore three pairs of pants. I worked there because they gave me a half scholarship to study English. To arrive at my job, I had to go to Queens Boulevard by bus and I had to walk 20 blocks, then I studied for two hours and then I started work.

After eight hours of standing up, I had to go back home, walking another 20 blocks and taking two buses. When I arrived at my house, it was 8 p.m. and I had to cook. Then I helped my children with the little English that I knew. Since I didn't have a translator machine, I had to look at the old Spanish-English dictionary to translate many words. I tried to help them, so that they wouldn't stay behind. Then I cleaned the kitchen and went to sleep for a little bit.

When I closed my eyes, the alarm clock song rang. I had to get up to begin one more day in hell, standing up all day and then learning some English. My husband worked at night in a bar, and I worked in the morning. We didn't see each other much because of our working schedule. If we did see each other, it was to give each other the Metrocard.

Today my older son is 20 years old and he is in college and the younger one is 14 and he is in high school. Now, can you tell me if I am everyday hero or not?



Irene Laos, originally from Peru, has lived in New York City for five years. She writes, "I still study English, and I work in a pharmacy very near my house. I can practice my English all day because I work with people from India and nobody speaks Spanish there." She studies at Hunter College in the SPELL program. Her teacher is Gale Shangold, and the director of the program is Lauretta Goforth.

Contact Information for Participating Sites

BEGIN Managed Programs, Brooklyn

248 Duffield Street

Brooklyn, NY 11201

718-222-5540

Alvard Berberyana, Instructor

berberyana@hra.nyc.gov

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Bedford Learning Center

496 Franklin Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11238

718-623-2134

Haniff Toussaint, Literacy Advisor

H.Toussaint@brooklynpubliclibrary.org

Central Learning Center

Grand Army Plaza

Brooklyn, NY 11238

718-230-2191

Winsome Pryce-Cortes, Site Supervisor

W.Cortes@brooklynpubliclibrary.org

Coney Island Learning Center

1901 Mermaid Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11224

718-778-9330

Michael McDuffie, Site Supervisor

M.Mcduffie@brooklynpubliclibrary.org

Eastern Parkway Learning Center

1044 Eastern Parkway, Second Floor

Brooklyn, NY 11213

718-778-9330

Gladys Scott, Instructor

G.Scott@brooklynpubliclibrary.org

Flatbush Learning Center

22 Linden Boulevard

Brooklyn, NY 11226

718-856-2631

Gladys Ortiz, Site Supervisor

G.Ortiz@brooklynpubliclibrary.org

College of Mount Saint Vincent

Institute for Immigrant Concerns

1223 Second Avenue

New York, NY 10021

212-421-9538

Mark Brik, Education Director

Donna Kelsh, Director

dkelsh@verizon.net

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Brooklyn College

Adult Learning Center

900 Bedford Avenue, 0118 Ingersoll Hall

Brooklyn, NY 11210

718-951-4177

Moya McLellan, Instructor

moya333@earthlink.net

City College of New York

Adult Literacy Program

10 Shepard Hall

New York, NY 10031

212-650-7596

Tamara Kirson, ESOL Coordinator/

Staff Developer

tamara.kirson@verizon.net

College of Staten Island

Adult Learning Center

2800 Victory Boulevard, Building 2A,

Room 201

Staten Island, NY 10314

Paul Katz, Instructor

Leslie Berkheimer, Instructor

Mary Mastrogiovanni, ESOL Coordinator

Mastrogiovanni@cuny.csi.edu

Donna Grant, Director, Adult Learning

Center

grant@mail.csi.cuny.edu

College of Staten Island

CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program)
2800 Victory Boulevard, Building 4N,
Room 210
Staten Island, NY 10314
718-982-2981
Caryn Davis, Instructor

Hunter College

SPELL Program
695 Park Avenue, Room 1031W
New York, NY 10021
212-772-4620
Ruby Taylor MacBride, Instructor
RTaylormacbride@worldnet.att.net
Gale Shangold, Instructor
GShangold@verizon.net
Lauretta Goforth, Director

LaGuardia Community College

Adult Learning Center
31-10 Thomsen Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101, Room E249
Miriam Fisher, Instructor
fisherfreund@hotmail.com

LaGuardia Community College

Center for Immigrant Education and
Training
English and Family Literacy Program
29-10 Thomsen Avenue, Room C250
Long Island City, NY 11102
718-482-5025
Seungyeon (Jackie) Lee, ESOL Instructor
Albert Sgambati, ESOL Instructor
Hillary Gardner, ESOL/Civics Program
Coordinator and Instructor
hgardner@lagcc.cuny.edu

Lehman College

Adult Learning Center
250 Bedford Park Boulevard West
Bronx, NY 10468
718-960-8807
Sue Machlin, Instructor
SMachlin123@aol.com

Downtown Learning Center

Adult Education Program
80 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-290-2000
Lavinia Acosta, ESOL Coordinator
Joni Schwartz, Director

Fortune Society Education Program

29-76 Northern Boulevard
Long Island City, NY 11101
212-691-7554
Eric Appleton, Teacher
Eappleton@fortunesociety.org
John Kefalas, Teacher
Jkefalas@fortunesociety.org

Lutheran Family Health Center

Adult Education Program
6025 Sixth Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11220
718-630-7150
Lydia Zanezhina, Teacher
lzanezhina@hotmail.com

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION****Bronx Adult Learning Center**

3450 East Tremont Avenue
Bronx, NY 10465
718-863-4057
Andrea Jones, Computer Literacy
Teacher
Ajones162@yahoo.com
Linda Pelc, Site Supervisor
Lpelc@schools.nyc.gov

Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center

212 West 120th Street
New York, NY 10027
212-666-1920
Diana Raissis, Instructional Facilitator
draissis@schools.nyc.gov

United Bronx Parents of School 2

733 Prospect Avenue
 Bronx, NY 10455
 718-991-7100
 Wendy Wen, Teacher
 elearnus@yahoo.com

Tompkins Square Branch

331 E. 10th Street
 New York, NY 10009
 212-673-4528
 Terry Sheehan, Literacy Site Advisor
 tsheehan@nypl.org

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

76 Wadsworth Avenue
 New York, NY 10033
 212-822-8323
 Fran Schnall, Teacher
 franschnall@yahoo.com

Wakefield Branch

4100 Lowerre Palce
 Bronx, New York 10466
 718-652-4663
 Charmain Haynes, Literacy Assistant
 Sherlette Lee, Literacy Advisor
 slee@nypl.org

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY CENTERS FOR READING AND WRITING**Aguilar Branch**

174 E. 110th Street
 New York, NY 10029
 212-534-1613
 Elaine Sohn, Site Supervisor
 Elaine_sohn@nypl.org

QUEENS LIBRARY**Rochdale Adult Learning Center**

169-09 137th Avenue
 Jamaica, NY 11434
 Michael Semple, Literacy Advisor
 Michael.Semple@queenslibrary.org

Bronx Branch

310 E. Kingsbridge Rd.
 Bronx, NY 10458
 718-579-4226
 Shawanda Williams, Literacy Assistant
 swilliams@nypl.org

Steinway Adult Learning Center

21-45 31st Street
 Astoria, NY 11105
 718-932-3239
 Tsansiu Chow, Site Supervisor
 Tchow@queenslibrary.org

Harlem Branch

9 W. 124th Street
 New York, NY 10027
 212-639-2714
 Steven Mahoney, Site Supervisor
 Steven_Mahoney@nypl.org

University Settlement Society

Family Literacy Program
 175 Eldridge Street
 New York, NY 10002
 212-533-6306
 Michael Hunter, Director
 corrina@rocketmail.com

Seward Park Branch

192 East Broadway
 New York, NY 10002
 212-529-2909
 Terry Sheehan, Literacy Site Advisor
 tsheehan@nypl.org

The Gallatin School of Individualized Study, a small, innovative school within New York University, began in 1970 and grew out of the educational reform movements of the late 1960s. As a small college within a highly regarded research institution, Gallatin provides the best of both worlds for its 1,200 undergraduates and 200 graduate students. In close consultation with faculty academic advisors, students create their own curricula and unique plans for learning, combining Gallatin's own interdisciplinary courses with more traditional courses in various schools of NYU; self-directed education through independent studies; and experiential learning through internships at New York City's numerous institutions, businesses and arts organizations.

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The Literacy Project is comprised of a Literacy in Action course (co-sponsored by the Community Learning Initiative) that combines the study of the adult literacy/ESOL field with volunteer work at four partner organizations (University Settlement Society, Fortune Society, International Rescue Committee and Turning Point Educational Center); a weekly writing class at University Settlement Society; a writing class begun at International Rescue Committee; publications of writing by adults, including *The Literacy Review*; and the annual, free, all-day *Literacy Review Workshops* in Teaching Writing to Adults in Basic Education, G.E.D. and ESOL Programs.

This summer, look for *The Literacy Review, Volume 6* online at the Gallatin website (www.nyu.edu/gallatin).

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