



*THE
LITERACY
REVIEW*

Volume 13

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The Literacy Review

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

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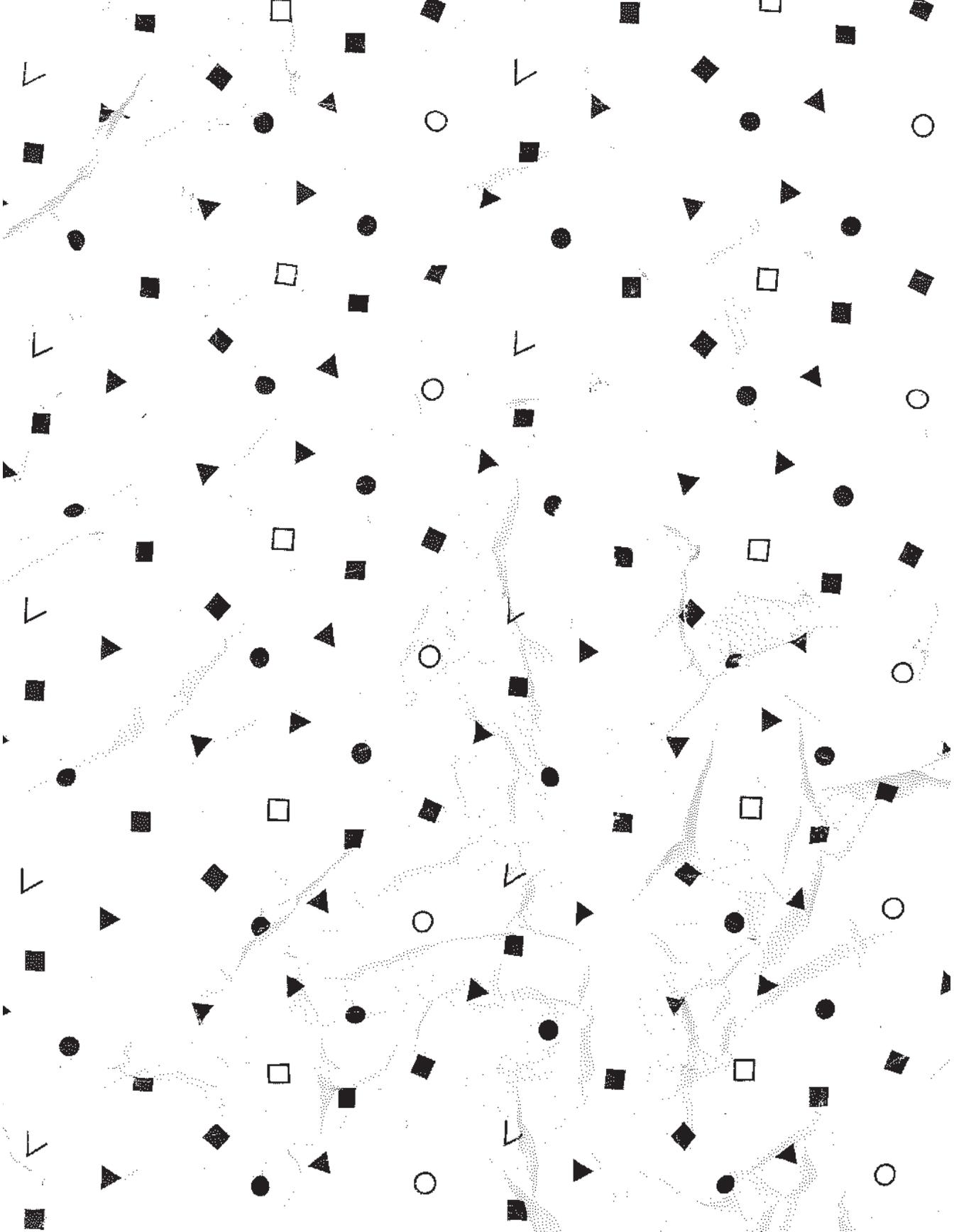
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The Power of Writing Our Own Stories

Dianne Ramdeholl

Writing one's story on one's own terms is a deeply political act. As cultural critic and social activist bell hooks points out, "if people don't tell their own stories, others do it for them. By doing so, they retain authorship and authority, continuing to objectify and colonize." When someone else tells our story, it ceases to be our own. Oftentimes, it is robbed of critical and essential truths regarding the author's complex lived realities. In part, the *Literacy Review* is an attempt to make space for students' stories to be told, in their own voices and on their own terms.

I have taught Gallatin's Literacy in Action course for several years, and many of the students in the class either are (or go on to be) editors of the *Literacy Review*. In this course, students are introduced to the landscape of adult literacy and explore current themes and issues within the field. We read, discuss, and write about who adult students are, about society's (and our own) assumptions about adult literacy, and strategies and philosophies of teaching practice. As part of the course, students volunteer for 20 hours over the course of the semester. As students begin to work at their field sites, the focus of the class moves between broader issues of literacy, power, and privilege in education. We discuss what Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire means when he says that all education is political (and that education can never be neutral). We question who benefits from current policies and structures in our society and how this impacts adult literacy students, the communities they live in, and the other millions of New Yorkers struggling every day in the midst of incredibly complex circumstances. We connect adult literacy in this country to other larger institutionalized inequities, impacted by race, class,

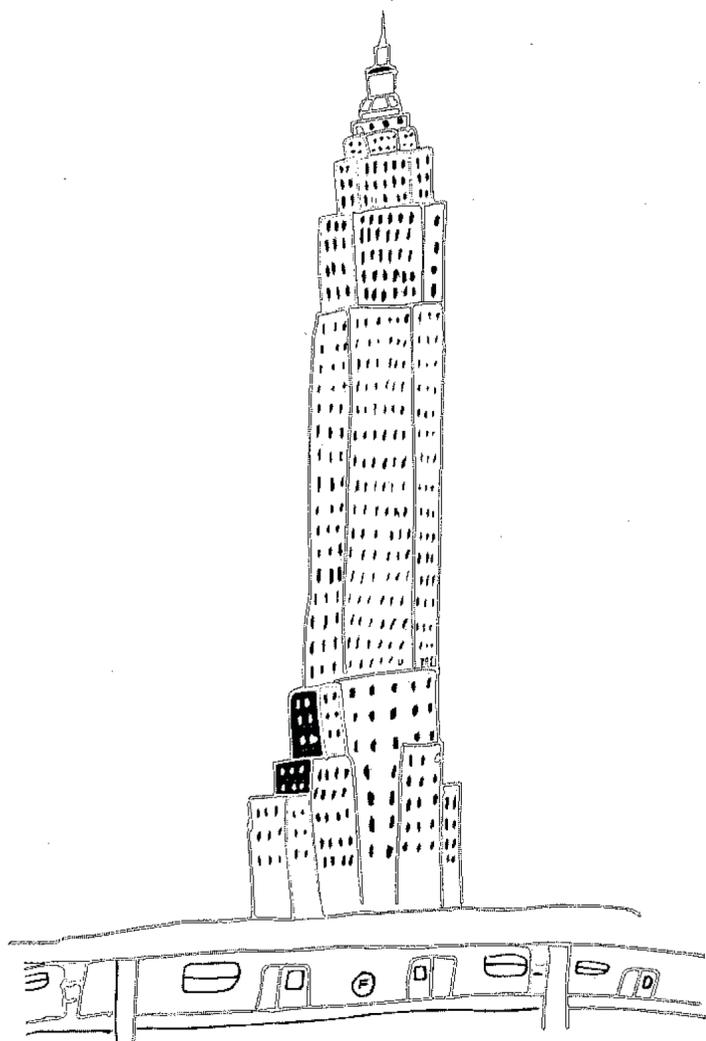
gender, and other interlocking oppressions. We explore through reading (and, of course, writing) what emancipatory adult literacy practice could look like (and the importance of reading and writing words and worlds in that process). We also discuss whether truly participatory practices are even possible, given the numerous restrictions working against them in the field. We unpack ways that adult literacy programs could connect classroom learning with what's happening in students' lives and communities.

I believe part of our responsibility as practitioners is to support students in navigating unfamiliar territory regarding reading and writing proficiencies, but, as importantly, to honor who adult students are and all they bring to the education process. We need to think about the power of words: how we say what we say, what remains unspoken, and how those words translate into actions.

Many researchers have pointed out that it's impossible to separate socio-political issues in adult literacy classrooms. Community publishing and oral histories are both ways to make space for these topics to be part of content. Through oral histories and writing, people have the possibility of defining their own reality and sharing their own history. They're subjects, authors, and producers of knowledge, instead of consumers of someone else's concepts. Writing represents an opportunity for groups who have been systemically marginalized and oppressed historically, politically, and socially to become actors rewriting a script imposed by the dominant culture.

For adult literacy and ESOL students, writing stories signifies a quest for autonomy, visibility, and freedom. Writing can help us renegotiate new, more just ways of being and living in the world. The act of naming words and worlds is essential in this decolonizing process and efforts such as the *Literacy Review* make space for this possibility. This effort at redefining what's possible in students' lives, and for us as a society, needs to be supported and honored. As Robert Coles, the psychiatrist and educator, says, stories are "what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them."

We hope you enjoy, honor, and cherish all of the powerful words contained in this volume.



New York City

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Colors of New York

Elena Adasheva-Klein

LIGHT GRAY AND ORANGE

I was walking on Broadway at twilight, when Manhattan, decorated by orange splashes of color, looks its best. The minute I turned to the east, I was struck by an almost full moon hanging over 74th Street. I stopped. I didn't try to take a picture to steal the moment; I just kept looking. I drew on all my senses to look through a narrow alley of buildings, up to the roof with water towers, and right above them, at the enormous light gray disk of the moon. It was there, fascinatingly beautiful in its existence.

RED

I started to call him Red Rocket the first time I saw him. A bike rider dressed all in red on a red racing-bike flew by me on the Hudson River Greenway. I had just a couple of seconds to glance at him. The immediate impression of grace was unforgettable. The next time I saw him on the path was a couple of days later; Red Rocket was riding towards me, not as fast as the last time, and I had a chance to get a better look at him. Dark glasses, a moustache, and a goatee. Leaning forward and concentrated, he was "one" with his bike—a perfect expression of speed and energy, a perfect red. I smiled.

WHITE

I sat down in the shade of a tree on the Great Lawn in Central Park. I had chosen a northeast corner so I could see my favorite view of the city—a green layer of grass, a yellow stripe of baseball field sand, then green again, all the shades of green in various shapes that the trees of Central Park could offer—and in the background there was a city: the wild geometry of Midtown. Suddenly a boy of four or five years old with bright, white-blond hair started to run back and forth on the grass. The painting came alive, I thought, and I immediately recognized the feeling of witnessing a miracle, a normal miracle of life when the stage is set and something amazing just happens.



*Born and raised in Gorky, Russia, **Elena Adasheva-Klein** has been in the United States for four years. She is an emerging museum professional and art student with a strong interest in drawing, sculpture, and photography. At the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center of the English-Speaking Union, she studies writing with ESOL teacher Angela Wilkins. Tanzilya Oren is the site manager.*

Shot by Shock

Hong-Wen Chen

“**S**hot” and “shocked”: These two words sound similar to an English learner like me. About one month after I started studying at a BMCC English class, I began to practice English with my classmates during the break. That day, F. wore a very beautiful traditional African outfit that I had never seen before, not even on TV programs. Such a powerful image gave me the courage to speak to her and tell her how different she appeared in such elegant clothing compared with the ordinary clothes she wore every day.

To be honest, it was not easy for a French speaker and a Taiwanese speaker to communicate in English, especially since both were still freshman in the English learning class. However, our strong curiosity about each other dissolved the language barrier, and we were eager to find out about our individual and specific experiences in the “fresh” place that we lived—New York City.

F. began to tell me that she was shot (“shocked,” I heard in my mind) a few days after she moved here from Africa. Therefore, she stayed at home for nearly one year before she could attend classes. I responded immediately and excitedly in agreement.

“Me, too. I was shocked soon after I arrived here a year ago. Thus, I chose to stay home instead of going out to take a look at the city.”

Then she asked me, “Where have you been shot?”

“Where?” I gazed at her as if I did not understand her words. She repeated her question twice. But my brain was still stuck, empty of answers and full of question marks.

Suddenly, she lifted up her top and showed me a big scar, which went from the bottom of her sternum to her umbilical cord. I was struck, not only by her drastic act, but by the huge scar that was revealed and the dramatic story that followed.

She told me that a few days after she arrived in New York City, immediately after she and her husband emerged from a subway station, a bullet flew through

her body, penetrating the narrow space between her heart and liver. She shrieked uncontrollably when she saw the huge amount of blood spreading as it sprang out of her body. All of her family, who raced to the hospital emergency room to see her, thought that she would definitely die.

Listening carefully to her story, I gradually realized that F. was “shot” by a real bullet near a subway station, and I was “shocked” by the complex, not-easy-to-understand everyday American culture. Even now, a few months later, I remain shot by shock.



***Hong-Wen Chen** writes: “I came from Taiwan and have been in New York City for one and a half years. I am an infant New Yorker and hope one day I will grow up to be an internationalized New Yorker. In Julie Weinstein’s amazing class at BMCC, I have learned how to think differently, deeply, and more thoroughly through the English language. I have also had the opportunity to experience many different cultures, which has expanded my heart to allow me to respect all others.”*

Take the A Train

Nathaly Garcia

One day I saw a man on the subway. He was sleeping. Another man, standing in front of him, vomited on his head. The man woke up. He cleaned his head and continued sleeping. The other man did not say, “I’m sorry.” Everyone was surprised. This is why I don’t sleep on the train.

Nathaly Garcia writes: “I’m from the Dominican Republic. I’ve been in New York City for two years. I like to travel and go shopping, and I want to be a nurse.” At the Department of Education’s Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, Nathaly Garcia’s ESOL teacher is Teresa Noverr-Chin, and the instructional facilitator is Diana Raissis.



God Bless You!

Qiao Zhuang (Grace) Zhang

“**G**od bless you!” I’ve been regretting that I didn’t say this out loud in the subway car.

That morning, I hurried to run up the stairs and catch the train. I held the subway door, shouting (in Chinese) to my two kids, “Hurry up!”

“Stupid Chinese b_____!” A harsh voice immediately came into my ears. I was stunned. I saw the young lady who had just cursed me standing in front of another door. I turned my face, an old lady’s expression in my eyes. A very low-voiced curse word slid over my lips.

The subway moved on. It was quiet. It seemed nothing had happened. However, my mind couldn’t stop. I had just done something wrong. I shouldn’t have held the door and waited for my kids; I should have waited with them for the next train. It was a busy traffic time for all the people. It was unfair to them to be kept waiting.

Furthermore, the lady didn’t look in good shape. She must have been exhausted and depressed. I was just unlucky to be the last straw that pissed her off. The subways of this city have overwhelmed a lot of people. She was just being angry; she didn’t do anything else. We all sometimes lose our temper. I always try to understand weak people. My spirit reminded me that I shouldn’t have cursed her back. I should have burst out, “God bless you!” I was comparing how my other response could have made a difference for the people in the subway car that morning.

May God bless us all!



Qiao Zhuang (Grace) Zhang, from Fujian, China, writes: “I am a wife and temporarily a stay-at-home mom with two angels, and I always try to improve my English to keep pace with my kids. I hope to go to college and dream of having a decent job to support my family and uphold my pride. I seek to be a lifetime learner, pursuing wisdom and truth. I am now a writing class student at the Adult Literacy Program of University Settlement Society, where Michael Hunter is the director.”

See You Tomorrow

Oksana Semeniak

A train. There are the same passengers every morning. They have all become part of my life. At my train station on Staten Island, you can only get in the last car. A special guy from MTA opens only this door by turning a special key. I tell him “Good morning” every day. One day I drove to work, and the next morning the MTA guy said he was worried about me. That was nice. One morning I was so tired; I don’t know why, but I told him “Good morning” in my native language. He just smiled at me.

One of the passengers is a solid man in a suit. He probably works in Manhattan, because he wears his suits all year along. He always lets me get in the train first, even if I come later than he. Ladies first. I appreciate that.

Another passenger is a high school student, I think, because I don’t see him during school holidays. He changes his hairstyle approximately every two or three weeks, more often than I do. He wears flat shoes even in the winter. Skinny jeans are part of his image.

There are many people to whom I say “Good morning.” Halfway to work, Steve joins me. Actually, he is the first native speaker, except for my English teachers, I have known. He says he is a chef. Steve also works in Manhattan. One day I asked him why he takes the local train instead of the express train, which would be faster. He said that he is glad to see me on the local train every morning. I was surprised. I did not realize I am also part of the train society.

Steve sits next to me every morning. We make small talk about the weather and last night’s news. He knows my English is not very good, and that is why I am not very sociable. He sits next to me to say, “Have a nice day” when the train arrives at my station.

“Take care, Steve.”

“See you tomorrow, Oksana.”

“See you.”

***Oksana Semeniak** was born in the Kyrgyz Republic. Although she has Ukrainian roots, she speaks Russian and English. She has lived in New York since 2011. She studies English because of a strong desire to be a successful and satisfied person. A student at Touro College, she plans on becoming a special education teacher. Ruby Taylor MacBride is her ESOL teacher at the New York Public Library's Dongan Hills branch on Staten Island.*

Sonia Sotomayor on the Subway

Ouedraogo Pagom

On November 1, at 10 o'clock in the morning, on the 4 train, I bumped into one of my favorite extraordinary women, Sonia Sotomayor. I actually had just been reading her biography in my English class. I introduced myself to her and told her my experience as an immigrant woman. She said I impressed her with my knowledge of her background and experience, and I also impressed her with my modest life story. She told me to stay in touch and gave me her email address.

Two weeks after meeting Sonia Sotomayor, I invited her to visit my CLIP class. When she came to our class, everybody was happy to see her. She said to the class, "I heard that all of you knew my story, and I am very glad to have inspired all of you." She also recommended that we love what we are doing and work hard toward achieving our goals.

The day I met her, I had the opportunity to share my life and experience with her. I told her that I am sometimes sad being alone in this country without my family. I have to work many hours to make money for my living expenses. I barely have any rest since I work seven days a week. Then one day, I realized that working hard in this country only to live paycheck-to-paycheck without any college degree and future is like being on the train without knowing where you are going. You are totally lost. Because of that, I decided to go back to school, hoping for a change in my life and a brighter future.

When I got the chance to meet Sonia Sotomayor, I couldn't leave without asking her to help all immigrant women like me. I asked her to suggest to lawmakers that they pass laws to help undocumented immigrant women find better jobs and support their children because immigrants have made and will always make America a stronger nation. As President Obama said, "We were strangers once too,

and we are and we will always be a country of immigrants.” I also told her that I want women to have equal rights, equal opportunities, and salaries equal to men’s.

Sonia Sotomayor is a role model I admire. She is a humble woman, devoted to her important work. I couldn’t believe that she accepted my invitation to come to our class. She gave us a lot of courage to reach our goals through her quote, “People who live in difficult circumstances need to know that happy endings are possible.”



*Born in Burkina Faso, **Ouedraogo Pagom** has been living in New York City for four years but has only been learning English for a few months. Marshella Lie, her teacher in Hostos Community College’s CLIP class, says Ouedraogo Pagom has been an excellent student whose “hard work and dedication to mastering a second language have motivated many of her classmates.” The site advisor is Fatiha Makloufi.*

The Lady with the Oranges

Agustina Gamero

One afternoon in July 2012, I took the E train from Queens to go to my English class in Chelsea. It was a hot and sunny day, and I was distracted along my usual route.

As I was going up the stairs to exit the subway, I saw a woman on the sidewalk carrying many shopping bags and walking two dogs. Suddenly, one of her bags ripped and a dozen oranges fell out, rolling across the sidewalk. I thought, *Poor woman; nobody is helping her*, so I hurried out to help her. I picked up all the oranges I could, and just as I was about to give them to her, I realized who the lady was. It was Susan Sarandon, the famous actress! I couldn't believe it!

She looked like any normal person. I almost couldn't speak, especially because of my limited English at that time, but she was very kind to me. She thanked me for my help, and she asked me if I could go with her just a half block to her apartment because she couldn't carry the bags by herself. I said: "Of course! It would be a pleasure." She smiled and thanked me again.

As we walked, she told me she was preparing a barbecue to celebrate the Fourth of July. She asked me where I was from, and she told me she loves tango and maté from Argentina. When we arrived, she invited me to go inside and offered me a glass of delicious, fresh orange juice.

Every time I remember that day, I smile and think how amazing and crazy this city is.

*Born in Argentina, **Agustina Gamero** has lived in the United States for three years. She studied visual communication design at Universidad Nacional del Litoral and graduated in 2008. That same year, she met her future husband when he was traveling in Argentina. After a two-year long-distance relationship, they married and decided to live together in the United States. Now based in New York City, she freelances, developing projects that include branding, corporate identity, and editorial design.*



The Symbolic Birds of New York City

YingLei Zhuang

I immigrated to New York City from China in October 2013. I often go to the park in my free time. It is my favorite place because many pigeons gather there. Pigeons are part of the citizenry and the symbolic birds of New York City. When I first came to New York City, I was astonished to see so many pigeons on the ground. They looked like humans, slowly swinging their bodies to walk. I was surprised that the pigeons did not fear people who approached them. In China, I had often seen pigeons flying. But they feared people and never landed because Chinese people like to eat them. However, when I threw bread to them in New York City, pigeons surrounded me. I felt excited and entertained. Here, pigeons are like citizens. They are free and live secure lives. They do not fear people.

Pigeons also cheer me up. One snowy day, the weather was frosty and the roads were slippery. I watched pigeons walking on the ground, finding food. They were hardy and persevering. I thought I could also be hardy and persevering to pursue my dream in this free country.



YingLei Zhuang comes from Fuzhou, China. She likes to watch movies and plays written or adapted for TV and to think about their universal themes. In her CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program) class at “City Tech,” she has learned how to write an essay and a script, and she wants to be a screenwriter and compose one-character dramatic scripts and plays. Caryn T. Davis is her instructor, and Gilberto Gerena is the director of adult education programs.

Where I'm From

Lamont Lewis

I'm from a nice community with dark thoughts
I'm from a place where courage beats fear
And
Where disappointments could knock you down in tears
I'm from a place where music was born
A borough where everybody wants to be stars
I'm from a place where everybody loves to celebrate
And
Make toasts to better things
I'm from a place that when you fall you get back up
I'm from a home where we say our grace before we eat
And
Say our prayers before we sleep
I'm from a world where peace is the solution to everything but
People would rather fight to get anything
A place where money can control your thoughts
And
Can bring pure evil to your heart
I'm from a place where Lareva stays up late
To make sure that her sons get home safe

Lamont Lewis, a New York City native, attends the Adult Learning Center at Lehman College in the Bronx. He is 19 years old. His instructor is Edgar Grant, and Jaye Jones is the site director. Lamont Lewis writes: "I'm a fun and outgoing person. Some of my spare-time activities are playing basketball, football, and baseball. But most of my time I like to spend with family and friends."



Melody from a Stranger

Hector Arguinzones-Noriega

As if it is planned, like the most unexpected surprise, there they are, the bride and the groom, walking around the blossoming south Central Park, on a beautiful sunny day, looking for the perfect spot to take some pictures.

An empty tunnel waits for them, and in it is an old violinist who is playing his instrument softly, in a way that seems to be part of the natural sounds of the park, like the water flowing in the stream and the birds singing in the trees. Tranquility is rarely observed in the always busy city, so here it invites visitors to awaken their senses by enjoying the melodies. The wedding seems to be happening now: Everyone is happy; everyone is smiling.

The old violinist keeps playing and smiles with them, excusing the couple for not thanking him; he plays with the joy of knowing he is happy in what he does. “That is New York City,” I say to my son. A city that gives everything to everybody, and asks you to awaken your five senses and to be aware. A city where a melody played anywhere can have a message for you, if you just stop a moment to hear it.

There, on the street, are a handful of people giving away their talent, people who make the city smile, sharing their talent in the middle of crowds rushing around, at the center of giant buildings, no matter the weather or the time. So sitting on a rock with my son on my lap, we give cheerful applause to the musician at the end, hoping it makes a little seed of appreciation grow in his soul.

“Okay, son, let’s continue exploring the park!”



***Hector Arguinzones-Noriega**, age 42, studies at the New York Public Library’s Aguilar Adult Learning Center, where the site advisor is Elaine Sohn. He writes: “I was born in Caracas, Venezuela, and I have been living in New York for four months. When I first visited New York in January 2002, the city still seemed in shock from the September 2001 events. Despite its emptiness, the city captivated me at first sight. I have come and gone several times, and everything changes, but it is always like the first time.”*

My Secret New York

Watson (P'Man) Sriboonwong

There are a million ways to deal with pressure, stress, and depression. I have many ways to deal with them. One is to go to a place that gives me peace, makes me relax, and lets my mind blow away.

That will bring you to my secret New York. This place has a legendary history in our New York City. It is a wonderful place and brings a lot of beautiful memories to people from generation to generation. There are so many amazing attractions, many sculptures, and much architecture. I am talking about Central Park.

My secret spot is located on Bank Rock in the Rambles area. It is “hidden in plain sight” on the walkway under the 70th Street transverse. You can see this spot from West Drive, just after you head across 79th Street. It’s on the left-hand side.

My secret spot has two symbolic trees: a gingko tree and a maple tree. In my opinion, they represent two geographies. The gingko is East (Asia) and the maple is West (Europe and America). I think it means that no matter where you’re from, East or West, we can live under the same roof in peace.

There are three benches to sit on at the left edge of the walkway. The first two benches are facing Bank Rock Bay, but blocked by a bush on a small hill. The third one is beside the gingko tree and directly faces the maple tree. When fall comes, the gingko’s leaves will turn a lemon yellow color, and the maple’s leaves will be bright red. They will create a vivid view, which brings peace.

In this atmosphere, I am able to abandon everything and make myself peaceful. I can also perform a meditation by focusing on a maple leaf and letting my body feel the wind that blows around, feel people walking by, make myself a center of the universe, and then lose myself in Mother Nature.

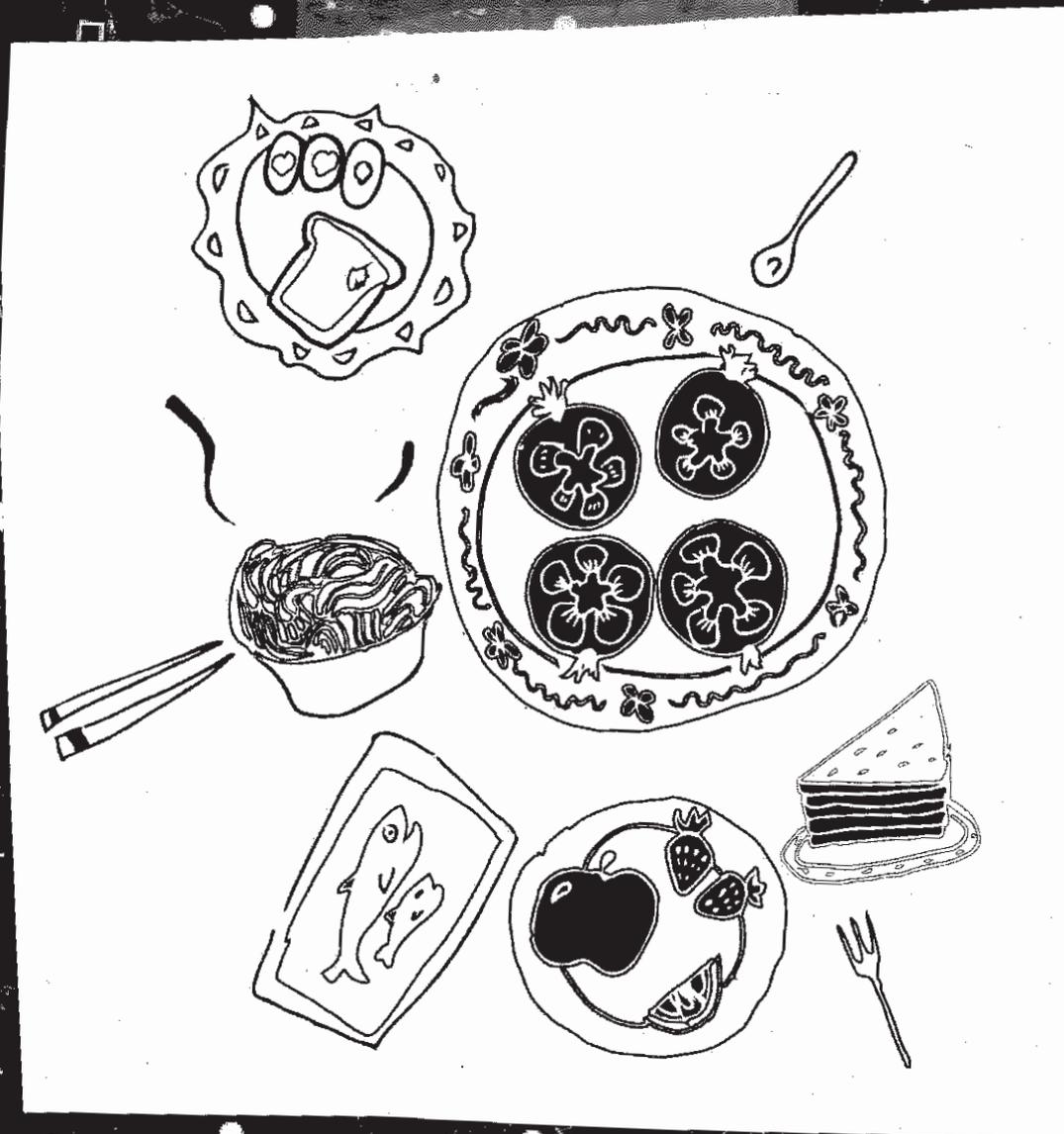
I do not go to this spot only in fall; I come here anytime I want. In the other seasons, I just sit here under the green gingko leaves and watch the crimson maple leaves, waiting for them to change color when fall comes. It’s the same feeling you

get watching your children grow. It has also given me an understanding of why my sister, who lives alone in California, loves to plant flowers.

My secret New York spot always makes me calm and relaxed. Even when I am bored, I just spend time here to appreciate nature. Do you have a secret New York like mine?



Watson (P'Man) Sriboonwong writes: *"I was born in Bangkok, Thailand, graduated from Ramkhamhaeng University, and worked in sales promotion and advertising before coming to New York City in 2002. One day I realized I was wasting my time by only working, so in 2013 I started studying English at University Settlement. For anyone lost like me, please wake up and set your goals. Do not throw away your precious time."* Michael Hunter is the director of the Adult Literacy Program at University Settlement Society.



Between Two Cultures

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At LaGuardia Airport . . .

Yanghee Kim

One . . .

Two . . .

The plane was flying over the sunset

I dreamed away the afternoon watching the plane

I would reach the good old days, if I took that plane . . .

The shadow disappeared behind the sunset

One by one the faces of loved ones flashed through my mind

My heart was cold

My eyes were getting warm

Yanghee Kim was born in Gwang-ju, South Korea in 1981. She has lived in Flushing, Queens for two years. She writes, "I love writing in Korean, but writing in English makes me nervous. To be published in the Literacy Review has given me more confidence in reading and writing in English." At the Pascualano Adult Learning Center at the New York Public Library's St. Agnes branch, Yanghee Kim's ESOL instructor is Robin Poley, and the site supervisor is Elke Stappert.



My Father's Wood Shelf

Buenaventura Elizabeth Checo

The best gift I ever received was a wood shelf my father gave me 17 years ago. My father gave me other things, but this wood shelf has special sentimental value. It was furniture from the living room of our home when I was a child.

The wood shelf brings me a lot of memories of when my siblings and I were living with our parents. I remember a long time ago, in the evenings, my siblings and I would watch TV programs. Our favorite was *El Chavo del Ocho*, a comedy series for families. The TV was on the wood shelf in the living room.

My father would put the newspaper on the wood shelf when he finished reading.

One Christmas, my father bought a stereo radio. He put that on the wood shelf, too, below the TV. Whenever we had parties, my father would turn on the stereo radio, and he would play old-fashioned music.

Now, when I look at the wood shelf, I smile sadly because on that old piece of furniture there are only dolls and toys of my daughter. I guess that old wood shelf was my best gift because I can remember my childhood whenever I look at it.

My father died 12 years ago, but I thank him forever for that gift.

***Buenaventura Elizabeth Checo**, who prefers to be called Elizabeth, was born in the Dominican Republic. Now 55 years old, she has lived in New York for three years with her daughter. She likes to write poems in Spanish. At the New York Public Library's Harlem Adult Learning Center, she tries to improve her English and hopes one day to write poems in English. Her teacher is Myrna Holguin.*

A Hundred-Dollar Bill on a Windy Day

Magaly Palaguachi

It was a windy day in autumn 2006, and I was walking to my job. I was walking fast because I was late. I had to put an envelope in the mailbox. I also needed to send money to my parents in Ecuador, but then I thought better of that and decided to send it the next week. I took the letter out of my handbag to mail. Suddenly, I saw something that was flying. I thought it was a piece of paper. But I remembered that I had put the money with the envelope in my handbag. Then I realized that it was the hundred-dollar bill that was flying in the wind.

I felt very sad and confused, and yet I still thought that I could find it. I tried to find it for some minutes, but there were too many leaves and papers flying everywhere. I promised God that if I found it, I would never again hesitate when I had to send money to my parents.

Then an idea occurred to me. I went to the place where I lost the hundred-dollar bill. I took a piece of paper and let it fly. I followed it and stopped in front of a schoolyard, next to a tree. When I saw the hundred-dollar bill close to the paper, I couldn't believe it. I was surprised and happy. There were people around, but nobody else had seen the bill. I went inside the yard and retrieved it. Immediately, I went to send the money to my parents.

Magaly Palaguachi, a native of Ecuador, has lived in Brooklyn for 10 years. She writes, "When I came to the United States in 2005, I had a very difficult time because I couldn't understand English. Now I use English every day on my job, and I study at Sunset Park with the Fifth Avenue Committee, so my English is improving day by day. I want to thank my teacher, Catherine McRae, who encourages me and other students all the time in this program." The site advisor is Chris Curran.



My Brothers in the Dominican Republic

Eugenio DeLa Cruz

A lot of things make me smile, especially visiting all my brothers back in the Dominican Republic. I have six brothers. Visiting them makes me so happy because they are all really funny. We go out all together, we dance, and we cook; we enjoy every hour, every minute, every second. Sometimes they look at me and ask me, “What’s wrong?” I tell them I don’t want to go back to the United States; I want to stay in the D.R. But then I realize that if I stay in the United States, I can help my brothers in different ways.

I live in the Bronx with my mother and my son. It’s hard in New York City if you don’t speak English, and it’s not easy to work and go to school. I do it because I want to help my family. So when it’s really hard, and I’m really sad, I think about all I do with my brothers, and it makes me smile.



***Eugenio DeLa Cruz** came from the Dominican Republic to the United States in 2005. He works in a local hospital and studies English at the New York Public Library’s Adult Learning Center in Harlem. According to hub manager Elke Stappert, Eugenio DeLa Cruz’s hard work is paying off: As his English has improved, he has gotten a better job at the hospital and is able to assist his family even more.*

A Smell That Takes Me Back

Odris Rogers

The smell of soap and laundry instantly takes me to the moments of my childhood when my grandma used to wash the clothes in the river. We would use a big stone to scrub, and we hit the clothes with a piece of wood, and then we tended the clothes.

While the clothes dried, my cousins and I played in the river. We collected stones, and my grandma cooked over a campfire.

We told stories, and it got so late that when we got home we fell asleep wherever we lay down.

Those beautiful moments!

***Odris Rogers**, age 29, came from Panama to the United States in 2004. She lives in New York City with her sister, brother-in-law, three nephews, a niece, and her son. At the New York Public Library's Seward Park Adult Learning Center, she studies in the advanced class with instructor Kathryn Bonn. The site advisor is Terry Sheehan.*



My World Travels with Me

Maria Grazia Candela

I really think that everyone who leaves one country for another changes something in their life.

I'm discovering another life, another culture, which is hard for me and my family. Every single daily thing becomes a big event and a problem to solve. I lost part of my life, my personality, and my confidence when I moved to New York four months ago. Before, in my country, I was sure of myself. Now I look like a confused woman. But in spite of this, I know that the person I left behind in my country is always inside me, and one day—I don't know when—she will come out!

Every night, in my bed, I remind myself: I'm me, Maria, the same person I was four months ago. I'm myself in Italy, in New York, everywhere. I am part of the world, and my world travels with me.



Maria Grazia Candela, age 38, was born in Italy. She has lived in the United States for four months. She has an Italian degree in political science, and she is the mother of three children. She likes to study and read books. Her ESOL teacher at the New York Public Library's Dongan Hills branch in Staten Island is Ruby Taylor MacBride.

A Hoop-Rolling Memory

Keefong Liu

Hoop rolling used to be a popular sport in China, as widespread as skateboarding is in the United States today. It is an energetic game in which the hoop, a wheel-like metal ring, is set in motion, and the players run alongside, using sticks to guide their hoops and keep them moving. Also called trundling, hoop rolling was a favorite outdoor activity—especially for boys—in my hometown of Guangzhou.

I still remember my one and only hoop-rolling experience: It happened in the 1960s on a Saturday afternoon, while three of my teenage girlfriends and I were strolling through Guangzhou's renowned Wen Hua Park. We were on our way home, when we came across a bunch of seven- and eight-year-old boys who were excitedly rolling their hoops. We saw them racing with each other as we passed by. Suddenly, a hoop accidentally hit one of the girls on the leg. Frightened, she jumped back and cried out loudly. The boys burst into laughter; and, on a whim, they decided to "attack." We girls were about to become their moving target.

Redirecting their hoops, the boys turned on us. They chased after us faster and faster. There seemed no way to get rid of them. Then an idea popped into my head: *We are older and taller. Why should we be scared?*

I stopped the exhausted girls and told them not to show any more fear. We pulled ourselves up. I counted to three as we turned around and faced our attackers; then it was their turn to be scared. The boys picked up their hoops and fled.

Born in China, Keefong Liu writes: "I am a bilingual administrator at an Asian Pacific community service agency for seniors, and myself close to retirement. Looking back, I treasure my experiences at Tompkins Square's Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. In my 'twilight years,' I'll continue studying English and playing a serious game of ping-pong. The way to grow is not to limit oneself. I offer my heartfelt thanks to my site advisor, Terry Sheehan, and to my enthusiastic tutor, Rodger Larson."



Pilaf: More Than Food

Farangiz Abdugodirova

Pilaf: This is the food that makes me feel like I am back home in Tajikistan. It's the traditional food of my country. In New York, I cook it every week. It is one of the foods that make my family life comfortable.

I learned how to cook pilaf when I was 14 years old. My dad taught me to cook it. He taught me very delicately, so I didn't feel bad even when I made mistakes at the beginning.

Every woman in my country has to know how to cook pilaf because it is a major part of our cooking tradition. Pilaf has a place in all our ceremonies, such as weddings, birthday parties, and wakes.

Here in New York, I cook it for our friends and guests on birthdays and holidays. The ingredients are very simple to find. It has meat, rice, and vegetables. Pilaf has three stages of cooking. First, you have to fry the meat and vegetables. Then add water and rice. At the end, you have to cover it and wait for it to be ready.

I could tell you how to cook it. You could also find the recipe on the Internet. But if you ask me how to cook it the right way, I will tell you this: You have to feel it with all your soul. You have to love it, and then your pilaf will be delicious. Following a recipe doesn't give you the best results. Following your feeling and the voice of your soul—this is the secret of making the best pilaf!



Farangiz Abdugodirova was born in Khujand, Tajikistan and has lived in the United States for seven months. She studies at the Harlem Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, where her ESOL instructor is Christina Nieder. She writes: "I speak five languages, three of which are native to me. I want to know, speak, and read English as if it were one of my native languages. Language opens new doors." The site advisor is Sisnur Araujo.

A Small Piece of Brown Candy

Yuanping Xiao

The Chinese spring holiday is the most important festival in China. Chinese people celebrate this holiday during the New Year. Before I immigrated to the United States, when I awoke on the first day of the New Year, I always saw a small piece of brown sugar candy laying on my night table. It was from my mother.

My mother is a traditional woman who takes good care of her family. She hopes everyone in her family will be prosperous and successful. Therefore, at dawn on every New Year's Day, she always cut a big piece of brown sugar candy into smaller pieces. Then she silently put the pieces on my father's, brother's, grandmother's, and my night tables. We ate it when we woke up. It meant we would have a sweet life that year.

Even after I left my hometown and immigrated to New York City, I still remember the taste of that brown sugar candy. When the candy melted in my mouth, it was like a warm current swimming into my heart. I would be full of energy in an instant. I have lived in New York City for four years and during that time I have not eaten brown sugar candy from my mother on New Year's mornings. Still, although I am not at my mother's side, whenever I see the brown sugar candy in a Chinese supermarket, the scene with my mother preparing small pieces for her family appears in my mind. A small piece of brown sugar candy is not really that small. It carries a mother's best wishes.

Yuanping Xiao emigrated from Guangdong, China. She studies in instructor Caryn T. Davis's CLIP class at "City Tech," where Gilberto Gerena is the site advisor. Yuanping Xiao has enjoyed reading Tales from the Odyssey, which has helped her improve her reading comprehension. Her writing skills have also improved because now she knows how to develop paragraphs using evidence to support her main idea. In her free time, she likes to read mystery novels.



Food Is a Way of Life

Takako Azuma

What do I like to eat? I eat the products of the sea a lot. We Japanese appreciate the gifts from the sea. Fortunately, we have a lot of fresh fish because the Japanese archipelago is surrounded by the ocean. So we have the custom of eating raw fish, which we call sashimi. Actually, no one knows who first created this delicacy.

I do eat meat sometimes, but not much. There are a lot of other good things in the world to eat, like vegetables, beans, nuts, and seaweed. We might sometimes need meat, but I feel that it is kind of wasteful because it takes a lot of land to grow the food that animals eat.

Recently, many people, especially on the West Coast, have decided to be vegetarians. For me, it is an extreme choice. I want to enjoy a wide range of foods from the earth, river, and ocean.

I really enjoy cooking. I cook a lot of Japanese food, but I also cook food from other cultures. When I moved to New York, I found Mexican food to be interesting. I created my own recipes, which mix Japanese and Mexican ingredients. Back then, the tortilla was very new to me, and I loved it. I wrapped it with seafood and vegetables and dipped it in soy sauce. It is delicious! I also discovered a new cocktail, which is called wasabi Bloody Mary. I use wasabi instead of horseradish for my Bloody Mary. It works very well.

Maybe I am becoming Americanized.



Takako Azuma comes from Japan. Her hard work and creativity led her to start her own business as a shoe designer. She is proud to be self-employed, and although her business requires a lot of time and energy, she finds the grit to improve her education. She attends English classes at the Institute for Immigrant Concerns, under the instruction of Mark Brik, who is the Institute's education director.

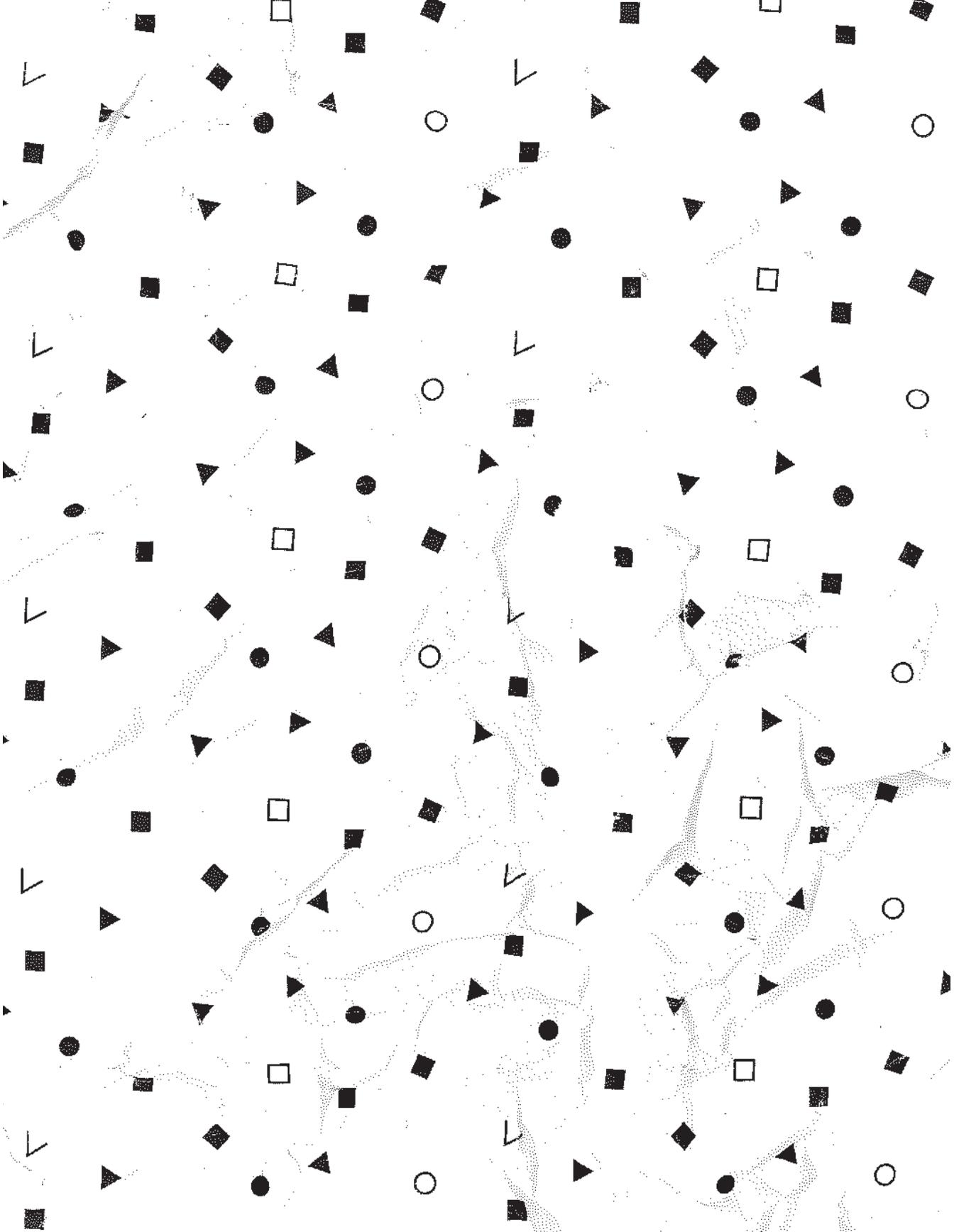
Jellyfish Village

Anna Chan

I am from Ningbo, near Shanghai, China. On the east shore, across from Japan.
I am from a jellyfish village.
I am from an ancient country where woman have smaller bound feet, like my mum.
I am from an ancient country, where men have long braided hair, like my dad.
I am from an ancient country, where women wear beautiful cheongsam, colored
like a rainbow.
I am from an ancient country, where people use chopsticks, like me.
I am from an ancient country, where there are a lot of people.
But none of my family are there right now. They all came to America.

Anna Chan is a 74-year-old student at the New York Public Library's Seward Park branch. Chris Milson is her instructor, and Sherin Hamad is the hub manager. Originally from Ningbo, China, Anna Chan moved to Hong Kong when she was 18 to be with her boyfriend and to escape the civil war and widespread famine. They married, raised three children in Hong Kong, and later immigrated to the United States. She has been here for 34 years.







Social Justice

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Catalyzing Truth Retribution

Angel Depeña

Retributive Justice, Retributive Justice, Retributive Justice

The UN-told truth, The Hidden War, The Hidden Lie

The protected brotherhood in blue

That breaks and abuses the rights of communities

In impoverished neighborhoods.

The new threat:

Read all about it, read all about it,

But this isn't new to us.

It just seems like enforcement officers are over-enforcing their power on us.

We have been through a whole lot that hasn't stopped us.

But Confidence, Confidence, everybody lacks Confidence

Until we've had enough of your intimidation and incrimination.

No more choke holds, no more aggressive suppression—we aren't resisting!

No more violating our first amendment. This country's Bill of Rights was created

Not to be violated.

We should speak our truth or forever hide an unbearable truth.

For years they've told us it's a figment of our imagination.

They portray our words to be overplayed.

But instead we replay our videos on Facebook and YouTube.

Our phones describe your hidden agendas and your stereotypes of ethnic groups.

The world has the preconceived notion that victory is around the corner

And thanks to Martin Luther King and his dreams, we were able to follow through

Because we worked together to accomplish the forbidden truth.

We await to see the justice that prevails, the divine justice that prevails
against those who abuse great power.
And those who defend the unrighteous actions of these uncompassionate
egocentric pigs are just as guilty.
May they suspend these individuals and put in power people
with Discerning Truths, Discerning Truths, Discerning Truths.



Angel Depeña studies at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning of the Department of Education. Kamala Redd is his teacher, and Diana Raissis is the instructional facilitator. Angel Depeña is bilingual. He loves technology and has a business repairing computers in his home.

From Gene to Genius

Jeremiah Cumberbatch

Most people think I'm complicated, but that's because I'm a genius. I know that sounds egotistical, and it may be hard to believe, but I am. You see, most people can't see the genius thing about me, but that's all right. There are evil souls out there. Once you tell them you have a gift, they look at you like you're Christmas. So let's just keep my genius abilities between you and me.

"Suurre, buddy, where I'm from we call a *genius* borderline ca-raazy."

"And where is it you're from again?"

"The land of the free."

"I bet you didn't know your so-called free land keeps innocent men in prison."

"No such thing! Every prisoner has to be proven guilty before they get caged, and it don't take a genius to know that one."

"Well, if I tell you according to *The Guardian* at least four percent of all people who receive the death penalty are innocent, what would you think of your free land?"

"Four percent? Come on, that's not a very high percentage."

"Try telling that to the families who are living day by day without a father, without a mother, without a brother or a sister. Try telling that to the kids who are now in foster homes, who grow up not knowing where their genetic roots come from. Try telling them when they are hungry, sick, or not knowing where to go for help. Please go! Tell them that I sent you and how you found out about your '*free land*.' Look them right in the eye and say four percent is not much."

Jeremiah Cumberbatch was born in St. Kitts, came to Brooklyn when he was 12 years old, and went to school up to the 11th grade. He now studies at the Department of Education's Brooklyn Adult Learning Center. Jay Rasin-Waters is his teacher, and Kesha Harris is the principal. Jeremiah Cumberbatch writes: "My mission is to free myself of the burden I carry. I want to learn self-love and recover my confidence in humanity."



Why Always Me?

Abdoulaye Diogo Balde

Why always me when there is a problem?

Why always me when there is hunger?

Why always me when there is disease?

Why always me when there is a war or crime?

Why always me when there is an ethnic problem or genocide?

Why always my picture, my image when an international organization, NGO,
media, or government wants to do fundraising?

Why always me when there is poverty and pity?

Why always me when there is murder in the streets, shops, buses, schools, universities?

Why do we have more opportunity to go to prison than to go to college?

Why is there no unity and comprehension when it is about me?

Why always experimental medicine on my people?

Why always me when we speak about Ebola, cholera, malaria?

Why, why, why . . . ?



*In Guinea-Conakry, **Abdoulaye Diogo Balde** was an activist with a master's degree in NGO management who founded his own NGO. He came to the United States in October 2013 and lives in the Bronx with his cousin. He studies English at the International Center of Catholic Charities Community Services. When he wrote the poem "Why Always Me?" his teacher was Shawn Mullin. The Center's director of programs is Elaine Roberts.*

Amazing Tunisian Women

Samia Ben Sliman

A lot of talk nowadays is focused on the Arab Spring and the political situation in Arab countries. My country, Tunisia, was the first one that ignited the Arab Spring in 2010. If there is sinew in my country, it runs through the Tunisian women, who played a major role in the revolution.

In fact, women in Tunisia played powerful roles that went beyond direct participation against the dictatorship to include organizing and leading protests and cyber-activism, and Nidaa Tounes, the democratic party in Tunisia that recently won the legislative elections. The Tunisian people got rid of the Islamist party that swept to power in 2011 just after the revolution and was trying to spread its dangerous ideology throughout my country.

Tunisian women are proud of their identity and did not want to lose their civil rights and integrity. They believed in democracy and voted for the secular democratic party. A substantial number of voters were women of all ages: young students, moms, and elderly farmers. They believed that with their votes they would change things and achieve their goal. What they did was very remarkable. Tunisian women were brave and strong. They fought with all their power and soul to save their country from extremism and to achieve a better future for the new generation.

Tunisia's political experience after the revolution was impressive and succeeded thanks to the Tunisian women who did an outstanding job helping to change their country from dictatorship to democracy.

*Born in Tunisia, **Samia Ben Sliman** came to the United States in 2012. In order to improve her writing skills in English, she attends classes at Hunter College's SPELL Program, where her teacher is Ruby Taylor MacBride and David Williams is the director. Married with two sons, she is fond of painting and wants to begin art studies.*

Could Have Been Fiction

Leonardo Petronilha

On October 2, 1999, I was 19 years old. Around 8 p.m., I was driving by the front of a church in Niteroi, a city close to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was Saturday night and there was a great flow of traffic toward the city. I was headed to the restaurant owned by my family to work overnight.

In front of the church, another car stopped and forced me to brake. While the car was stopped, I looked to the left at the temple entrance, where two young couples who, judging from appearances, were harmless, headed to church in order to participate in religious worship. I looked at my watch nonchalantly. Once again, I turned my gaze to the left, and one of the men drew a revolver. My immediate reaction, cornered by the gun, was to jump out of the car.

One of the guys, a bit older than me, sat in the back seat and pulled me tightly into the vehicle, saying that nothing would happen to me and the car. I didn't care about the car; I was worried only about my life. The other boy, who appeared to be no more than 25 years old, sat next to me, and the two women got into the front seat. I was between the two criminals in the back seat. Each of them stuck a gun to my belly. In that moment, a cold sweat drenched my body.

The boys told me to be quiet. The women didn't communicate with me. I was taken to a hill. To this day, I don't know the name of that favela, but I will never forget my time there. The driver stopped the car at a place on the hill where the vehicle couldn't go. My kidnappers got out and one of them told me to get out as well. I complied, and they asked for my wallet. They took my money and complained that I had no credit card. The women left with the car, and I was led on a side trail to an area where the locals throw trash. I was there with the two young criminals.

They picked up the cell phone that I had borrowed from my sister. They were about to toss it away, when in an act of great boldness, I asked them to let me call my family's restaurant to inform them that the car had a mechanical problem

so I would be late. My concern was that my family members, worried about my disappearance, would call the police. The kidnappers nodded, and after the call they threw the cell phone to the curb.

I controlled my nerves, and that kept me going. I managed to establish a dialogue with the criminals. During my whole time with them, I never looked directly at their faces. They asked my name and I said, "Leonardo." I didn't lie to them, because it could cost me my life if a lie was discovered. The younger guy said his name was Leonardo too, and I started calling him "Namesake." The other guy said that he was a fan of the Flamengo soccer team—the most popular soccer team in Brazil, like a religion—and I agreed. I started to call him "Flamengo," although I felt a certain disgust, thinking that a guy like that had no right to support our dearest team, with its many struggles and glories. I, Leonardo, the victim; Namesake and Flamengo, the criminals: We were all young guys with different life stories.

After a while, they decided to stand on a path in the middle of the favela and said that I could take off my shirt if I wanted. They stopped pointing weapons at me. However, they continued to casually mention how good it would be to burst someone's head. They asked me if I was nervous. They showed me where the weapons were hidden on the hill. They told me that one day, they had caught a guy about my age, and he had asked for a gun to help them in action. They said criminals don't usually like to catch people with my profile. They prefer middle-aged people who are heads of households, and they only took me because I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

They told me I was lucky because they were not involved with drugs; they just did it for the money. They said if I had been caught by other criminals, I would be humiliated. I talked about my family, and they told me they had once had family and now had no one. I tried to negotiate my way out, saying that I wouldn't go to the police. They agreed on the condition that I leave my address. I preferred to continue with them until they freed me. I reasoned that if they let me go on the hill, I could be picked up by another criminal, and if I went down I could be killed by them. Finally, they told me that when the car returned they would free me.

Their cell phone rang twice. At first, the women said they were still in Copacabana, a famous neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro. My nervousness grew because I was desperate for them to arrive. The second call was their "commander." I listened as

Flamengo said, “I will not shoot because the guy is cool.” After that he gave me the cell phone, the “commander” asked me if I was calm, and I said yes and that I would cooperate with whatever was needed.

Until the car arrived, I spoke with the guys about soccer and poems, sang funk, and complained about the government, high prices, lack of jobs, health, and education. The only thing we didn’t discuss was the lack of security on public roads in my hometown.

I remember my happiness and hope when Namesake climbed up the trail and waved at us to follow him. I thought that the car had arrived, and I would be set free.

Flamengo and I went up to the car. Namesake took me into the back seat of the car and gave me back my wallet. Flamengo opened the trunk and yelled, “Stop being suckers and put him here in the trunk.” I think it was the worst moment of my ordeal because I had believed they would release me. I sat in the trunk and Namesake placed a cloth bathed in ether on my face. After sniffing, I pretended I had fainted, and they closed the trunk. I was sober, inside the trunk, with the criminals inside the vehicle.

The engine started, and I could hear their conversation. They seemed to spot a police car, and one of them said that if they were discovered they should run in different directions. I feared a shooting would occur, and I would be abandoned in the trunk. The police didn’t notice them, and they continued to drive. Although I was incredibly nervous, I didn’t think at any moment that I would die.

They drove for a while. They requested information on how to get to a certain neighborhood. I listened to everything. They robbed a gas station and filled the tank. I thought that if they let me go with the car, it would be with a full tank.

Finally, they parked on a slope. I waited about 15 minutes in silence to make sure they wouldn’t be back. I unlocked the trunk, pushed the rear seat forward and got out. I shut the door and headed for the middle of the street. I was born again!

This story could have been fiction, but it was true and happened to me.



Leonardo Petronilha studies English at the New York Public Library’s Adult Learning Center at Tompkins Square. His ESOL instructor was Lajlim Yang. Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Leonardo Petronilha was the executive coordinator of the Human Rights Secretariat of Rio de Janeiro and a special advisor to the governor there. He has a Ph.D. in political science. He is currently a visiting scholar/visiting scientist at Columbia University’s Institute of Latin American Studies & Center for Brazilian Studies.

Umbrella Revolution

Krystal Fong

Nowadays, there is worldwide concern about the “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong. Worldwide, television crews and journalists have reported the latest movements, and the stories have made the daily newspapers.

The Umbrella Revolution has consisted of the largest demonstrations in Hong Kong since it was returned to China in 1997. It is a turning point in the democratic movement of Hong Kong. Many people are increasingly worried about the government’s future steps. Sometimes we can see the shadow of 1989’s Tiananmen Square massacre in this campaign. At that time, the government used force to clear the site. Thousands of people were crushed by the tanks, most of them students. That revolution failed miserably, and until now, no one could mention the Tiananmen massacre or they would get into trouble. There are a lot of similar points between Tiananmen and the Hong Kong revolution. The current rally is organized by students, the government takes an unyielding attitude, and the police expel the crowds by force.

In recent days, things are becoming worse. A group of gang members has started to disturb and attack the protesters; some even harass the female students. The gangs provoke one another to commit crimes, and the police don’t arrest anyone. Some newspapers report that those troublemakers are paid by the government to trigger the conflict. Additionally, undercover police pretend to be protesters and incite or even engage in violence. The government wants the protests to evolve into a riot, so they have a perfect excuse to quell the protestors.

When I was small, Hong Kong’s police were highly respected for their integrity. They protected people, caught criminals, and defended the law. Before, the Hong Kong police force was considered to be the best police force in Asia by the international community. In those years, they strove to keep Hong Kong one of the world’s safest cities. At that time, I was very proud of them. But now everything has

changed. The police have connections to the criminal underworld, and they have used excessive force against protesters. The news reported that a group of policeman took a man to a dark corner and placed him on the ground to kick and beat him for minutes. Later, he was taken to the hospital with serious injuries. I felt distressed and disappointed when I saw the video. I don't want the Tiananmen massacre to happen again in Hong Kong. I did not finish the video; I could never have imagined that such a thing would happen in Hong Kong. Everything is strange to me; it isn't the place I grew up anymore.

People around the world are criticizing the police for their treatment of the unarmed protesters. Police are supposed to protect people, rather than harm them. They are fighting for our future and that of the next generations. Some people ask why the protesters do not just give up. The answer: We don't want Hong Kong to be the same as China. In China, people cannot say a word about the Tiananmen massacre. And that is just one example. People in China are denied freedom of speech. A fundamental human right is withheld from these people. Once we abandon our principles, we do not get a second chance. In Hong Kong, people don't know if the revolution will succeed, but at least they are trying. All are risking their lives. Regardless of the danger or of their parents' strong opposition, the students still keep protesting against the government's decision. No matter what, they strive for justice. Whatever the outcome, it is going to be one hell of a fight. There is no way to predict the future, but if we never give in, that is half the battle. We hope only that we eventually get what we want.

***Krystal Fong** writes: "I am from Hong Kong and have been in the United States about a year. To write 'The Umbrella Revolution,' I read some Internet news stories and summarized everything I read." Krystal Fong studies at BMCC's Continuing Education & Workforce Development. Her teacher is Christine Green, and Rosa M. Rivera-Ciudad is the ESOL coordinator.*

Living in Ancient Times

Brian Liang

If you asked me where I would like to travel, Chastity Memorial Arches was never on my list. But a few years ago, when I was visiting Shanghai, China, my friend asked me, and because he was lovelorn and needed cheering up, I went with him.

We took an overnight train from Shanghai to Anhui Province. The Memorial Arches are in a typical northern China traditional village, desolate and decaying. Usually, the young people move out to the city if they have any opportunity.

There are seven Chastity Memorial Arches and some shrines in the village. The arches represent seven chaste women. Before we got in, some local women followed us, asking if we needed a tour guide to explain the history. I didn't think I needed one, but it seemed my emotional friend needed someone to explain to him what chastity is. So we got one.

The first stop was the shrine. The tour guide said this shrine was the only shrine that worships women in China. It didn't mean anything to me; there are millions of shrines in China. I didn't see how special this one was. But suddenly our guide spoke loudly: "In ancient times, the women had no standing in the village. Because the village was poor, after most boys grew up, they would get married, but they would go away to earn money and leave their wife and kids at home. The husbands would not come back if they did not earn any money. Even worse, if the men brought money home, they would return with a concubine—another wife. All the first wife could do was endure; here people were conservative. Even if the husband never came back or died, the women had no opportunity to remarry."

The guide was emotional; her face was red from speaking so loudly. I was surprised. Maybe she was local, and since she was a woman this had resonance for her? It wasn't her first day in this career. Why would she lose control? Maybe she was also in a bad situation? Or maybe her husband, like in ancient times, worked in another

city and lost contact? I looked at her. She looked 40-something, one of millions of faces. I wondered if it would have been better for her if she had been born in ancient times. At least she would have gotten a Chastity Memorial Arch.

But after I followed her to the arches and listened to her, I did feel bad for her. Even if she lived in the ancient times, she would have had no chance for her own arch, because to qualify, in addition to being a widow, she could not talk to any male except her own child for her whole life. It would have been even better if she had never seen any male for the rest of her life.

My friend was touched and kept asking questions. His curiosity gave our guide's career respect and radiance. Looking around the village, at the blue sky and the fuzzy mountain, we could be anywhere in China. The same people live in the same houses, with the same lives, the same emptiness and despair.

I was down in that moment; we are living in the modern world, but somehow it still seems like living in ancient times. We still have the same questions puzzling us. It doesn't matter how science and technology improve, and how good an education we have. If we are not able to control our lives and be independent, even building 10 Chastity Memorial Arches would not make us happy.



*A native of China, **Brian Liang** now lives in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. He has his own graphic design business. He writes: "Living here is like living in China. I don't have many chances to speak English because my neighbors are mostly from China." For about a year, he has been studying English at the Adult Learning Center of the New York City College of Technology, where Jay Klokker is his teacher. Gilberto Gerena is the director of adult education.*

September 11, 2001

Ruben Juarez

As usual, I was working in the factory on that date. I was listening to a morning talk show on my walkman. Then someone made a phone call to the radio station and told them that something had happened around the Twin Towers. He said, “A plane crashed around the World Trade Center.” He did not know exactly where; he just saw black smoke in the sky.

A few minutes later, the news started coming in. It was confusing, but after about five minutes they confirmed that a terrible tragedy had happened. I thought that it might be a joke because the hosts of that show are always making all kinds of jokes. Then I went to the back of the factory, where we could see the Twin Towers clearly from the windows. Some co-workers followed me and we saw the first tower engulfed in flames and a crowd of black smoke coming out from the tower.

Everybody was in shock. It was hard to believe. I don't remember the exact time, but after about 10 minutes the radio stations confirmed the bad news. Most of the reporters on the radio expressed their thoughts about a possible terrorist attack.

Then a second plane crashed into the other tower. In my workplace everybody was silent. We just looked at each other without saying a word. The news did not stop. We then heard that a third plane had crashed into the Pentagon. The reporters were not sure about how many planes were hijacked, but they said, “Another plane just crashed in Pennsylvania.”

We could not work anymore because everybody was paying attention to the news. And besides, we were scared. We were sent home at noon. On the street, people were astonished and scared; some were running, others were crying. Stores were closing their doors.

When I traveled on the subway, it was the same situation—everybody was silent or weeping. As we were crossing the Manhattan Bridge, people turned their heads, looking for the Twin Towers, but there was only an empty space with clouds of

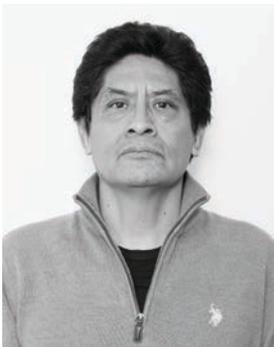
black smoke rising to the sky. Since that day, I think that people who live in New York City have been affected in many different ways.

At that time, I was attending ESOL classes in Chinatown. My teacher lost a son who worked in that area. She did not show up for about a month. I heard that her son was only missing and that she hoped they would find him in a hospital somewhere. She waited for almost a month, and then she gave up hope. She faced the truth that her son had died.

I don't remember how much time passed, but my classmates attended a church service in honor of my teacher's son. When she returned to the school, nobody asked anything about the tragedy because we didn't want to see her in pain or crying. She acted strangely, and everyone could feel her pain. After a couple of months she started to talk about her son, about what a responsible, kind person he was. Before 9/11, he suggested to her, "You should ask for your retirement, and I will help you to pay your bills in order that you can stop working." I haven't seen her since 2003, and I don't know anything about her now.

Some time later, I learned that the principal person responsible for that attack had been killed by the United States Seals. I think that my teacher, if she is alive, will have some relief for her pain. Killing Osama bin Laden won't bring back those people who died that day, but in some way, justice was done.

To those who lost their loved ones on 9/11, I wish peace and a long life.



***Ruben Juarez** emigrated from Mexico over 24 years ago. He has studied English at New York City adult education programs and is currently studying at the Consortium for Worker Education. He expresses gratitude to all of his teachers, especially Jackie Bain and Chuck Lee. He also thanks Sherry Kane, current program director, and Nancy Lorence, the previous director, who for many years gave him the encouragement to improve his life.*

Ibrahim Sings No More

A Syrian Refugee

This is a true story; all the Arab and foreign newspapers and magazines wrote about it.
The story goes:

Ibrahim Qashoush was a Syrian, 24 years old.

He sang motivational songs; he asked his people for freedom. He would sing “Leave, Bashar Assad” (the president of Syria).

That was one of the sayings from his home city during the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011.

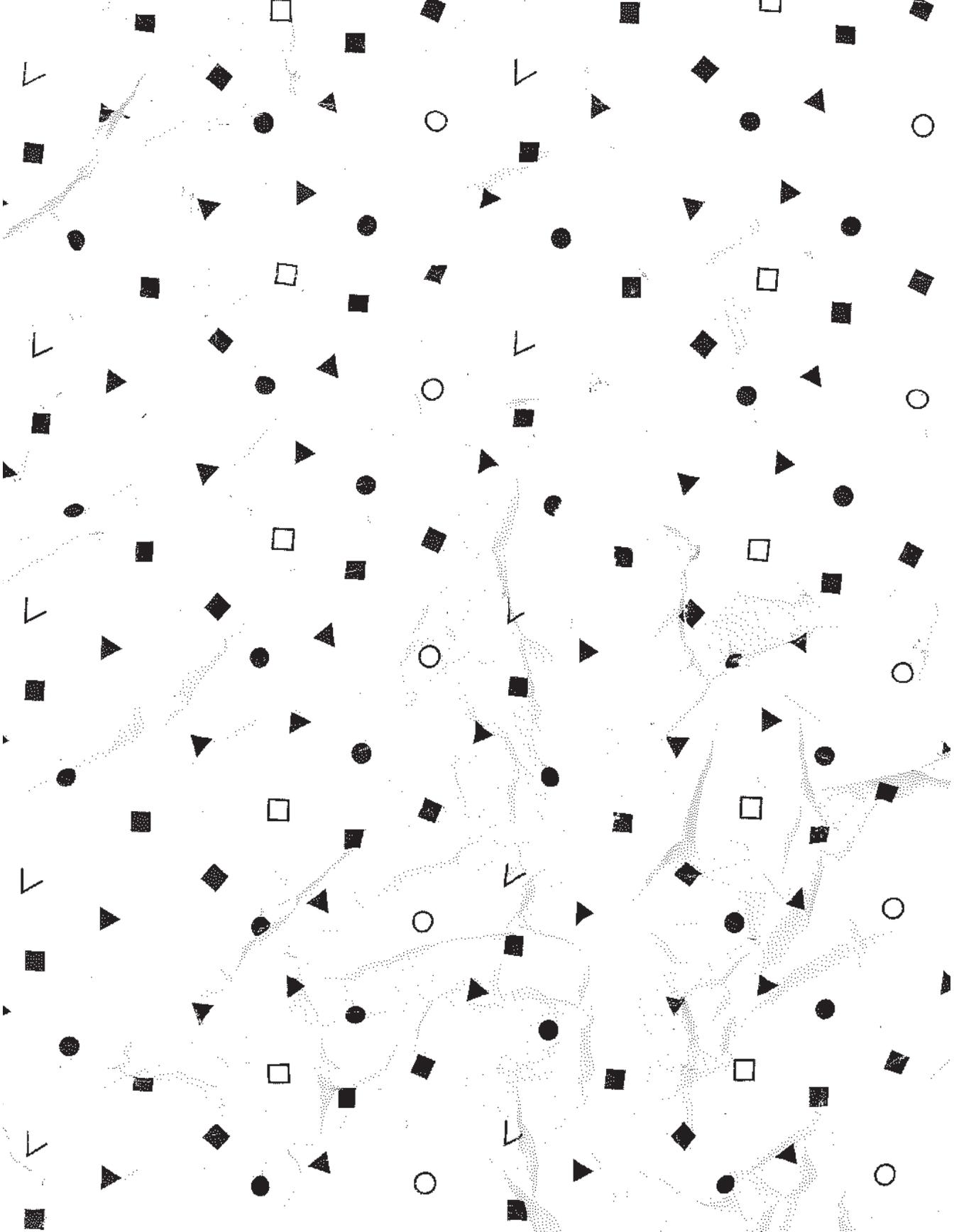
Ibrahim did not carry weapons, did not join armed cliques, but the singer and his songs bothered the Syrian government.

After just three days, the government caught him and put him in prison.

Before 24 hours had passed, the people found his body in the river. The Syrian regime cut his neck and removed his voice box. His mother cried, his friends cried, and all the Syrian people cried.

Now the prisons are housing thousands of prisoners.

The writer of this work has asked to remain anonymous, to protect himself and his family. A native of Damascus, Syria, he has been in New York City with his family for less than a year. He says he loves his ESOL class with site advisor Joanne Springstead at the New York Public Library’s St. George Adult Learning Center, and he has enjoyed making the acquaintance of people from so many different parts of the world.





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I Am the Queen

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“GOD GIVES BURDENS, ALSO SHOULDERS”

YIDDISH PROVERB

Recently, I had the pleasure of reading *The Literacy Review*, Volume 12. It’s a unique opportunity to become acquainted with creative works of people from different countries. It presented a vast variety of cultures and diversity of mentalities.

There I read a poem, “I Am the One,” written by Fatima Kanu from Sierra Leone. Actually, the poem consists of a long list of duties that Fatima has to fulfill in her everyday life. It touched me so much. Almost at every point, it was written about me. Until one day five years ago, I was like Fatima. I too was the one who woke up early in the morning and went to work; the one who took care of the house; the one who cleaned the house; the one who brought the money home; the one who did the laundry and cooking; the one who worked hard, and so on.

Then everything changed. I realized that I couldn’t haul such a load of “I am the one who . . .” anymore. I fell into hysterics. It happened spontaneously. I cried so bitterly. That had never happened to me before, and it worked. Suddenly, my husband, so “thick skinned” and always plunged into his business, became more attentive to me. Little by little, he released me from some of my household chores. He began to do the laundry, pick up the garbage, put the garbage bins on the edge of the sidewalk on the scheduled days, and put them back. Now he washes the dishes and cleans up our apartment. We do the shopping in turn. When I am cooking dinner, my husband always helps me. I couldn’t even imagine that one day when I returned from jogging, he would fix breakfast for me. After that day, it has happened quite often.

Since then, I feel like a queen. My husband and my son are my loyal subjects. My kingdom isn't vast, but nobody in my kingdom can disobey the queen. It's funny, and it cheers me up. So my family shows respect to me.

Luckily, I managed to shorten the list of my duties. Although I continue to work quite hard, now I stand tall, and I'm always chanting: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."



Iryna Chytsiakova writes: "I'm from Russia. I have lived in New York City since June 2003. I think I will study English for the rest of my life. When I first came to the United States, I worked very hard and only dreamed about college. My husband always told me, 'Wait, wait.' But time is running out fast. And now I am a student in the ESOL class at CUNY's 'City Tech,' and happy to be there. Never give up! It's never too late!" Iryna Chytsiakova's teacher is Jay Klokker.

The Big Tip

Mustapha Souibrat

When I got my TLC driver's license, I wanted to start working, but I was frightened because I didn't know the city well. At the same time, I didn't want the customers to complain. I was very hesitant.

One day my friend, who drives a taxi, asked me, "When will you start working as a taxi driver?"

I told him what I felt. He said, "Don't worry; just start. You will know everything by practice. If you keep waiting until you know the city well, you will never start. I have been working for more than 10 months, and I still don't know the city well, but practice makes me feel better." He encouraged me a lot. In fact, he pushed me to start driving.

"Okay, next week I'm going to start," I said.

I started Monday about 5 p.m. I chose the night shift because it has less traffic and fewer traffic cops. From 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., I was off duty. I just drove around the city, east to west and north to south. Around 7 p.m, I decided to pick up my first customer.

I saw a lot of hands waving for a taxi. My first customer must be a woman, I said to myself, because I thought women don't judge people, and they are kinder.

I saw two girls around 25 years old waving their hands, looking for a cab. I picked them up.

"Hi, where would you like to go?" I said.

They gave me the destination. It wasn't far, but I said, "I just want to let you know that you are my first customers. I still don't know the city well. If you know the best way to get there you can show me. If not, I am going to put it on my GPS, if you don't mind."

"Just keep going straight, then turn right on Third Street," one of them replied.

My face was showing that I was frightened. I feared losing my TLC driver's license if my customer complained.

When I got to the destination I was happy. I stopped. On the meter was only seven dollars. Before they gave me the money, I said, "Thank you for your help."

One of them rolled up the money and gave it to me. Meanwhile, she looked in my eyes and said, "You did great. Keep the change."

I did not look at the money at that time. I thought that it must be ten dollars.

When they left my cab, I looked at the money. It was only one dollar, I looked for them, but they had disappeared.

I laughed at myself and realized I didn't have to be frightened. Nothing was going to happen. If I didn't know the city well, my GPS would know it. From that time on, I felt confident, in control, and the work went as I wished.



***Mustapha Souibrat** worked as an electrical technician and a teacher in an Islamic school in Casablanca, Morocco. Now he lives in Brooklyn and works as a taxi driver. He writes: "Now I'm studying at the Adult Learning Center of CUNY's New York City College of Technology. I like playing soccer with my friends, traveling, hiking, reading books, and I love nature." Mustapha Souibrat's teacher at "City Tech" is Jay Klokker.*

Creating Opportunity

Anita George

I used to work for a company in Guyana called Banks DIH Limited. I worked there in 1994. While I was working there at the restaurant, a manager saw me and liked me, but I never liked him. One day, I passed in front of the man, and two other guys were standing at the office desk with him. He slapped me on my butt in front of his friends. I turned around and said, “Mr. Donrod, with all due respect, would you like anybody to slap your daughter’s butt?”

After that, there was no more peace on the job for me. He was doing all types of spiteful things to me. One morning, he came and said, “The next department is short of staff. They need someone to sell at the counter.” Out of 30 people, he chose me because he knew I couldn’t read or write. He was sending me there to embarrass myself or leave the job.

But when God is for you, no man can be against you. I went there with a big mind, and I made friends with a girl. She showed me every little thing on the job until I became a cashier. When the general manager came and saw me working as a cashier, he said, “If Ms. George can cashier, everyone else will have to learn, as well.” So he made all the kitchen staff learn to cashier. Because of me, everyone there had the opportunity to be promoted to cashier!

Anita George moved from Guyana to Brooklyn in 2012. She writes: “I am a very nice and quiet but also an ambitious person. I don’t like to sit back and wait for things to come to me. I am working towards my goal of learning to read and write at the Flatbush Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library. I want to encourage young people to go to school.” Luz Diaz is the literacy advisor, and Gladys Ortiz is the site supervisor at the Flatbush Learning Center.



Fashioning My World

Huworth Leonce

Growing up, life was tough. I came from a family of 12 and was the seventh sibling. I didn't like to wear raggedy clothing or torn shirts and pants, so I used to take the needle and thread. I replaced every button that would fall off my shirts or pants, and I would mend every torn area of my clothing. At times, I would mend my brothers' and sisters' torn shirts or school uniforms. My mom would sometimes ask me to sew something for her or my father. My father, may his soul rest in peace, would advise us, "It is always good for a man to have some kind of trade." He decided to send me to what we would call back home a "tailor shop." His very good friend Thomas worked for a big tailoring establishment, and oftentimes interns would be needed.

I was not happy with my father's decision for me to become a tailor. I began going to the tailor shop to learn the trade, but at age 17, I wanted excitement, lots of activities going on all around, like movies, hiking, and parties with girlfriends. The men at the shop were much older than I was, and they enjoyed themselves in a more mature way, such as drinking, smoking, and listening to music that was not my kind.

I started off attending regularly and tried to learn as much as I could, but being there each day, I became very frustrated and boredom began to set in. Soon, in the mornings when I left the house, I pretended to go to the tailor shop. But instead, I set my own agenda by going to visit my friends or going to the park and sitting there for practically the entire day until it was time to go home.

I continued this practice of disobedience for about three weeks. Then one day, my father asked me how I was doing.

I answered, "Good. Everything is going fine."

He asked, "How is Tom?"

I said, "He is fine."

Then my father asked, "Did you see him today?"

I replied yes, and that was that, not another word. My father knew I was lying.

The following day I went to the shop because I started to feel guilty, and I tried to make everything look good, but when I got there, my father's friend asked me if my father had talked to me. My reply was yes. He then asked what we talked about. I did not answer because I felt I didn't owe him any explanation. He thought I was being rude, so I left the shop, never to return. Three days later, my father asked me the same questions in the same order, and I answered in the same manner.

My father was a very strict man, but I was not afraid of him. He looked at me and said, "Thomas said he has not seen you for the past three weeks."

I then boldly told him, "That's because I was not there for the past three weeks." He left me alone with his words of wisdom about having a trade, needing the hands-on learning of a skill, and having a plan B. The lecture went on.

I began to look for another job. I started off working in a supermarket and looking for better wages, applied to another supermarket. I met one of my friends whom I knew from before, and he asked if I would like to go to school. "What type of school?" I asked.

He then said it was really an institute. "I can get you an application if you want to apply," he said.

My reply was, "Cool."

When he brought me the forms to be filled out, I had to make a quick decision because it was close to the deadline. I realized it was a trade school that offered all types of trades including tailoring. I filled out the forms and posted them. My friend began to tell me that having a trade would give me a bright future, which would one day lead me to having my own business. He said that I could become a good businessman. I laughed because he reminded me of the words my father said to me.

I attended The John Donaldson Technical Institute on the island of Trinidad and Tobago for two years. After I graduated, I set out on my own, having learned the trade of how to make clothes. I guess my father would have been proud.



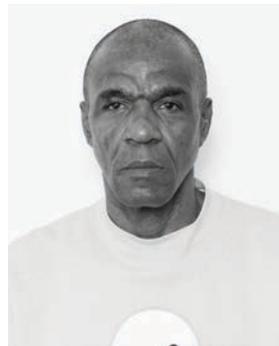
Huworth Leonce, born in Trinidad and Tobago, has been in the United States for 14 years. He attends the Central Library Adult Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library, where his teacher is the site manager, Winsome Pryce-Cortes. He writes: “I love worshipping God, cooking, dancing, singing, and making clothes.”

Refinishing

Marlon Lennard

Wood has no future. It saves all scratches. At 23, I helped a woman sand her table down to the grain. I touched every inch of that table, used a belt-sander but took the corners by hand, not wanting to burn through. I had it clean in days and then set to charcoaling. I could count my years in its surface as the tiny histories of the people who had eaten there vanished.

***Marlon Lennard**, age 52, was born in Kingston, Jamaica and has lived in the United States for nine years. He writes: "I am intelligent, trustworthy, helpful, and friendly. I can cook really well, especially Jamaican cuisine like ackee and saltfish with fried dumplings and potato pudding." Marlon Lennard studies at the New York Public Library's Bronx Library Center. Barbara Martinez is the literacy advisor, and Emily Skalet is the community liaison assistant.*



A Day at Work

Linda Otero

I had a good day at work today. I work in a school cafeteria with nine other people. As we were working, we were joking and laughing. There was no music in the background there, but one lady setting up the food trays sang out my name, “Li—i—i—in-da,” so I started dancing to the rhythm, and we laughed. All around us were the sounds of trays plopped on the table, water running, dishes placed on the racks, and the sounds of people working together and getting along. We were the music today.



Linda Otero was born in Puerto Rico but has lived in New York City since she was a baby. She writes: “I have two children and a granddaughter. I would like to travel and to learn how to crochet.” She studies at the Seward Park Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, where her teacher is site advisor Terry Sheehan.



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Beyond Numbers

Hiroyoshi Itabashi

The greater numbers become, the harder people find it to take them seriously. For instance, during the last two decades, more than 10 million people in the world got cancer each year, according to the World Health Organization. When I was younger, in fact, those numbers were not a reality for me. This issue was trivial for me until my parents were included in the statistics.

My father died of lung cancer when I was 17 years old. He ran a company that produced clothing in Japan. Although he was very busy, he taught me how to play baseball and took my mother, younger sister, and me to many fantastic places, such as mountains and amusement parks. He was a reliable and broad-minded father. While he was in the hospital, my mother stayed beside him every night. She wanted to be with him as much as possible. However, I avoided going there because I was too scared to see him, who once had been very tough and strong, getting weaker. His last words to me were: “Look after your sister and my wife instead of me.” After he passed away, I regretted that I had not talked with him much more.

Five years later, my mother got breast cancer. I didn’t want to make the same mistake. I applied to my company for nursing care leave and stayed in the hospital room with my sister. We enjoyed sharing our precious memories. We promised that we would go on a trip when our mother got out of there. The room became like our home, which was filled with laughter and love. As days went by, our mother started losing her words with the effects of medication. Her hair started falling out, and her eyes stopped focusing. But we kept talking to her and at the same time we gently stroked her thin arms, sitting on opposite sides of the bed. We wanted her not to forget: “We are with you, always.” She kept trying to say something by grasping our hands. After a few months of hospital stay, she took her last breath, watched over by us. Strangely enough, that day coincided with my father’s birthday.

In world news, we see the numbers that show how many people have ended their lives in natural disasters, accidents, incidents, and diseases every day. Now I know: Various kinds of stories and emotions exist behind each one of the numbers. Every time I see the numbers, I can imagine the individuals beyond the numbers even though I do not know them.



*Born in Japan, **Hirooyoshi Itabashi** has been living in New York City for six months. He studies with ESOL teacher Katherine Perry at the New York Public Library's Adult Learning Center in Harlem. Hirooyoshi Itabashi writes, "My teacher's lectures are illuminating for me, and my English is getting better day by day." The hub manager is Elke Stappert.*

My Three Little Angels

Fabienne France

My three little angels are named Christopher, Romaine, and Francesca. Christopher is my first-born. He is quiet when it comes to being around people he doesn't know. He's sneaky when he's around his brother, doing things he is not supposed to do and then telling me that his brother did them. He well knows not to do this. He loves to make people laugh by dancing and telling jokes. Romaine is the middle child. He loves being near me. He wants everyone to pay attention to him. If you don't, he will try everything to make you look at him. Francesca is the baby. She is light, and she loves to run and play. Even though she has epilepsy, she still enjoys having fun. She is a fighter. My children are my world; they are the air I breathe. Without them, I'd be lost. My angels show me so much love. Every time I look at them, I push myself to become a better person.

The past couple of months, I was so down and lost that I couldn't think straight. I had lost my job, and I didn't know what to do or where to start. One day, I stayed in my room thinking about everything that had happened to me till I started crying. My son Romaine came and asked, "Mommy why are you crying? Are you hurt?"

I told him, "I'm just sad."

He looked at me and said, "I love you so much. Don't cry no more. You have me."

I looked at him and saw everything I couldn't see before. I have three beautiful angels in my life who love me for me. That's when I knew I had to get my High School Equivalency diploma to become a better person, for myself and for my children. Before, I used to look all around for love, but it was right in front of my face: my three little angels, my pride and joy.

Now I have found a job, and I'm going to a Pre-HSE class at the New Lots Learning Center. I work in an optical lab making glasses for doctors and entering data. Coming to Pre-HSE class twice a week feels so good, and I'm learning so much about myself and how I can become a better person. I feel so light and happy. I'm doing it for my angels and me.

***Fabienne France** was born in Haiti, moved to Brooklyn in first grade and has been living there ever since. She was drawn to the Pre-High School Equivalency program at the New Lots Learning Center at the Brooklyn Public Library because she wanted to pass the test to set an example for her three beautiful children. Her instructor is Alison Halpern and the site supervisor is Jean Buonacore.*

A Christmas Story

Marzia Messina

Last year, a few months before Christmas, my seven-year-old daughter, with her most serious expression, asked my husband: “Dad! Look me straight in my eyes and tell me if Santa Claus is real!”

My husband was surprised, and answered with another question: “Why do you ask me that?” He looked at me for support.

Someone at school had told her that maybe it was the parents who brought the presents, not Santa Claus.

It wasn't the first time that our daughter had shown doubt. But now it was different. She demanded the truth!

In a blink of an eye, we decided to tell her the true story. First, we congratulated her for arriving at this important moment. We explained that parents wait for this moment. It means that their children are growing up. That with their doubts and reasoning, they can discover new things. We told her it's also an indication of her very good intelligence.

This is one of the most important transitions in the lives of children, so we spent a lot of time answering her questions. She listened very carefully and the expressions on her face changed continuously. At first, she was a bit disappointed, then confused, then surprised. But finally, her face became proud and satisfied.

The next day was Veterans Day, and the schools were closed. So my daughter and I went to a bookstore, and she bought her first Christmas present for her dad!

Marzia Messina, a professional photographer, came to the United States from Rome, Italy in 2012 with her husband, also a photographer, and their daughter, Penelope. Marzia Messina enjoys learning English at the New Americans Welcome Center of the Prospect Park YMCA. “They give people an excellent opportunity. I like the other students in the class, and the teacher, Sharon Gintzler, is very professional.” Nabila Khan is the coordinator of the Center.



Feeling Scared

Kecia Askew

Feeling scared
Of being alone
Feeling scared
I'm feeling down
Feeling worthless

Feeling scared
As I feel the wind crashing down my feet
Just feeling weak
As I couldn't speak
Feeling scared

Feeling scared
Just feeling emotional
Even in the roughest moments
Feeling speechless

Feeling scared
As I cry
Inside I'm screaming
I'm feeling my feet bleeding
Feeling so deeply
I couldn't breathe
I couldn't see
My heart has been used
So sad, but it's true
It hurts my soul
As I can't let go
All these words I'm caving in
I can't stop my suffering

Feeling scared
As I'm feeling down
Just feeling the ground tumble
Falling down to the ground
I couldn't hear a single sound
Just feeling scared

Feeling scared
I need something to hold onto
When I break down
I lie down in my bed
With my room feeling cold
Feeling scared

Feeling scared
When I'm used
Just feeling the abusive words
Feeling heavy weight on my shoulders
Feels like I'm dying
With my mom using drugs
Just as she had me alone
I had no one to lean on

Feeling scared
With my heart beating
So fast
That I couldn't last
Just feeling scared



***Kecia Askew**, age 26, lives in the Bronx, where she grew up. She studies at the Bronx Library Center of the New York Public Library, where the site advisor is Barbara Martinez and Emily Skalet is the community liaison assistant. Kecia Askew writes: "I've been writing poems since I was 12 years old. Poetry expresses my thoughts and feelings. I am studying to get my High School Equivalency diploma, and I want to go to college to study psychology."*

Sometimes It's Okay to Forget

Joann Wilson

My cousin Thelma is so forgetful. She forgets that I called her. She forgets why she's angry but stays angry no matter how silly the reason. I told my other cousin to be patient. Our Thelma is 90 years old. After all these years, she's earned the right to be forgetful!

I just hope people are patient with me if I get to be that old.

Joann Wilson was born in the United States and has lived in New York City for many years. She is a good cook and is learning to crochet. She studies at the Harlem Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, where her teacher is Yolanda Rodriguez, her tutor is Meg Busch, and the site advisor is Sismur Araujo.



Just Smile

Robert Nowak

Every morning I open my eyes, and I smile because I am still alive. When I walk into my kitchen and see my daughter's green eyes, that makes me smile. I hear my grandson in another room. Then he hugs me and says very important words, "I love you grandpa," and I know I will be in a good mood all day.

Then it's time to go to work. It will be a very busy day, but I say to myself, "We will do it!" I go there not just to work, but to see my co-workers, who are also my friends. We all come from different countries, have different traditions and speak different languages, but I smile because we met here in the United States.

I would like to say that a smile is a very simple thing but makes people feel happy. When you see smiling people, just smile back. You don't always have to have a reason; just smile.



***Robert Nowak** immigrated to the United States from Poland. He has a lovely family and lives with his wife, children, and grandson. He is very grateful to have a job, and supporting his family makes him very happy. Employed at a famous Polish restaurant in Brooklyn, he also loves to learn new American recipes and cook for his family and friends. He is a student at the Adult Learning Center of the New York City College of Technology, where his teacher is Alvard Berberyan.*

Learning How to Cook

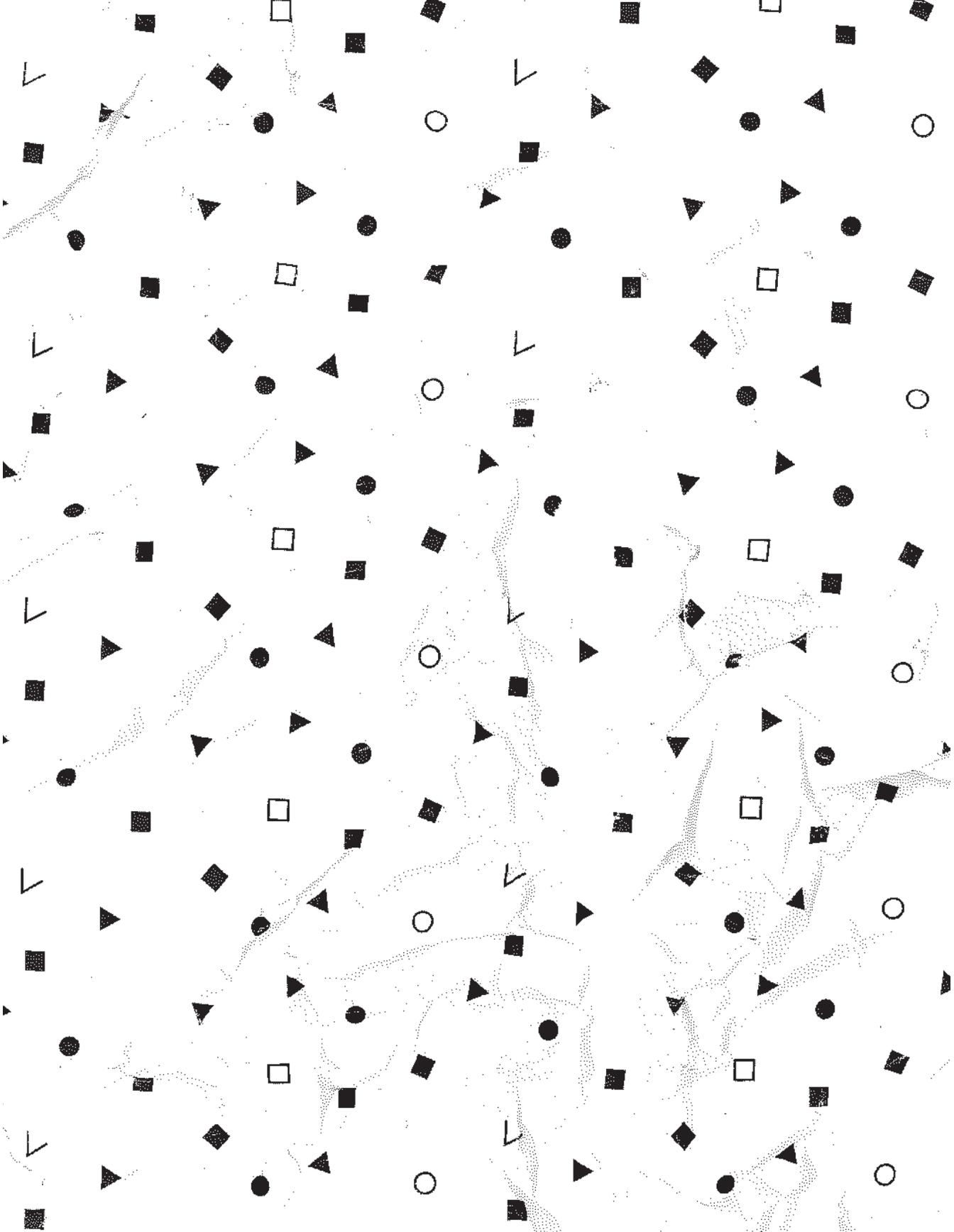
Julieanna Charles

I was 12 years old when my mother called me into the house to teach me how to cook. It was a hot summer day. All the children from the neighborhood were outside playing in water from the fire hydrant. I didn't want to go inside; I wanted to play with my friends, but Mom yelled my name, and with hesitation, I came in. Mom decided to teach me how to cook chicken and peas and rice. I could not believe how my day was turning out. It was 90 degrees, and this woman had a chicken in my face. Oh God, what did I do to deserve this?

For some reason, Mom was enjoying herself. Mom started by showing me how to clean the chicken. I had been watching Mom and Grandma cook for 12 years, so I knew what to do, but Mom had always been too scared of my burning myself. After 20 minutes, I couldn't take the heat of the kitchen anymore, so I told my mother my secret: "Mom, I know how to cook! Daddy and I spend a lot of our time together cooking. I love that you want to teach me, but it is too hot for cooking. I love you, Mom!"

Julieanna Charles was born in Tobago 33 years ago and has lived in the United States for 20 years. She writes: "I'm a struggling young woman trying to get to the next level." She studies at the Bedford Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library, working with volunteer tutor Bridget McLaughlin. The site supervisor is Susan Knott.







Surprises

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The Contest

June Lau Chan

Sai Mui lived on a farm, and her best friends were the animals who lived there with her. She learned many things from them and they also learned important things from her. She enjoyed seeing the fish swim up to greet her when she dropped their food on the water. She learned to swim by imitating the frogs. When the hens laid eggs, they would run to her and flap their wings proudly, saying, “Kok, Kok, Kok! Kok, Kok, Kok!” That’s how she knew she would have fresh eggs for her breakfast that morning. She learned loyalty from her three dogs, Lucky, Dolly, and Cash. She learned how to play cat and mouse by watching her two mischievous cats, Mimi and Mickey, chase mice. Sai Mui returned the favor by teaching them to jump high.

But the parrot Jack was her very best friend. She taught him to speak many words; he was smart and could imitate sounds quickly. When Jack wanted to eat, he would call out, “Toe or la! Toe or la!” (I am hungry!) Sai Mui would hurry to bring a bowl of melon seeds for him.

One day as she watched Jack rapidly crack open the shells with his beak, spit them out, and eat the seeds inside, she suddenly reached over, took a seed for herself and popped it into her mouth. Jack stopped eating for a second and looked at Sai Mui, as if to say, *What do you think you’re doing? This is my food!* Sai Mui laughed and grabbed a handful of seeds and began to crack them, spit out the shells, and eat the tasty insides as fast as she could. Jack wasn’t going to let her get away with this. He grabbed and cracked and gobbled as fast as he could, with one eye on Sai Mui, who was doing the same thing.

After that time, Jack and Sai Mui had a running competition to see who could shell and eat more quickly. At the beginning, the winner was always Jack, because he was an expert in peeling the shells. When Jack won the competition, he would spread his colorful wings wide, extend his head proudly, and let out a cry of victory.

The chickens did a happy dance to congratulate him. Sai Mui wanted to be a winner, too, so out of Jack's sight she practiced peeling the melon seeds. Sai Mui's older brother taught her how to use her front teeth and her tongue together to peel the melon seeds more quickly. Sai Mui practiced this for a few weeks, during which time she stopped competing with Jack. When she decided she might be fast enough to beat Jack, Sai Mui challenged him again. This time Sai Mui was full of confidence, and she whipped through the seeds like lightning. Jack was so shocked he stared at Sai Mui and forgot to crack his seeds. Finally Sai Mui was the champion! She screamed and jumped for joy. The dogs and cats ran excitedly all around the house, barking and meowing. They were celebrating Sai Mui's victory.

Jack, Lucky, Dolly, Cash, Mimi, Mickey, and the fish and frogs were wonderful companions to Sai Mui as she grew up. They helped make her childhood happy and safe. Those friends will live in her mind for the rest of her life.



June Lau Chan writes: "I am 65 years old. I was born in Hong Kong, and I lived in Japan. Eight years ago, I followed my husband to the United States, and we now live in the Big Apple, where our two sons graduated from college. I am a curious person, so I love to do a lot of things to enrich my life." At the Aguilar Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, June Lau Chan's writing tutor is Lynda Myles, and the site advisor is Elaine Sohn.

Baby Grand under the Bridge

Cara Montana

I set out on my bicycle for the East River on a balmy June day. Peddling along the river's edge with a cool breeze coming off the water, I was enjoying the ride and taking in the scenery, as I often do.

When I neared the Brooklyn Bridge, I saw a baby grand piano on the sliver of a beach under the bridge. I thought it must be an optical illusion. *Of course*, I thought, *that couldn't be a piano. That's impossible, ridiculous, and quite laughable, really.*

But there it was: a beautiful black piano set on a sandbar. Like dozens of others, I climbed over the fence to gawk at the curiosity; many folks were taking photos. The Mason & Hamlin baby grand had become an impromptu tourist attraction.

*Born in Chicago, **Cara Montana** now attends the Tompkins Square Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, where Terry Sheehan is the site advisor. Once shy and fearful, Cara Montana gained confidence when a poem she wrote "was one of the few selected from nearly 200 entries for a performance reading at a concert hall, and I attended the event as a guest of honor." She went on: "Fear, you're not invited to the show. There's no seating here for you."*

The Giant Man

Anahit Mkrtchyan

One day, I was looking for a bus stop and could not find it. Then, all of a sudden, I came across three healthy-looking giant men.

I went and asked in broken English, “Where is the bus stop?”

One of them looked at me and said, “You are not afraid of me?”

I did not understand what he said, but I still said “No!”

Everyone started laughing out loud; then he offered to take me to the bus stop. He showed me there, then said, “As a matter of fact, you are not afraid of me,” and everyone laughed and waved to me as they left.



Anahit Mkrtchyan writes: “I came to the United States from Armenia four years ago and have been living with my mother and three sisters. My son has remained in my country. I really like this country.” Anahit Mkrtchyan studies English at the Queens Library’s Peninsula Adult Learning Center, where the center manager is Barbara Miller.

Because of an Insect

Ana Sofia Abreu Pineda

Until recently, I lived in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. One evening, my sister, my boyfriend, some friends, and I went out for drinks on Lincoln Avenue, a busy street on weekends, to shoot the breeze. We piled into four cars since almost all of us lived on the same street, except for one friend. My sister, my boyfriend and I offered to give this friend a ride while the others were waiting for us on a safer and quieter street.

On the way to drop off our friend, my sister and I were sitting in the back, while my other friend sat in the front seat with my boyfriend, who was driving. My sister, who has a terrible fear of cockroaches, saw that one had crept into the car. No one spotted it except her. Since we didn't see anything, we told my sister there was no cockroach and she should chill.

I don't know why it is that those who are afraid of any animals or insects are always those who feel or see them before everyone else. Is there a sixth sense that signals danger? Or is there some special connection between fear and animals or insects? Is this phobia really rational? In my sister's case, I think it is because our grandmother's place, where she grew up, was crawling with cockroaches, and my aunt, the one who actually raised her, was fearful of cockroaches and passed down this fear. My sister had lived with this fear throughout her childhood.

We got to my friend's house, said goodbye and left, and my sister got in the front seat. While driving on the bustling avenue, my boyfriend spotted the cockroach walking on the dashboard, but he kept mum, so as not to spook my sister. Silence prevailed, but my sister did see it! She started screaming, and she tried to open the door of the car, but my boyfriend grabbed her hand and with his other hand swerved the wheel abruptly to the center island, for fear she would throw herself on the street with the car in motion. The friends who were waiting watched in horror how close we came to a car crash. When we arrived, my boyfriend caught the

cockroach and killed it. But he really wanted to kill my sister, who almost caused an accident because of a harmless cockroach. Our friends arrived and didn't say any words to express their dismay with my sister's overblown reaction.

From that day on, we always checked cars before my sister rode. And today she has had to put her fear aside, because she has a baby and she has to defend it from those insects. Sooner or later we all have to face our fears as well as learn to master them and feel confident in ourselves again.

So my fearful sister has become a fearless mother.



***Ana Sofia Abreu Pineda** was born 26 years ago in the Dominican Republic. She came to the United States in August 2014, with a bachelor's degree in business administration. She is currently attending an ESOL class in the DACA program at Bronx Community College. Her teacher is Mihaela Ghiuzeli. Her dream is to become a vet, like her father in Santo Domingo.*

Sunflowers

Mary Heron

Sunflowers transformed her kitchen into a garden on the walls. It was beautiful to look at. She had small ones and big ones; she also made drapes to match her walls. Everything in her home had a design of sunflowers.

When her family came to visit, they loved to see all of the sunflowers. Even her tablecloth and plates had pictures of sunflowers. Her sugar bowl and salt and pepper shakers were made in the form of sunflowers. There was no end to the madness of what she had in the rest of her house. They called her “The Sunflower Lady.”

Mary Heron, mother of three and grandmother of four, lives in Brooklyn. She is a member of the Salem Missionary Baptist Church and a community activist for the Glenwood Houses. She writes: “I am a lifetime student, and I have dedicated myself to learning something new each and every year. I am grateful to the staff of the Brooklyn Public Library at Eastern Parkway, and to my teacher, Neé Eagle, who has been a true inspiration and helped me tremendously to become a good storyteller.” The site advisor is Donna Alleyne.

Another English

Abdelhamid Annemer

In my first days in the United States, I looked for where I could learn the English language. Quickly, I found a school in my neighborhood. My wife and I were well received. The first day of class began with the students introducing themselves to one another. All of our classmates communicated easily except us.

At home, my wife asked me, “Why did these people come to learn English? They already speak very well.”

I answered her, “Maybe they are at a high level.”

But the next day, I asked the same question to the teacher. The teacher answered: “All your classmates were speaking Russian among themselves.”

At that time, I didn’t recognize the difference between English and Russian.



Abdelhamid Annemer emigrated from Fez, Morocco four and a half years ago. He writes: “Thank God my dream has become a reality with a family reunion with my son, Abdelaziz.” Aspiring to communicate better and to find a job, he studies at the Bay Ridge branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, where the program advisor is Lora Rosado. Haniff Touissant is the ESOL and BE coordinator.

Regional Dialect

Sumitra Sen

I used to live in Chittagong, a commercial, financial, and industrial hub of Bangladesh. The city and its airports were a vital base for American and British forces during the Burma Campaign in World War II. The administration of Bangladesh is divided into seven major regions called divisions. My story is about two different divisions and two regional dialects. I believe a particular group of people are defined by everything including language, knowledge, beliefs, art, love, moral customs, traditions, religion, and habits. Language is one medium that we can use to express ourselves and communicate with others, and Bengali is my “Mother Tongue.” However, sometimes language can create a terrible situation if you cannot understand it completely.

The dialects of the Bengali language are part of the Eastern Indo-Aryan language group of the Indo-European language family. Although these languages are mutually intelligible with neighboring dialects of Bengali, they lack mutual intelligibility with the standard Bengali language and sometimes would not be understood by a native speaker of standard Bengali. Some of these dialects are sometimes considered languages in their own right.

There is a division called Sylhet. Sylhet is considered one of the most picturesque and archaeologically-rich regions in South Asia. The burgeoning economy has contributed to the regional attractions of landscapes filled with fragrant orange and pineapple gardens and tea plantations.

One time, all of my friends went on vacation in Sylhet. They were excited and also hungry, so they went to a restaurant near their rest house and ordered some breakfast. The main menu for breakfast is chicken curry and puri. Puri means bread. The ingredients are flour and salt. The bread is rolled out in a small circle, then deep fried in vegetable oil. While deep frying, it puffs up like round balls of a golden brown color.

The problem started when my friends ordered. They said, “Waiter, we need some puri.” The waiter and the other people in the restaurant got so angry that my friends thought everybody was coming to kill them, but they didn’t know what was going on and what their fault was. Some people said they were going to shoot them. In a short time, a big crowd of people surrounded them. They were so afraid, and at last they understood that it was their fault and they asked forgiveness. They didn’t know that while in the Chittagonian regional dialect, “puri” means “round ball crispy bread,” in the Sylhet regional dialect, “puri” means “girl” or “virgin.” That was the misunderstanding and a bitter experience for them.

I think sometimes regional customs or dialects can create great problems. If you want to visit Sylhet, in Bangladesh, don’t say, “I need some puri.”

Sumitra Sen writes: “I came from Bangladesh in April 2014. I have bachelor and master degrees in sociology. In Bangladesh, I was a teacher, and this was a great time in my life. Now I don’t know when I will achieve a good position; it’s a hard time in my life.” Sumitra Sen studies English at the Bronx Library Center of the New York Public Library, where the site advisor is Barbara Martinez and the community liaison assistant is Emily Skalet.

Sin City Surprise

Parvinder Kaur

About a year ago, while my husband, two-year-old son, and I were visiting my brother-in-law in Salt Lake City, my husband decided to take me and our child to Las Vegas on a three-day trip. Las Vegas is a magnificent city, but my in-laws call it “Sin City.” I don’t know why it is called “Sin City,” but maybe it is because people go crazy gambling there.

When we reached the hotel, my husband told me to handle the check-in process with the receptionist while he took the car to the hotel parking lot. In the middle of checking in, one of the receptionists asked me, “Do you want *something* in the room?” I did not understand the word he used, so I said, “Excuse me?” He repeated his question. This went on three or four times, but I still could not understand what he asked. To save myself from further embarrassment, I finally told him “Yes.” I figured he was asking me if I wanted some refreshments served in the room since it was such a hot day.

When my husband joined us in the lobby, a porter showed us to our room, carrying a large rectangular brown box in his hands. Once in the room, he started to open the box, and I began to panic. I thought it was a brand-new TV, and the hotel was going to charge us extra. I was also afraid that my husband was going to be angry with me. When the box was opened, there was something other than a TV in it, but I did not recognize what it was.

The porter started to assemble the object in front of us. It was rectangular, and approximately four feet long. Judging by its size, it seemed to be something for our son, Arpit. Arpit was so excited to see the action unfold in front of him that he told me, “Thank you, Mamma,” thinking I had bought a new toy for him. Even though I had never seen anything like that in my life, I knew it was not a toy.

After the porter had left the room, I asked my husband what the mysterious object was. My husband explained that it was a *crib*, a small bed specially made

for infants and young kids, and he was amazed that I had asked for one from the receptionist.

In India, we do not have separate beds for our small children. Parents share the same bed with them. I learned a lesson that day: If I want to live in this country, I have to improve my English and understand the differences between the cultures and traditions of India and the United States.



***Parvinder Kaur** has lived in New York for almost two years with her husband and their son. She holds a master's degree in computer application and worked for two years as a computer lecturer in Punjab, India. She writes, "I am a homemaker now, but I want to get a job again in the future." She gives special thanks to all her teachers and tutors, and Tsansiu Chow, the library literacy center manager, for helping her at the Queens Library's Steinway Adult Learning Center.*



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The Immigration Officer Asked Me

Saadia Aboulfid

I was asked, Where are you coming from?

I answered, I ran away from the war in my country.

I was asked, Why did you choose to come here?

I answered, Because they accept political refugees.

I was asked, Why do you look so slim?

I answered, Because we had no food to eat, and we could not go to buy food.

I was asked, Why are you wearing dark glasses?

I answered, Because I'm not used to seeing the light. We do not have electricity.

We always use a candle and stay in the dark.

The officer looked at me with a painful look, and he said:

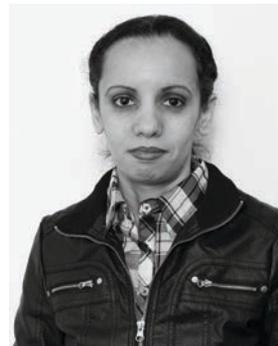
I will accept you as a political refugee.

We will give you some money to buy a bed to sleep and food to eat, water to drink, and clothes to wear. Are you happy now?

He stamped my passport and wished me good luck with a huge smile.

Now I can see the light.

Saadia Aboulfid, age 35, was born in Morocco. She came to the United States in 2009 and lives in Lindenhurst, Long Island. She is married. She loves fitness sports and enjoys reading romance novels. Her teacher at the CLIP program of York Community College is Stephanie Mueller, and the site advisor is Hamid Kherief. Saadia Aboulfid plans to study education when she begins college in 2015.



Secret

Juliet Parris

One of the saddest times in my life was when my brother Michael killed himself. This was a pain I would not wish on my worst enemy. Michael was my favorite brother, and he always sent me letters and postcards for my birthday. He did not know my secret: I couldn't read or write.

In those days, I had two enemies who followed me around everywhere I went. My enemies' names were Fear and Pride. When Michael died, I went to my nightstand and took out the letters that my brother wrote to me. I couldn't read them, so I started to cry. Fear and Pride showed up again. Why did I let in Fear and Pride again? I did not want to ask my daughter to read my brother's letters to me, so again Fear and Pride showed up. I felt as low as if I were a kid. I missed receiving letters from my brother. I still felt so sad.

Two years ago, I decided to go back to school to learn to read and write. Now I can read and write a little better, so this time I was finally able to read my brother's letters. I finally beat Fear and Pride.



Juliet Parris, born in Guyana 51 years ago, has lived in the United States for 42 years. She writes: "I am nice and kind-hearted. I like to read and write, and to clean, cook, and bake. I have no patience with people who look down on me. I think that I am a beautiful person." Juliet Parris studies at the Bedford Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library, where the site advisor is Susan Knott.

My Transformations

Ardelle (Dellie) Mitchell

My life changed in 2012. It was a new year, so that means a new beginning. I had just turned 21 on January 18. My family threw me a surprise birthday party. From what I was told, I had a great time. Around this time, my son was a year old. Also around this time, I was attending Newtown High School to get my diploma and living with my mother in Jamaica, Queens. I developed a virus in early February 2012. I went to New York Hospital twice and was misdiagnosed, leaving the hospital with a fever of 103 for two weeks. The crisis started on February 21, 2012.

On February 21, my mother came home from her job as a postal worker in the Bronx. I was very sick. Everything I tried to eat, I would throw back up. The only thing I was taking in was water. I could barely walk, so I was peeing in my bed. My mother came in that night and tried to help me to the bathroom. We started walking into the living room, but I lost my balance, fell, and hit my face on the edge of a wooden table. I didn't scream or cry; I just lay there, staring at the ceiling. That's when my mother called the ambulance, and I was rushed to Jamaica Hospital and taken in immediately. When I arrived at Jamaica Hospital, one doctor wanted to put me in a psychiatric ward because he didn't recognize my symptoms. That's when another doctor said, "No!" He recognized my symptoms. I was admitted into the hospital and was diagnosed with tuberculosis meningitis of the brain. The next thing everyone knew, I slipped into a coma.

I was in a coma for three weeks. While in a coma, everyone was saying I was responding with my eyes closed. The doctors would ask me to squeeze their hands, and I did. But I don't recall doing any of that. I remember being in front of an audience dancing to Deitrick Haddon's song "Well Done." I also remember walking in a field with my father, who had been dead for two years. My father and I were walking in a field, and then I stopped. On my right side was my father and a hand

coming down. Just when I turned to take the hand, I heard little kids playing and having fun. I started to watch them play; then I noticed a little boy who looked just like me. My father said, “That’s my son, Victor.” I turned and said, “I want to go with him; I want to go with Victor.” Then I came out of the coma.

My mother said she explained to me what happened. I wrote on a piece of paper, “Thank You!” My family was happy that I came out of the coma. While in the hospital, I had to learn how to walk, talk, eat, my numbers, and my alphabet. I was admitted into the hospital on February 21, 2012. I was well enough to leave the hospital and go home on April 11, 2012. I completed my treatment in nine months. By November 2012, I was done with my treatment and completely healthy. In the year 2012, I went from 130 pounds to 90 pounds to 162 pounds.

Now I am 23 years old. I am fully healthy. My son is now four years old and in school, and I gave birth to a healthy baby girl on July 28, 2014. The only things I have left from 2012 are my tracheotomy scar, a shunt scar, a messed-up left eye, and long- and short-term memory loss.

I am not sad for my experience or scars. I am a very happy person because I made it through. I enjoy this change in my life!



***Ardelle (Dellie) Mitchell** is 24 years old and lived in Queens for 22 years, moving to the Bronx two years ago. She is a Pre-High School Equivalency student at Phipps Neighborhoods Opportunity Center, where her teacher is Gale Shangold. “My future goals and dreams are to become a massage therapist and have a great life for my children. I have recovered from tuberculosis meningitis of the brain and am looking forward to a great future.”*

Our Journey

Obdulia Ambros

My son was developing normally. He interacted, smiled, and was able to imitate other babies. At the age of 16 months, he was saying five words, which concerned his pediatrician, who said that he was supposed to be saying 20 words or more. She referred him to Early Intervention (a program for children younger than three to help them with any developmental delay). I didn't accept the need to put him in the program. I told her that my boy needed more time, and with my help he would improve. Two months passed, and after the vaccines he spoke less and less, at which time I accepted Early Intervention. The evaluators—a psychologist, a teacher, and occupational, physical, and speech therapists—came to my house to evaluate him, and all agreed that he was fine—he only needed 30 minutes of speech therapy a week. My pediatrician said this therapy was too little, and she was suspecting something else, perhaps autism. The incredible thing is that the evaluators, with all their experience and knowledge, couldn't diagnose it. My son continued losing his ability to speak.

A developmental specialist soon diagnosed my son with PDD NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified). Our journey began there. I had read once about autism some time ago, but it was impossible to me that my perfect and beautiful baby could have it. The word was offensive to me. My son is the first case in our family. Perhaps the developmental pediatrician had made a mistake; my brain was unable to understand the magnitude of that diagnosis. I researched until I half understood what PDD NOS was. My son started to receive Applied Behavior Analysis, occupational, and speech therapies at home. At that time, he lost his ability to smile and to interact. When he was 26 months, he started attending a school for children with his needs. Through some surprise visits that I made to the school, I realized that he wasn't getting the help he was supposed to have. When he was 30 months old, he started to try to say the word “bus” with the help of his ABA

instructor at home. For me, it was glorious to hear his sweet voice again, trying the impossible: to say the word.

As I observed my beautiful child become increasingly frustrated, however, I knew we needed to do something else. My husband and I traveled to Sheffield, Massachusetts to learn about a program I had researched called Son Rise. On our return, we implemented the program at home, and I was surprised that my child started to advance in giant steps for somebody in his condition. My first surprise was when a month after applying the program, I went to say good night to my son, and my baby told me, “Mommy, I love you. You are so beautiful.” Yes! My dream came true! He said “I love you” because he felt it; it came from him, not from a repetition through ABA therapy. It was a big achievement because he expressed himself, using his voice, his smile, his eye contact.

The path is long, and we have so much further to go, but little by little we are achieving our goals. Advocating for him, with help from his younger brother (who interacts with him all the time), his sister, his oldest brother, other mothers on the same journey, from different programs in New York City, from good people who are on the same road as we are and have been willing to help, and mainly with God’s help. We need only to love our children completely. We need to understand that they do strange things to balance the explosion of sensory activity they experience and are not able to express their thoughts with words. They need us to help them. They can’t do it by themselves. Their potential is unlimited, and we parents are their best help, when they feel our unconditional love and dedication. Even with challenges that are still there, now that he is nine years of age my son enjoys life, plays, expresses his emotions with words, and feels more comfortable in this world, my world, his world, our world.



*Born in Puebla, Mexico, **Obdulia Ambros** has lived in New York City for 21 years. She is married, with four children. Her dream is to earn a college degree and become a teacher. She took ESOL classes in community centers and earned her GED with honors. In 2011, she came to the ESOL program at the Adult Learning Center of York College. The staff there broadened her horizons, encouraging her to register in college, and she is now in the CLIP program, on the way to attaining her dreams. Lalit Bajaj was her instructor, and Hamid Kherief is the director.*

Growing

Yaguang Wei

The first time I raced in swimming
In my life, I was eleven.
In the summer, I couldn't feel the heat.
The start of the whistle sounded
Like the scream of a witch.
I jumped before my mind thought.
My body crushed the water,
But I couldn't feel anything.
I looked around while I swam.
Other people were behind me.
I knew I couldn't relax yet.
The fear went after me
Like a hungry shark. I focused
On my arms, and imagined
They were wings when I
Raised them up, and imagined
They were paddles as they broke
Through the water. After half the race,
A boy almost passed over me.
I could see his hands
Like a ghost pulling my body.
I held my breath and hoped
I could have the power
Of a steam engine. The air
In my lungs was quickly gone.
I felt a fire ball in my chest,

And I couldn't spit it out.
Fortunately, pain could be a
Source of power. In the rest
Of the race, there was nothing
In my head. The time
Seemed stopped in the moment,
And the next moment,
I had touched the pool wall.
I raised my head out of water.
The fresh air came into my body,
And I never thought air
Would have a taste. My coach
Pulled me out of the pool
And patted my shoulder softly.
I felt there was something
I couldn't see on my shoulder,
Heavy, warm, and shining.



***Yaguang Wei** was born in Shanghai, China and has lived in New York City for two years. As a child, he trained as a swimmer. Before coming to the United States, he worked as a lifeguard and swimming instructor in a public swimming pool in Shanghai, China. He studies in a CLIP class at Queensborough Community College, where Vincent Zomba is his instructor, and Dr. Diana Berkowitz is the site advisor.*

The Crow Who Wouldn't Quit

Galina Gonshanova

**“TO FIGHT AND SEEK, TO
FIND AND NEVER QUIT!”
RUSSIAN WRITER V. KAVERIN**

The story I am about to tell happened in a small southern city of Russia, where our family once lived, about three years ago. This town was situated on the high bank of the rapid mountain river, the Kuban. It's a green, cozy town, like many other southern towns, with a warm, comfortable climate, mild winters, often without snow, and hot summers. Below the town in the Kuban valley, a big park called “The Green Island” is located. The Green Island has two warm lakes, various shrubbery, and many tall trees. It is the favorite recreational place of the townspeople.

In these comfortable conditions, a lot of crows lived in our town. They lived in large families. Their nests were on the high trees of the Green Island. But every early morning and every evening, the huge crow flocks flew to the town streets. They sat down on the tips of the highest branches of the tall trees called Lombardy poplar. They greeted the sunrises and watched the sunsets. Often the crows flew above the streets for their crow business. Then people looked up, cautiously, afraid of getting a surprise “gift.”

One fine summer morning, I was walking down the street next to the town square. I saw a crow in the sky. First, I didn't understand why this crow attracted my attention. The crow flew, flapping her wings heavily. And then I realized that the crow held a chicken egg in her beak. Probably, the crow successfully stole this egg and was carrying it to a secluded place to enjoy her breakfast. Soon, a few other people stopped to watch the crow. But it was difficult to keep the egg, and the crow dropped it from her beak! The egg started to fall down. I stopped, astonished at

what I saw. I had to wait to see whose happy head the egg would land on.

But the end of this story was even more surprising. Suddenly, the crow dived sharply down, flew under the egg, and caught it into its beak again. Everything happened in a second, and all the spectators gasped. After that, the crow with the egg in her beak continued on with her flight and disappeared out of sight. I was truly amazed.

My wish for everyone: If you find your fortune, don't let it go, no matter how difficult it is—like this crow.



*A native of Novosibirsk, Russia, **Galina Gonsbanova** came to New York City in March 2014 and now lives with her husband, Petr, and their cat, Many, in Brooklyn. She studies at the Seward Park branch of the New York Public Library, where her teacher is Chris Milson, and the hub manager is Sherin Hamad. She loves to write about animals and nature. She writes: “In Russia, I lived in a home that was underground. Seeing nature was rare.”*

Don't Cry

Ian Lewis

When I was a child growing up, my father wasn't there for me. It was my mother that took all the responsibilities in her hands. My mother had to play two roles for me: both mother and father. In my former school, I was supposed to get a mathematics textbook, but my mom didn't have the money at the time, so she sent me to my father to ask him if he could give me the money to buy that textbook.

He turned to me and said, "Come for it next week Friday." I said thanks, I would come back and get it the next Friday.

When I went to him that Friday, he was playing dominoes with his friends. While they were playing, I said, "Good evening, Papa."

He said, "What you want, boy?"

I said, "Remember? You said I must come for the money to buy the book, sir."

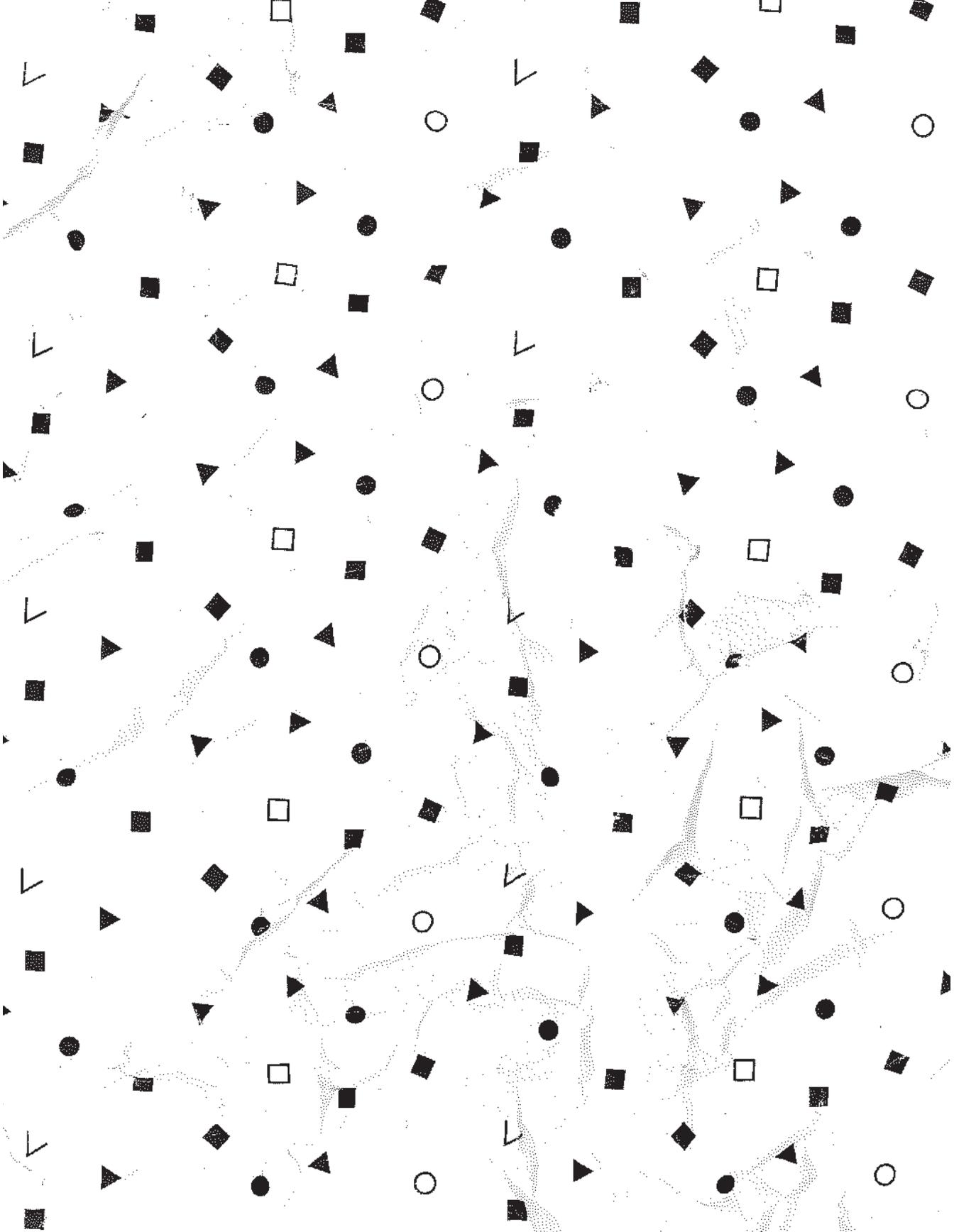
He turned to me and said, "Boy, go tell your mother I don't have no money."

I ran from there and went straight up to my mother, crying.

My mom said to me, "Son, don't cry. You growing okay. Don't worry."

And every time I remember that, I use it and strengthen my weakness.

*Born in St. James, Jamaica, **Ian Lewis** has been a student at the Brooklyn Public Library's New Lots Learning Center since its opening in 2012. He writes: "I know I am an old man, but I still come to this Center to achieve my goal of getting my High School Equivalency diploma." Nicolas Simon is the literacy advisor, and Jean Buonacore the site supervisor at this Center. Ian Lewis gives special thanks to his tutor, Ayana Maurice, for all her help and encouragement.*





Inspiration and Imagination

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My Dinner with a Famous Person

Julia Uraga

I would like to invite the president of my country to dinner. I would make corn soup (*pozole*) for him. I would ask President Peña Nieto why there is a lot of violence and many massacres in Mexico. I'd ask him when Mexico will have good security for our Mexican brothers and sisters. I'd ask him to tell me what happened to our 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. Our people are sad about so much violence and death. When will it finish, Mr. Enrique Peña Nieto?

Julia Uraga comes from Mexico. She is 42 years old, with two sons, and likes to watch her son play soccer. She studies English at the P.S. 24 Parents' Program of the Lutheran Family Health's Family Empowerment Program in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Her instructor is Jerilyn Sackler, and the program director is Sheldon Serkin.



Reunion

Yunwei Cen

“How’s the dinner?” I asked my mom.
“Not bad,” she said. “I didn’t know you had learned how to cook.”
“Now I prepare every meal by myself. I’ve learned how to choose fresh vegetables, fruit, and fish. I also exercise every day. Don’t worry about me, everything has been all right since I left you.”

She looked surprised. “I’m really happy for you. You seem like you have grown up. I always worried about you. You’re such a lazy boy.” She stood up. She wore only a scarf over her shoulders.

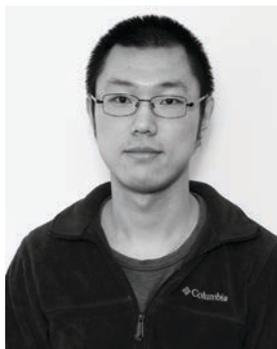
“New York’s winters are really cold,” I said. “You should wear more clothes.”

“You little bastard, you even learned how to care about others.” She laughed.

“Sure, Mom. There are many things you don’t know. I want to tell you every detail about my life in New York. First, let’s go to Times Square New Year’s celebration, I want to share that happy moment with you.” I stood behind Mom, and put my hand on her shoulder. Snow was falling heavily. The New Year’s ball lit up.

“So beautiful, right?” I thought she would be smiling. Tears spilled out of my eyes. “Sorry, Mom. I never said that I loved you. I wanted to bring you to see this wonderful world. All the success I’ve achieved, I wanted you to be proud of my efforts. I’m sorry that it’s too late to tell you this. I love you! Can you hear me, Mom . . . ?”

Mom’s figure faded with the heavy snow. Just to the left, people were cheering and laughing in the street.



Yunwei Cen, age 24, emigrated from China ten months ago. He studies with ESOL instructor Chris Vasquez at the New York Public Library’s Mid-Manhattan branch, where Sherin Hamad is the hub manager. Yunwei Cen writes: “In New York, I’ve met really nice people, cool guys, and interesting friends. I feel as if I am experiencing Pi’s epic journey. I’m a new New Yorker. I like sharing my story.”

Before I Die

Mackenson Felix

If I have a day before I die
I would like to spend half of that day with my mom,
Hang out at some places that she always dreams of,
Make her happy, like I never did before . . .
Then I would slip a letter under her pillow
Describing how much I love her
Because she's the best person I've ever known.
I know she would be tormented, crying about my death
But I want her to be strong like I am.
I never have felt like the good son that she hoped for.
I did a lot of awful unforgivable things
That really hurt her so bad.
Nevertheless, she has still been here for me.
I would thank her for everything she has done.

Then I would go to see my girlfriend.
I would bring her to Eleven Madison Park Restaurant
For a last dinner.
I would apologize for not being ready to have a baby
And for all the things I did in my past,
Things I couldn't explain or write on pieces of paper,
Then I would grab her hands tight and whisper . . .
"I love you."

I would make her laugh like she never did before.
When we got home, I would lie down next to her,
Look into her eyes until she fell asleep—
Then my heart would stop beating.



Mackenson Felix came from Haiti to New York City with his brothers in July 2012. He writes: “I would like to go to college and learn something that could change my life. I won’t look back and grieve over my past, for it’s gone already. I also won’t be frustrated about my future, for it has not come yet. I’m going to work hard as long as I can to make life so beautiful that it will be worth remembering.” Mackenson Felix studies with teacher Jay Klokker at the Adult Learning Center of the New York City College of Technology.

Inspiration

Blanca Lopez

To wake up
and notice that I'm breathing
and am alive.

To look around and see
the wonderful beings who are with me.

To go out and contemplate
the leaves falling from the trees.

To smell and see the green grass and to realize that
there is always beauty on the dried sand, too.

To hear the birds chirping, flying around, and
searching for food.

To feel the air touching my face,
to taste the salty sweat from my skin
when it is a hot day.

Then I say to myself
*How lucky I am, that even if I don't know it
there has to be someone
within, beneath or above
so powerful and with tremendous care
to make this happen
every day*



Blanca Lopez emigrated from Venezuela to the United States in 1989. The mother of three, she works at a day care center. She writes: “I came from a wonderful, dedicated mother, who didn’t know how to read or write. I dedicate my writing to her.” Blanca Lopez studies at the Pascualano Foundation Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library’s St. Agnes branch. She thanks site advisor Sisnur Araujo; hub manager Elke Stappert; and tutors Maida Schwab, Leslie Wells, Madge Rosenberg, and Bronia Vinokur.

She Didn't Like the Diamonds

Virginie Lacheny

I don't know why I decided to invite her to this Lower East Side bar. I would have liked something cozy; instead, it was gloomy, dirty, and noisy. I was sitting at the bar, looking toward the entrance door while sipping her favorite drink, a glass of Champagne.

At 7:05 I saw the door open, revealing a girl with blue jeans, a black coat, and blond hair.

At first, I didn't recognize her. She looked like a little girl, confused, scared, not knowing where to go, just looking for anyone.

I nodded at her, and she came to the bar. Without a greeting, she explained to me that the city had changed a lot. She asked for a drink and whispered that life had continued without her.

She asked me why I had invited her. She said she was fine now . . . still alone, as in the past, but at peace . . . I explained that a lot of people have written books about her even more than 50 years after her death.

At this last word, I felt she was hurt. I wanted to excuse myself, but she whispered it was not a drama; she just needed to get use to it. Then an awkward silence set in. She informed me that she didn't have much time and had some phone calls to make.

I knew these were our last minutes, so I questioned her about the truth. She didn't understand my question, replying, "The truth about what?"

I said, "About your last moment."

She looked at me sadly and told me that the truth was she had loved a lot, but no one ever really loved her.

A tear rolled down her face. She stood up and left the restaurant as she had entered, like a lost girl.

It was not the moment that I had expected. I thought that I had a meeting with Marilyn, but in reality it was with Norma Jean.



Virginie Lacheney, age 31, was born in Paris, France, and has lived in the United States since January 2014. She studies English with ESOL instructor Chris Vasquez at the New York Public Library's Mid-Manhattan branch. The hub manager is Sherin Hamad. Virginie Lacheney writes: "I discovered the other face of Marilyn Monroe in a biography, and it changed my thoughts about her."

The Dancing Soul

Randy Vergara

Time goes slow.
Songs repeat in my mind
And the bird is prisoner in the cage
Looking for the first yellow sunbeam
To get away.

Can you believe we don't have it?
We're all mental slaves.
This has to stop!
Don't be afraid!
Your soul asks for dancing in the wind.

Happiness! Sadness! Fun!
My dream is to be free,
My dream is for redemption,
My dream is to not to be a slave.

Wake up!
Don't be afraid!
For how long are we going to live like this?
If you want to dance
You have to play the music
And throw yourself to death.



***Randy Vergara**, age 22, was born in Panama and grew up in the Dominican Republic. In the United States since November 2013, he lives in Corona, Queens. He describes himself as “formal and informal, bold and shy, dynamic and static, passive and active”—neither one thing nor the other—but most importantly “a human being who knows that he wants to make a difference in this society.” His CLIP instructor at York College is Stephanie Mueller, and the site advisor is Hamid Kherief.*

My Impressions of The Kite Runner

Nisrine Drissi

The writer Franz Kafka said, “A book should be an ax for the frozen sea within us.” A book that made a great impression on me was the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. I don’t know if some of you have had the chance to read it or have heard about it. Anyway, I’m not going to reveal the details of the story, instead I’m going to give you a brief summary, especially from the last pages, which grabbed my attention and made this impact on me. The end of the book made me think about how people can change their thoughts about something they were previously against.

Most of the book’s scenes occur in Afghanistan. One of the main characters of the book is Amir, a man who cannot have a child even after taking many tests with his wife. In addition, the couple cannot even think of adopting a child because the idea of adoption was and still is considered absurd in Afghanistan and many other countries. This is described in the book as “Blood is powerful.” A rich family in Afghanistan can build an orphanage for kids who lost their parents, but they cannot adopt a child from this orphanage.

At the time Amir is telling this story, he lives in the United States with his father. They moved years ago, when he was 13 years old, due to the situation in his country. After Amir got married, he received a call from his father’s friend that made him go back to Afghanistan. During his trip, he discovered that the servant’s son, named Hassan, with whom he had a beautiful childhood, was his brother. Hassan had left an orphan son called Sohrab. After hearing this news, Amir decided to adopt his nephew. My question: Why do you think Amir accepted the idea of adoption after he was against it?

Do you think he did this because this kid was his, of his blood, and “Blood is powerful”? Do you think his decision was based on the truth that he discovered? Or because he wanted to do something for Hassan because he hadn’t when they

were 12 years old and Hassan was bitten and raped, while Amir was a bystander without taking any steps to help him? Why did now the idea of adoption become acceptable?

Who set up the idea of traditions or customs? The answer is us. A custom means something done by a group of people in a particular society because it is a tradition. It becomes an inheritance from generation to generation. So I think in the same way we have created the tradition, we can change it. Especially if it goes against something we believe in or if it's going to bring happiness to our life.

I grew up in a family where the traditions are part of our inheritance. I like some traditions, such as our traditional clothes and the special occasions to wear them. However, if one day I found myself in a situation when a custom was not going to apply, I would either change it or go against it.

This book represents enjoyment for me—expanding my vocabulary and my general knowledge. I think everything in this life is connected, and nothing happens without cause and effect. Furthermore, I think that our learning in life is based on others' experiences and mistakes.

I think learning also can come from a book or a story that we have read or heard about. In fact, a book can be a message for our real lives, and at the end of our reading we can come to a conclusion that can be useful in our lives.

Finally, a book can be a motivation to change what we believe. As Gandhi, the Indian leader, said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."



Nisrine Drissi, a 38-year-old native of Morocco, writes: "I have been here in the United States for seven years. I'm a married woman, and I have two beautiful boys. The oldest, Omar, is five, and the youngest, Talha, is two. I have a bachelor's degree in business from my country. Besides my primary language, which is Arabic, I speak French." She adds, "I love to write." Nisrine Drissi studies in Joao Dasilva's CLIP class at Queensborough Community College, where the site advisor is Dr. Diana Berkowitz.

Snow Cones

Claudia Lorena Velez

It was a cold afternoon in December 2010 when I first saw snow coming down from the sky. It was beautiful and amazing. After one afternoon and an entire night snowing, the snow had reached an accumulation of over 16 inches.

I decided to go out with my two-year-old son, Christopher, and play for a while on the snow piles. I was afraid of my son's getting sick because of the low temperature, but I thought 10 minutes would be enough time outside.

Christopher was surprised when he saw snow for the first time. But a few minutes later, he got used to the snow and started playing. I remember he came to me and said, "Mami, look—ice cream; it is ice cream everywhere."

That day I learned that it is not about how many presents or toys a father or mother can offer to their children; it is about how the little things like spending time with them can make them the happiest children in the world.

Claudia Lorena Velez, a native of Colombia, has been living in the United States for four years. She is a student at LaGuardia Community College's CIET Program, where her teacher is Joao Moderno, and the director is Hillary Gardner. Claudia Lorena Velez writes: "I am a strong person who wants to learn from every aspect of my experience and make my family proud. I love my family; they are my motivation."



An Evening with John Lennon

Hector Ramos

If I could choose one of the most important personalities in history to invite to my home for dinner, I would choose John Lennon. He is a musician that I admire, and sometimes I think of the songs we have lost because of his premature death.

First of all, I would spend all day cooking a good dinner for him with many vegetables, and tofu and sushi as appetizers. I guess he likes all the things that come from Japan, and maybe he is a vegetarian. As a first course, I would prepare a ramen soup; and for dessert, I would make a delicious custard. Of course, I would have bought good wine or beer.

I would play some music, not very loud, only to listen to different songs, and maybe I would like to explain the kinds of music that people like these days, such as rap or reggaeton. I think he will be shocked.

After he recovers from the shock, I would like to start a conversation with him about music, the Beatles, his career and how he could write those wonderful songs. I would not want to ask about why the Beatles split, but my curiosity is strong, and I think I would finally ask him. I would like to know his favorite places in New York and about his relationship with Paul McCartney.

When we are full of food and wine, I would ask him if we could play a song together with my guitar and a possibly a piano that I would rent for this occasion. It does not matter what song, but I love “Imagine,” “Jealous Guy,” or any of the Beatles’ songs, like “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” or “Obladi, Oblada.” We would improvise a little concert at my home.

John Lennon would ask me about flamenco and ask if I could teach him. I would answer, “I do not dance flamenco. That is a stereotype. I am so sorry.”

He would start to be upset, but I would say, “Okay, I am a good dancer. Come on, come on, *vamos, Juanito!*” John Lennon would dance flamenco with me at my home. “*Olé, olé!*” I would tell him. We would spend a wonderful night eating, playing, dancing, and laughing.

*Born in Spain, **Hector Ramos** moved to the United States in August of 2014. He studies English with Chris Vasquez at the New York Public Library’s Mid-Manhattan branch, where Sherin Hamad is the hub manager. He writes: “I have a master’s degree in history and a bachelor’s degree in tourism management. I have taught history and the arts in Spain. I would like to be a Spanish teacher in New York City. I really like the melting pot of races and cultures here.”*



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

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

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