

I am from

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Paris, France

Manga, Burkina Faso

Casablanca, Morocco

Moscow, Russia

Taipei, Taiwan

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Mamabo, Puerto Rico

Donetsk, Ukraine

The VOLUME 15
Literacy
Review

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Shanghai, China

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Sukum, Ghana

Sylhet, Bangladesh

São Paulo

Kashuri,

San Pedro

Luanda, Angola

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Lupawa, Poland
Brooklyn, New York
Gujarat, India
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Queson, Palawan, Philippines

The VOLUME 15 **Literacy** **Review**

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for Speakers of Other Languages, Basic Education, and
High School Equivalency programs in New York City

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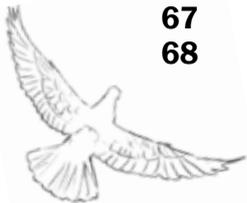


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FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LITERACY REVIEW

For the fifteenth volume of The Literacy Review, we asked teachers who have submitted their students' writing for many years—and one former LR editor and editor in chief—to write something of their own: a memory of an experience related to LR.

Lourdes Tapia's story, "Remembering My Village," was published in the very first *Literacy Review*, in 2003. Lourdes had completed the fifth grade in Mexico, and along with the other moms at the Sunset Park elementary school where I was teaching ESOL, she was motivated to learn English on behalf of her children's education. As we were driving across the Brooklyn Bridge toward the celebration at NYU, I was asking her what it was like to be a published author, and she quietly stated, "This is the first time I have been on this bridge." From its inception, *The Literacy Review* has provided both a literal bridge, in the case of Lourdes, as well as a metaphorical bridge to myriad communities in New York City and beyond, which continues to sharpen our minds and open our hearts.

**CARYN T. DAVIS, CLIP INSTRUCTOR,
NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY**

There is a strong continuity and connection between my classes from one semester to another over the years—and *The Literacy Review* helps make that happen. Early on each semester, I bring out many copies of many years of *LR* and ask students to read the suggested writings, including all my past students' published work, as well as other favorites. Students then pick out one work that especially speaks to them and share it with the class. This fall, Norma Hernandez chose "Miguel, I Want to Thank You" by Cynthia Soto (Volume 9, 2011). Cynthia writes so beautifully about coming to grips with her son's "label" of autism. Norma was deeply moved by Cynthia's essay and their commonality of experiences since her son had been given the same label. One writing inspires another and another and another, all unique but with common threads. Students encourage each other—even though they may never meet in person—through sharing their words, experiences, challenges, and resilience. Norma just finished her first essay, and powerful it is!

**GALE SHANGOLD HONTS, INSTRUCTOR,
PHIPPS NEIGHBORHOODS OPPORTUNITY CENTER**

Jaime Miranda wrote “A Bad Day in the Subway” (Volume 3, 2005) about getting stuck during the 2003 blackout. I was so excited when he was chosen to read at the ceremony, having so vividly portrayed the fear and camaraderie of post 9/11 New York in his writing. But the night of the reading, he never came. It made me realize that as a teacher you do not always know the lives of your students, including whether they feel strong enough to come out of the shadows and tell their stories. Last summer, I received an email: “I was your student in 2005, it took me almost 11 years to find your e-mail, and I still want to apologize to you.” Jaime moved to Orlando, Florida where he opened his own business, “small but my own :),” and *The Literacy Review* is still inspiring students and teachers to look at the city and its humanity with care and compassion.

**HILLARY GARDNER, DIRECTOR,
CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT EDUCATION AND TRAINING,
LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

The first time we attended the *Literacy Review* celebration, I had a whole group of our OGs (Original Writers). I was so happy that a number of the ladies got dressed in their finery because I had been wearing a suit all day. The students said, “Michael, we never see you dressed up in a suit,” and I said, “Today is the first day I get to escort so many lovely ladies for a dinner date.” Mr. Wah You Lee, ever the wise man, noted, “Well, there is a man coming on this date with you, too!” One would never believe a group of adults could be so excited about a 15-minute walk, but it was nonstop laughter and excitement. And their mouths were just as agape after we got to NYU, and continued through dinner and the readings. All in all, it was a wonderful first day that they talked about on and on.

**MICHAEL HUNTER, DIRECTOR,
ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT**

Maria Rivera, a single mother of four kids and a worker who barely finished elementary school in Mexico, tried hard and wrote her debut story in our ESOL class. In “Where Is My Cigarette?” (Volume 10), she wrote how her young son Jose secretly threw her cigarettes away to help her quit smoking. Writing that story and reading it at the *LR* celebration built her desire to succeed in education and pushed her to keep going in spite of many difficulties. Her last winter’s holiday greetings informed me that she was now an honor student at Hostos Community College. I asked, “What’s your major?” “Community Health,” she answered. “Do you remember my writing about my cigarettes? I quit smoking thanks to my son. It made me think that people in our communities need counseling for their health. I want to be the one who can help!” She has invited me to attend her graduation and intends to continue her study at Hunter College to become a social worker.

WENDY WEN, RETIRED ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TEACHER

Mary Heron joined the Eastern Parkway Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library in 2014. From the very start, she loved to write. She often shared stories about her family and was especially proud of her siblings' educational achievements. Well past 80, Mary often commented that her age would not be a deterrent to learning. In her *LR13* bio she states, "I am a lifetime student, and I have dedicated myself to learning something new each and every year." Shortly before the *LR* selections were announced, Mary became ill. It was serious enough that she needed to move in with her daughter in New Jersey. When I called to let her know the wonderful news, she was so excited. She was determined to get better so that she could attend. Unfortunately, she was unable to attend the photo shoot or the celebration. But despite her disappointment, Mary continued to get better and eventually returned to class. That summer, we honored her during our annual Spring Reception, inviting her to read her published work.

**DONNA ALLEYNE, SITE SUPERVISOR,
BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY, EASTERN PARKWAY LEARNING CENTER**

I first met Maria Rodriguez in fall 2015 as a Level 1 student in my beginning ESOL class. Since that time she has consistently shown herself to be a motivated and dedicated student with nearly perfect attendance every cycle. She has made great progress and is currently a Level 5 student. Maria was so excited to hear that her writing had been selected for *The Literacy Review*! She especially couldn't wait to tell her 12-year-old daughter, Zuleidy, the news. Maria told me that her daughter has been more interested in school now that mother and daughter are both students, and that they motivate each other in their education. I'm sure that being selected to be published in *LR* will be an additional motivation and encouragement for both Maria and her daughter.

**SARAH HIDALGO, LEAD INSTRUCTOR,
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, BRONX LIBRARY ADULT LEARNING CENTER**

Lisa Ng had a long piece, "Journey to Freedom," in *LR9* (2011) about her escape from China by swimming to Hong Kong with her friend Tom. She read an excerpt from it at the celebration. Later she and her classmates and tutor were walking near Union Square to the train station when two women (strangers who had just come from the *LR* celebration) waved to her and said, "But tell us, what happened to Tom?" Lisa and her classmates laughed all the way to the station, thinking and talking about the power of stories. They were amazed that strangers were curious about the rest of her story.

**TERRY SHEEHAN, LEAD INSTRUCTOR, ADULT LEARNING CENTERS,
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, TOMPKINS SQUARE AND SEWARD PARK**

My former student Rosa Delgado recently visited my ESOL class to talk about a piece of hers published in *The Literacy Review*, Volume 12 (2014). Titled “A Family in a Boat,” her story tells of her struggles to stay aboard “the boat” of her classroom despite the pain, weakness, and emotional distress brought on by chemotherapy treatments. In the classroom, the students greeted her warmly and listened to her read her story aloud. Afterward, they asked questions they had prepared beforehand: “How do you feel now?” “What are the symptoms of breast cancer?” “What about losing your hair?” “How did your family support you?” and many others. She responded with candor and grace, talking not only about her cancer, but also about the need for all of us to live our lives to the fullest. Rosa said that on learning that her story had been accepted to *LR*, she had been so happy she cried. She also remembers showing the book to her husband and children, who said, “We are so proud of you.”

**JAY KLOKKER, INSTRUCTOR,
NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Mohamed Jalloh, author of “A Field Trip to the African Burial Ground,” walked into the *LR9* (2011) photoshoot wearing a dazzling smile, a black suit and tie, and a traditional headdress from Sierra Leone. Without a trace of nervousness, he shook my hand and introduced himself to me. Several months later at the *LR9* gala, before getting on stage to read an excerpt from his story, Mohamed approached me as an old friend and told me he was looking forward to finding the love of his life in America. Fast-forward two years: He found me through social media and shared that he would be married and was working hard to become a paramedic by 2014.

**EMILY HE, EDITOR, *THE LITERACY REVIEW*, VOLUME 8;
EDITOR IN CHIEF, *THE LITERACY REVIEW*, VOLUME 9**

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REFUGEES

Munisa Aslieva

Every time my grandparents visit, they tell stories about my childhood, my parents' childhoods, or their own childhoods. Once, Grandmother told me about the day she and her parents immigrated to Tajikistan. Her motherland was Bukhara, Uzbekistan. My great-grandfather was the richest man in the town. He had acres of land. He bred cattle—about 10 thousand goats, sheep, cows, and horses. The number was so big even he did not know it exactly. Having a big house was rare at that time. However, my great-grandfather had several. After the Soviet Revolution, the government took all goods from rich people, saying that all people should be equal. My great-granddad was no exception. He lost all his wealth. However, he did save my great-grandmother's jewelry by burying it in a secret place. My great-grandparents were afraid to be labeled as “enemies of Soviet power” because people who were said to be such enemies were killed or died in labor camps. That is why, one day, my great-grandparents decided to flee Uzbekistan. In another country, nobody knew about their riches.

On a hot summer day in 1938, they traveled to Tajikistan, the neighboring country. After the long, hard ride on a crowded train, the young family—husband, wife, and little daughter—arrived. They knew nobody in Tajikistan. They took nothing with them but the clothes on their backs, and pounds of jewelry, such as gold and silver necklaces, earrings, rings, and coins. During those five days they were on the train, they had eaten all the food they brought. As a result, the first thing to do in the train station was to find food. At those times, it was very difficult to find something to eat, even bread. My great-grandpa knocked on the door of one house. He asked for a piece of bread, even just for the little girl, who had not eaten for almost a day. The people who lived in that house said, “We do not have anything!” and shut the door. My great-grandparents went on, carrying my grandmother on their shoulders. Near the train station there were few houses. They went to the next door but got the same answer. Then my great-grandmother said: “Might they think we cannot pay them because of our dirty clothes? Ask again and say that we can pay for bread.” When they asked the same family for some bread the second time, showing the gold, the family agreed and even invited them into their house, to which my great-grandparents said no. They paid a handful of gold for a piece of bread and went away.

On the bank of the river, which was near the station, they had dinner, dunking the piece of bread into the water. After dinner, as they were walking along the river, they found a shabby little old house neglected by its owners. An

old woman opened the door. She lived there with her seven-year-old grandchild, Samir, who lost his parents in a car accident when he was four years old. This woman allowed my great-grandparents to stay at her house until they could find another one. She had a big backyard, where she grew vegetables that she sold at a market. After a few months, when my great-grandparents could not find a house, this woman suggested that they buy half of her yard. Even though it was just a piece of land without a house, my great-grandpa agreed without thinking. They were happy because they liked this woman. My great-grandfather said to Great-grandma: “When you buy land, think about a neighbor, not a house.”

My great-grandparents built their own little house by themselves, on the other side of this woman’s yard. Even my grandmother took part. She dragged hard bricks, which were made by her mother. In the beginning, as they could not find any jobs, the gold they had was the only resource for buying something to eat and materials for building their house. It was the hardest time of their lives. As my grandmother told this story, tears kept running down her face.

This story made me think about the refugees from Syria. For my great-grandparents, their only salvation was their gold. Millions of Syrians fled their country because of the war. Some of them were taken into Germany, Sweden, and Austria. Even though the governments of these countries gave them housing, financial aid, and work, these refugees were forced to move away from their established lives into another society with a different culture, different language, and different way of life. Even for me, who immigrated deliberately with my family, it is difficult to adapt to a new country. What about the refugees who left Syria with nothing? I can imagine that for them it is so much harder. They fled to neighboring countries, such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. They need to meet someone like that woman in the little old house near the river who helped my great-grandparents and grandmother survive in the hardest days of their lives.

Munisa Aslieva writes: “I am 21 years old. I was born in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. My native language is Tajik. Besides English, which I am learning, I also know the Russian language. I have been in the United States since January 2016. I want to become a pharmacist and open a pharmacy near my home, so I can help people and be near my family.” In the College of Staten Island’s CLIP class, Munisa Aslieva’s teacher is Polina Belimova, and the program director is Donna Grant.





LAND OF PARADISE

Alroy Brown

Welcome to Jamaica Island, where I'm from—land of paradise, black, green, and gold. You can hear the loud voices of the people screaming and shouting at the top of their lungs in the stadium, waving rag and flag for the fastest man in the world, Usain Bolt.

Strolling through the heart of Kingston, Spanish Town, and the other 12 parishes of Jamaica, you can feel the vibration of sweet reggae music. You can hear the people in the marketplaces shouting and the vehicles in traffic. At the Norman Manley Airport and Montego Bay Airport, planes are lifting and landing.

Election time brings the sounds of people in the street creating a lot of excitement, cheering and shouting for the party they represent. There is a gathering of Rastamen holding conscious vibes, playing instruments, drum and guitar, dancing and stamping their feet.

Smell the strong scent of marijuana burning, jerk chicken and hot dogs, fish on the grill, rice and peas, curry goat, ripe banana, Julie mango, pineapple, star apple, and jackfruit from the farm. There is also the Riverton dump, the swamp, and raw smells of fish in the ocean.

Try the amazing taste of Wray-Nephew white rum, Magnum Tonic Wine, strawberry rum punch, and Blue Mountain Coffee.

See the panoramic views of the ocean and mountain hotels' all-inclusive resorts and restaurants, gorgeous ladies with adorable features and seductive walks, looks, and shapes from different races and backgrounds.

Feel the chill of the breeze in the early morning hours. It's sunny throughout the day, but the evening hours are nice; you feel well and relaxed.

Where I am from, people are very ambitious, progressive, talented, brave, and bold. They feel proud of being Jamaican and stand at attention, singing melodiously "Jamaica, Land We Love." So where I'm from, it doesn't matter where you are from or who you are, whether you are rich or poor, you can feel the positive vibes of love and unity. One love.

Born in St. Catherine, Jamaica, Alroy Brown came to the United States in 2000. He writes, "I enjoy what life has to offer. I love to party, dance, and write music, and I also love spending time with my children. My favorite foods are roast ackee and saltfish, and breadfruit. I work hard to achieve my goals." Alroy Brown studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Library Adult Learning Center. Felice Belle and Christina Best are the literacy advisors, and Winsome Pryce-Cortes is the site manager.



I DON'T KNOW WHY

Mamadou Barry

I don't know why our wives die in childbirth while their wives give birth abroad.

I don't know why we die of hunger while they throw food in the trash.

I don't know why we don't have water every day while they have water every day.

I don't know why we have light only three days a week while they have light every day.

I don't know why we are in class with more than one hundred students while their children are in private school.

I don't know why our sisters are always raped while their daughters are never raped.

I don't know why every morning we have to fight to share a taxi while they have their own vehicles.

I don't know why we are always guilty while they are always innocent.

I don't know why we are always killed during a strike while they are never killed.

I don't know why our mothers have to get up early every morning to look for water while their mothers wake up late and find everything is already on the table.

I don't know why.

I don't know why.

I don't know why.

Mamadou Barry was born in August 1981 and grew up in the Ivory Coast. He came to the United States in July 2015. At the Brooklyn Public Library's Flatbush Learning Center, he has studied with Site Supervisor Gladys Ortiz and Literacy Advisor Luz Diaz.



FIFTEENTH BIRTHDAY

Anna Chan

In English class, we learned about a girl's 15th birthday. Her parents gave her a big party. Everyone has a 15th birthday, but they just celebrate it differently. I know, because I also had a 15th birthday. That day was in my native country of China, on May 29, 1955. In the morning, my mom gave me new clothes and a pair of new shoes. They were all handmade by her because there were no sewing machines in my village. After my family ate breakfast, I took my younger brother to school. When I came back home, my father was ready for work.

He told me, "Everyone at home depends on their parents, but when you go into the world, you need a friend to help you. You have to meet new friends. You must, carefully." I said, "Yes, I won't forget it."

My father went to work. My mother gave me the equivalent of seven dollars (like two hundred today) and a small bag of soil, so that I would not be homesick when I went to a new place, so that I liked the new place like my home. Then my mom, younger sister, and I together took a long walk to the bus station. My sister carried my bags. My neighbors wished me well. We walked for 45 minutes and waited for a while for the bus to arrive at the station. We cried a lot. It was my first time taking the bus.

That day, I left my beautiful Jellyfish Village. I lost many little friends. I went to the big city of Shanghai, then Hong Kong, and finally New York. When I remember that day, I always cry a lot of tears.



Anna Chan was born in the countryside in China. When she was 15, she left her village to go to Shanghai, where she got married. Anna Chan and her husband left Shanghai to move to Hong Kong. At age 40, she wanted her children to have a good education, so her family immigrated to the United States. After working hard for 30 years, she retired. Now she studies English at the Seward Park Library. Her ESOL teacher is Ivana Ferguson, and the hub manager is Sherin Hamad. She has been published twice before in The Literacy Review.

WAR

Khin Thandar Aung

Flying bullets dropped by my side.
Barking sounds like millions of popping corn.
Fear made me lose hope.
I ran away from the death-path.
I forgot to take off my school bag.
My final exam drew near.
Only in sunlight could I study.
I felt starvation with little food.
Chilly winds made me miss my blanket.
Murmuring attacked the horrible silent night.
I fell asleep with fear.

I dreamed of a ceasefire.
I learn peacefully in the classroom.
I have dinner with plenty of food.

A boom blast illuminated the dark.
A cold sweat woke me up.

Khin Thandar Aung was a doctor in a government hospital for 15 years in her home country of Burma (Myanmar). She came to the United States in September 2015. She writes, "I don't have much experience with writing poems, but at that time in class, I saw some photos of the war in my country on social media. Then I had to create this poem on behalf of our ethnic group." Khin Thandar Aung studies writing with ESOL teacher Angela Wilkins at the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center at the English-Speaking Union.





MY HOMETOWN

Henderickson George

I grew up in a little village in Trinidad, a sweet little place. For as long as I can remember, we didn't have any street lights, so we all used flashlights to see after dark. As kids, we would wait for the moonlight. When the moon was full, we would play games in the street. We played hiding hoop and hide-and-seek. The moonlight was so bright that we could see each other clearly for about a quarter of a mile. You can imagine how bright the street was.

As kids, we had so much fun, such as climbing the farmers' fruit trees to get some sweet snacks. I remember one night, my friends and I went to raid my cousin's orange tree. We walked past their property to make sure they were asleep. There was no light on in their house, so we sneaked up to the trees. We used to tie the end of our shirts tight so we could put some oranges down the backs of our shirts. Did you know that you can carry a lot of oranges that way and still have your hands free?

Well, that night we got a surprise. My cousin's light was off, but she was not asleep. We heard a sound like a cannon as some rocks hit the orange-tree branches. One of my friends fell to the ground. I jumped down. Our other friend yelled to the guy who fell, "Are you dead?"

The guy who fell said, "Yes, I am dead." Our friend said, "So why are you talking?" We all started laughing. Then, we went to the culvert and sat eating oranges, still laughing. Of course, that was not the last night we raided the oranges!

My village is a beautiful place. We are surrounded by mountains and then the Atlantic Ocean faces us. Our beach is two and a half miles long. That beach is famous for the leatherback turtles that come from all over to lay hundreds of eggs each year. Tourists come to see this. I know that by now, you would like to know the name of my village. It's a little place in the northeast of Trinidad called Grande Riviere. I love my village very much. I'll be there soon!



Henderickson George, age 52, was born in Trinidad. He writes, "I am a down-to-earth, loving person, and a plumber by trade. My kids come first, everybody else after." He studies at the Tompkins Square Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. Lead Instructor Terry Sheehan writes that Henderickson George "arrives cheerfully at his nighttime class after a long day of work. When asked how he is, he always enthusiastically replies, 'Excellent!' At the end of each class, he always says, 'Have a blessed evening' to all."



BLACK FRIDAY

Agnes Nacoulma

One day, when I was 15 years old, my uncle visited my house in Burkina Faso. Although he was talking to my father in a very hushed voice, he really didn't seem so different than usual, but we wondered why he was speaking so softly. My older sister, whom I adored and admired, told me that probably someone had died in our village. He usually came to our house for money or to announce somebody's death.

After my uncle returned to his house, my father explained to my mother why he was here and what they were going to do. But I wasn't told anything. One week later, when I was ready to go to school, my mom told my sister to pick up her water jug from my grandmother's house.

The next day, I came back from school and was surprised to see a lot of people at my house. They were sitting in groups, eating, drinking, and dancing. I went quickly to my mother to get more details. "Your sister gets married today," said my mom. Very happy about this news, I went to talk to my sister. But when I got to her bedroom, I saw her lying down on her bed, not happy at all. "What happened to you, Sister? You are supposed to be dressed in nice clothes and have makeup and perfume on." She cried, "I am so sorry, Sister!" I told her I understood, but I was really confused.

I went back to the other room, took off my jacket, and joined the others. A little while later, I heard my mom crying loudly. Something dreadful had happened. You see, my sister was being forced to marry an old man she didn't even know; and the week before, at my grandmother's house, she had undergone female circumcision. So, to escape this tragic situation, she took a lot of pills.

Now I understand what she was trying to tell me by her words, "I am sorry, Sister." How could I have known that this tragedy would happen? I would have done anything to help my dear sister, but it was too late. For me, this day was a black Friday. I had lost my sister forever.

Agnes Nacoulma was born in Manga, Burkina Faso in 1993. Her father is a tradesman and her mother a housewife. She is the first child from her large family to earn a bachelor's degree, attending the University of Koudougou, majoring in archeology. In order to help his daughter further her education, her father sent her to the United States in June 2015. She now studies with Tilla Alexander at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center of the New York City Department of Education. She intends to become a medical doctor.





THE ONLY WILIAN ON EARTH

Wilian Murillo

My official name is Wilian Eliecer Murillo Jimenez. Yes, “Wilian” is the correct spelling. And you know what? I was born in Pensilvania, a small town in Colombia, South America, just in case you’re confused. The people who worked at the public notary in Pensilvania didn’t have much education, so they wrote my name on my birth certificate like they heard it: “W-I-L-I-A-N.” I was named after my father, Guillermo, which is Spanish for William. My parents didn’t have much education either, and for that reason they never checked the official record of my birth because it was supposed to be correct.

Time passed, and the problem started in 1995, when I was ready to graduate from high school. The school secretary, Martha, noted the error on my birth certificate, and she called my mom because she needed to print my diploma so that my real name, William, would be correct for my future education and work. At this time, we lived in La Dorada, and my mother traveled five hours by bus to Pensilvania, to try to make the corrections in the birth certificate document, but the new town notary said that no changes could be made. My mom asked for 10 copies of my certificate because she knew this mistake could continue forever, especially when I turned 18 and got my Colombian identification number.

In 2005, I moved to the United States, and for my immigration process documentation everything was the same, but I was ready with many official copies of my birth certificate. When I was about to become a U.S. citizen, the officer asked me if there were any changes I wanted to make. I thought for a while, but I said to him, “Thank you, Officer, but no changes. I think this mistake will be favorable for me because maybe I am the only man in the world with the name Wilian.” Finally, this incorrect spelling could be good for me.



Wilian Murillo was born in Pensilvania, Colombia, in 1977. He became a police officer in Manizales and eventually in Bogotá, the capital city, where he worked for nine years. After resigning from the police force in 2005, he came to the United States. He works as the personal assistant to a prominent family in Manhattan and studies in the WIOA program of the Center for Immigrant Education and Training (CIET) at LaGuardia Community College. Kate Lynch was his instructor when he wrote his essay, and Hillary Gardner is the program director.



COFFEE

Maimounatou Barry

When I was a little girl, I picked coffee in Guinea. I climbed the trees and pulled coffee. One day, I fell and stopped picking coffee. I still drink coffee, but it tastes different.

Born in Guinea, 39-year-old Maimounatou Barry's native language is Fulani. She immigrated to the United States in 2000. The mother of five, she studies English at the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Adult Learning Center, where the site supervisor is Susan Knott and Matthew Greene is the literacy advisor.



A YOUNG MAN'S JOURNEY

John Elmore

Hello, World,

I am going to tell you a story about myself. I was born in a town named Greenwood, South Carolina. That town is famous for having the largest main street in the world. If you don't believe me, you can always Google it. I was raised in a one-horse town called Cokesbury. It is about eight miles north of Greenwood. Around Cokesbury is what you call the farm; we raised all kinds of vegetables, potatoes, corn, pigs, cows, and chickens. If you wanted some meat, you would get your gun, go in the woods, find the wild game, kill it, clean it, bring it home, cook and eat it.

My grandmother raised 11 girls and one boy. After the boy and some of the girls had left home, she took in two grandkids, my brother and me. My grandmother worked so hard. She took care of the house, cooked and cleaned, and she even made some of our clothes and bed covers. We lived off the farm, and the little money my grandfather made from his job was just enough to buy the seed for the crops that would keep food on the table. It was hard living.

My brother and I did the farm work. My brother was lazy, and I had to do the work while he was sleeping under the tree. So I wrote my mother a letter and asked her if I could come to New York, where she lived, and she gave me the green light. So now, I had to ask my grandmother. She knew it would be a loss of help on the farm, but she was afraid for me because she knew that a 15-year-old black kid who was big for his age and liked to speak his mind would cause a problem during those times of segregation in the South. She thought it would be safer to get out of town. There were separate laws based on skin color in those days. So my grandmother gave me the green light. This was my special moment—I was going to the Big Apple!

That day, my grandmother made me a big lunch to take with me. This is what I mean by a big lunch: a shoe box with fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, corn bread, corn on the cob, sweet potato pie, collard greens, and a Mason jar of water from the well. Gramps and my brother took me to the bus station, and I was so happy to leave behind the hardships of country life. I boarded the bus (went straight to the back, where you had to sit if you were black) and gave a big wave, "See you later!" Gramps gave me a smile, but my brother didn't look too happy. As the bus went up the road, I started thinking about my brother. I knew I would miss him, but I was on my way now to New York.

It took about 18 hours to reach New York; that's why my lunch was so big. The bus stopped in all these little hick towns on our way north, but if you were black, you weren't allowed in some of those places. I carried five dollars in my pocket, but I saw signs that said, "No niggers allowed." That's why black people carried their own food when they traveled back then.

Well, when I arrived in New York, it was good to see my mother, but it was just like jumping out of the frying pan into the skillet. My mother was with a man who was not my father. He didn't like me very much, and I wasn't crazy about him. He was the superintendent of the building where we lived in the basement. He put me to work right away. He gave me a mop and a bucket, took me to the sixth floor, and said, "Mop the stairs down to the first floor. Then clean all the window panes."

But you have to keep living and keep moving. Life goes on, and you keep your spirits up.

John Elmore, age 73, was born in Greenwood, South Carolina and moved to New York City in 1959. He writes, "I drove a cab for many years, so I have many more stories to tell. Today, I am a deacon and chief usher at Antioch Baptist Church in Corona, Queens. I love to bake, especially sweet potato pie and pound cake (recipes from my aunt, down South). I am happy to be advancing my education." John Elmore studies with Lead Instructor Terry Sheehan at the New York Public Library's Adult Learning Center at Seward Park.





TAKE ME THERE

Juan Jimenez

Distance, stop holding me, disappear
You're like a dark rainy night
The sound of airplanes makes me weep
Nostalgia beats against my cheek
Distance, you haunt, please take me there
Distance, stop holding me, disappear

Distance, you distress me, take me there
Hundreds of miles, far away
When will this hurt stop?
Love at a distance, you take me down
Like a bird with a broken wing that can't go anywhere
Distance, stop holding me, disappear



Born in the Dominican Republic, Juan Jimenez immigrated to the United States in 2015. Now 21, he says he likes this country a lot and enjoys visiting special places throughout the city. His hobby is playing basketball with his brother and his friends. In York College's CLIP class with Site Advisor Stephanie Mueller, he is improving his English. His goal is to go to college and become a paramedic. Hamid Kherief is the site director.



MY CHILDHOOD

Yasmeen Saleh

I grew up in a small village in Ramallah, a city in the West Bank. There were a lot of olive trees, apple trees, and plum trees. One of my favorite foods was olive oil with thyme. This is a popular food in Palestine, especially in my family, when my grandma and mom woke up early to bake fresh bread for it. My brothers and I used to race toward the dining table to see who would sit first. The delicious taste of olive oil with thyme is still present in my mouth. I miss those days . . .

I enjoyed doing my homework in the front part of the yard, where I could breathe fresh air, hear the bird sounds, and see the blue sky. I never felt bored in this peaceful place.

I was surrounded by a friendly and supportive community. Every Friday, my neighbors came to my house and shared the food my mom prepared. We ate, danced, and played many board games. We had a joyful time together.

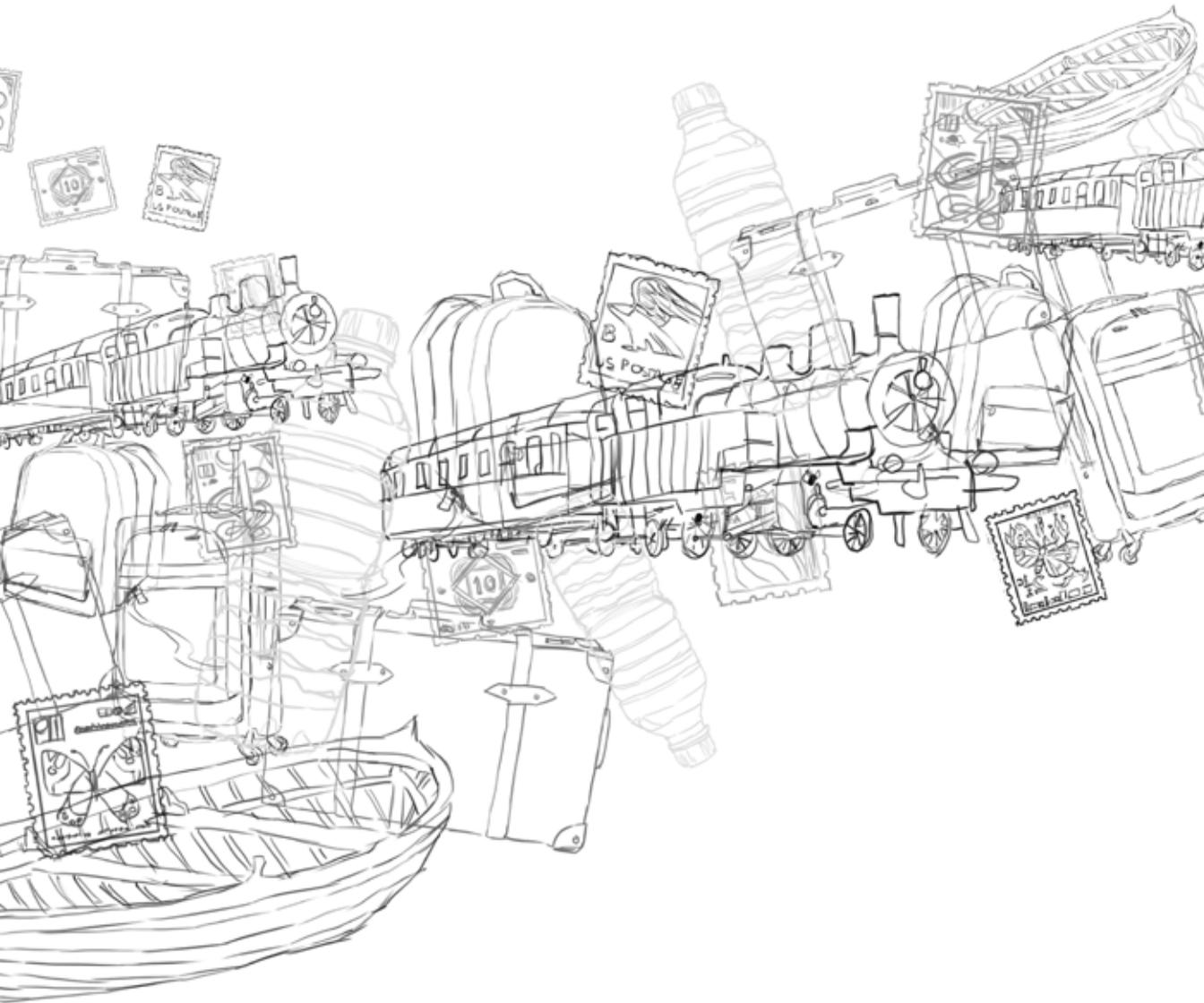
The kids in my neighborhood were aware of what was happening around them. Yet, at first, they talked instead about the toys they loved. But then, they talked about their friend's home that was destroyed by the Israeli occupation, and how it ended with him sleeping in a tent. They asked themselves how he could endure the extreme cold.

I will never forget Faris Odeh, the young boy who stood with his bare chest in front of an Israeli tank. Then, the Israeli soldier shot him in the neck, and he was killed instantly. Yes, don't be surprised. Terrible experiences happen every day for thousands of children in Palestine.

As you can see, this is how my childhood was. It mixed times of happiness and sorrow. Yet, my childhood made me a strong person who can cope with difficulties. Always, I have hope for a better future.

Yasmeen Saleh is a 31-year-old native of Palestine whose first language is Arabic. She arrived in the United States in 2008. She loves reading stories and is studying at the Queens Library's Elmhurst Adult Learning Center because she wants to improve her English to find a good job and be an active, supportive member of her community. She gives a great deal of thanks to her instructor, James McMenamin. Michelle Johnston is the center manager.

COMING TO AMERICA





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WHEN I CROSSED THE BORDER

Ofelia Santamaria

I remember when I crossed the border. There were 90 people in total. I couldn't believe that there were so many people who wanted to cross the border. When I saw so many people, I regretted my decision to cross. But I thought, I'm already here, and now I have to cross. I remember that we walked approximately four hours before reaching a ranch. The ranchers didn't want to permit us to cross. They said that illegal migrants destroy their fences and throw water bottles on the ground, which cows eat and then become sick from. They said that if we wanted to pass, we needed to pay 50 pesos per person. We paid them. After we paid, the ranchers became helpful. They showed us a big snake they had killed a few minutes earlier. They told us to be careful to avoid snakes; there are many in this area. We thanked them for their advice and kept it in mind.

We continued our journey. We walked all night. My sister-in-law stumbled on something and fell down. We thought that she broke her leg, but she didn't. She only needed to rest a few minutes, and then she was ready to walk. We were really so tired. We couldn't walk anymore. We walked during the night and rested during the day. We crossed fences, a railroad track, and two ranches. It felt like our journey would never end.

Our water was finished, and the sun was so strong. The human traffickers were looking for water, but they found only a gallon of water in a plastic bottle. It was too hot, but we drank it. It wasn't enough for everyone. Our lips became dry. We suffered from the lack of water. When I was walking, I had a vision of my dead sister opening a path in the dry grass so that I could pass. I also hallucinated horses, donkeys, a church, a cemetery, and people dressed in traditional clothing made of blankets. I was so tired. I thought that if Immigration caught me, I would never attempt to cross that border again.

After walking a long time, we found a small lake that was dirty. This didn't matter to us. We drank the water. At about 6 p.m., we took a bus to Los Angeles, where we stayed the night. The next morning, we took a plane to New York. Finally, I had arrived.



Ofelia Santamaria, 41 years old, writes: "I am from Cuautla, Morelos, Mexico, and came to New York in 2001. I am a student of the Fifth Avenue Committee. My goal is to speak and write English very well. I love New York because you can see all the seasons around the year and also see people of many different ethnicities." Christina Curran is Ofelia Santamaria's English teacher at the Fifth Avenue Committee, and Carolyn Wright is the ESOL coordinator.



COMING TO AMERICA

Jorge Colorado

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another. However, moving to another country is more than just changing your home, your city, or your homeland; it's a social, cultural, and mental change.

I came from El Salvador to the United States on July 21, 2015. That day was one of the hottest days of the year. I came with only two pieces of luggage: my whole life in two suitcases—everything that I was, reduced to pairs of pants, a few shirts, three pairs of shoes, a couple of books, and my laptop. But inside me, I came with a world of ideas and experiences, knowledge, and hopes.

I remember my last days in El Salvador. I tried to observe all of the details of my home, wanting to bring them with me. I remember the last time I saw the rain, the sound of the cicadas, and the appearance of zompopos, a kind of leafcutter ant. I remember the last time I saw my friends, and the last time I stroked my pet's back. I remember when my country disappeared from the windows of the airplane: I saw the silhouettes of volcanoes fading in the distance. In that moment, I knew my life was going to change.

One night, a week after I came to New York, I had a dream. In my dream, I walked along wide avenues of high buildings with many windows; I saw windows everywhere, windows of all sizes and details. Then I came to my apartment, I went into my room, opened the windows, and saw a huge and beautiful mango tree. When I looked outside, I saw more trees—it was a tropical forest.

I dream of El Salvador every night; sometimes my dreams are a mix between El Salvador and New York. Frequently, they are good dreams, but sometimes they are nightmares. I dream of being pursued by gangsters who intend to assault me. One night, for the first time in my life, I dreamed in English, which means my mind is trying to incorporate the new language.

Changing your life with a new language is a game of identity. When I speak in English, I feel like another person, another version of myself, someone with my same voice but with other expressions, exclamations, and accent. The meanings of the words are different, especially when you have built an entire universe in your native language. When I came, I had a good foundation in English; it was easy to communicate simple things, but I failed disastrously when I tried to communicate complex ideas, especially my personal points of view. I don't know about other immigrants, but in my case, I value sharing my experiences and opinions. Words are powerful, and learning a new language requires learning

the meaning of a new culture, learning about its morality and particular vision of life. Acquiring a new language is a complex process. It's not only grammar or the meaning of words; it's also how you assemble the sentences, which verbs are better than others, and how you should talk in the past tense. It's impossible to translate literally from your language to another; it's silly to do it because no one can understand you. Also, you need to pronounce words correctly; it's a big issue. In English, the Spanish speaker has problems with short and long vowels, also with consonants like "th" and "w." I spent my first months in New York trying to feel confident in my English while I was making new movements with my tongue. Finally, I accepted my English Latino accent. It was an agreement with myself; I had to accept my particular accent because it's my cultural signature.

But the accent is not the only complication. The people of the United States pay a lot of attention to ethnicity, what they call "race." Sometimes, your ethnicity becomes your dominant social status, establishing your social role and your position in society. People expect you to be a certain way just because of your ethnic background. Sometimes, that becomes a prejudice. Initially, I was shocked when I filled out my first job application because they asked about my origin and my race. When I grew up in El Salvador, I built a personal image of myself for other reasons, not based on my ethnicity.

Immigrating is not only about moving from one place to another, getting a job, and settling in a new city or a new country, or even learning the grammar of a new language. Immigrating has required redrawing the image of myself, discovering a new world of meanings, a new sense of belonging, and other emotions.

Meanwhile, the past gradually fades, like the memories of my dreams when I awake.



Jorge Colorado is a Salvadoran anthropologist, researcher, and science communicator who came to the United States in 2015. He conducted research in cultural studies, namely cultural astronomy and the ethnography of international migration. He has published articles promoting science in El Faro digital newspaper and La Prensa Gráfica in El Salvador. He studies writing with ESOL teacher Angela Wilkins at the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center at the English-Speaking Union.



MY DREAM

Tu Thi Lam

To set foot on American soil was my biggest dream. I started to have this dream of going abroad since my homeland, South Vietnam, lost to the hands of the Communist Party. My brother was the first person who left our family, escaping the country by boat. He was just 15 years old. His boat floated off the coast of Malaysia for about a week while he waited to be saved, struggling to find freedom. At home, we prayed a lot for his safety.

My brother often sent letters to us and advised us not to escape but to stay where we were. He said in his letters that it was so dangerous sailing in a small boat. He could not believe that he had taken that chance of floating on the ocean. The small boat became very weak and fragile, almost broken. The passengers' lives at that moment were like silk threads hanging on a bell, seeking a direction.

His boat was one of the lucky ones that were saved by the International World Help Organization. He stayed on Bidong Island for about nine months. Then he finally was accepted to go to New York City.

My brother went to school and worked at the same time to support himself. Then, he filled out the petition for our family to come here. He worked day and night to earn enough money to sponsor our family. He learned English at one of the high schools before finding jobs. Therefore, his accent in English is much better than the rest of the family's.

I appreciate my brother, who brought us here, and I also appreciate the Americans with World Help Organization, who saved a lot of people from being killed in the ocean when they tried to find freedom from the Communists. With the Communists, a chance to find work that fit their careers was very difficult. Instead they were sent to jail or to a farm without the tools to help them carry on their work, which was so unfair to them.

Since the Communist Party put too much pressure on the people, most of them thought of leaving their homeland to find freedom. Therefore, most of the people sacrificed their property. They left their beautiful houses and left their country bearing bitter feelings. They carried with them a lot of beautiful memories about the town, the rivers, the vegetable and poultry farms, the bamboo fields,

and the rice fields, even a ton of tears. There were a lot of prosperous businesses that they left, too. Bearing a ton of tears, the pitiful people carried the bitter memories of the Communists, who tortured them in many different ways—their bodies and their souls.



Tu Thi Lam, age 55, came from Vietnam 20 years ago. She lives in Brooklyn. She wants to learn languages because she is interested in other cultures and is planning to travel in Asian countries. Currently, she is studying English with the Consortium for Worker Education, Workers United Education Program. Her teacher is Jackie Bain, and the program director is Sherry Kane. Tu Thi Lam thanks the programs “that have supported the immigrants and refugees who have settled in this country.”



FAR AND CLOSE

Min Si Ng

There was a man whom I knew, and he knew me as well. Although until now we had never met in person, we knew of each other's existence and had a very close relationship. When my siblings and I were born, he chose our names.

While we grew up in China, he lived and worked very hard in San Francisco. Our lives never intersected. Although we never saw him and were so far from each other, somehow he knew everything about us: who was the oldest and youngest child, which were boys and which were girls. Every year, my parents took us to the photo pavilion to take pictures. Those days, not every family had a camera, so my parents would send him our pictures.

We received letters from him, too. However, his letters were few. He couldn't write all the time because he was so busy. He worked in a laundromat and had to work very hard to support his family in China. We always felt very happy to receive letters from him because we missed him very much.

Now I believe the reader must be wondering who this person is. He is my grandfather, Lee Yong Zan.

Unfortunately, we couldn't visit each other in those days due to the lack of diplomatic relations between the United States and China. We all knew and had to accept the fact that we were never going to see or meet him.

Years later, when I came to America, the first thing I did was go to his cemetery with flowers. I knew his face only from a photo. I thought about him a lot at his grave. He was my favorite grandfather. Although he lived so far away from me, he always stayed very close to my heart.

My dear Grandfather, I love you so much. The sweet memories of you have helped me in my life.

Born in Guangzhou, China, Min Si Ng worked as a librarian. After immigrating to the United States in 1993, she married, took classes in accounting, and became a bookkeeper. She now enjoys being a housewife, is well-versed in current events, and is always eager to learn more and improve her English. At CUNY's "City Tech," her teacher is Alvard Berberyan, who praises Min Si Ng's "very positive and outgoing personality."





A NEW WHITE LANDSCAPE

Angie Portilla

While we drank hot coffee and looked out the window, my brother, mother, and I talked about Christmas. The day was icy, and we could only see fog enveloping the street. Suddenly, small snowflakes began to fall, one after another. In a short time, the street was full of snow, and my brother and I decided to go outside. Once in the street, we were alone. As the snow fell and covered everything—the street, cars, buildings, and trees—I took off my glove and grabbed some snow as it fell from the sky. I watched those little snowflakes unravel in my hand, dissolving into nothing, leaving only a wet footprint. I thought about how my life had changed since I arrived in this country, in the same way I could feel the snow quickly melting in my hand.

I sat down on the steps of my house and admired, for a long time, the beautiful new white landscape.



Angie Portilla, age 25, writes, “I was born in Pasto, Colombia and arrived in the United States one year ago. I am a responsible person, focused on my goals.” In her free time, Angie Portilla likes to draw and to read suspense and adventure books. She wrote her story “for immigrants who arrive in the United States with dreams and with the expectation of new challenges.” A student in the CLIP class at “City Tech,” she thanks her teacher, Caryn Davis, “for encouraging me to take new opportunities and work hard to accomplish my goals.” She adds, “Now, my goal is to become a great businesswoman.”

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT-ELECT 2016

Harry Andriatsilavo



Dear Sir,

I am not yet an American citizen. I admire the United States, and I have made the choice to live in America and to contribute to the development of this country as others have done before me. I filled out an application in order to obtain American citizenship.

I am writing to inform you of my fear about the future of this country. During the election campaign, you expressed ideas that I and many American people don't accept. The racist and homophobic remarks and the scorn of women recall dark periods of history and bring back regretful times of this country. They don't "make America great again," as you chose for your campaign slogan.

You have divided the American people. They are now against each other. You have given them the sense of fear—fear of "the other," fear of the future.

Now you will be president of this marvelous country. You are a builder. So do not demolish it; rather, continue to build America by seeking trust, and equality, and end all kinds of discrimination.

You made a commitment to improve the lives of families. Do not abolish Obamacare. I am counting on you to improve it, so that more families can benefit. Concerning immigration, I would like the policy you are going to implement to be worthy of the greatness of the United States.

I would be grateful if you could consider my request. I look forward to seeing the measures you will take in this direction.

Yours sincerely,
Harry Andriatsilavo

Harry Andriatsilavo writes, "My hometown is Paris, France; I speak French, Malagasy (Madagascar), Italian, and English. I am an architect, retired for two years. I arrived in New York City in July 2015 with my wife, who is working here. Now I am enjoying American life while improving my English at the New York Public Library's Hudson Park Branch, with teacher Laura Dotterer. Currently, I am a volunteer member of a nonprofit organization created to restore, preserve, and operate the Barrow Mansion, a spectacular 1837 Greek Revival-style building in downtown Jersey City."





NEW YORK CITY

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42 MY SECRET NEW YORK

Oksana Habruska

44 MY NAME IS . . . ?

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45 JUST A SMILE

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**46 LADIES FIRST! GENTLEMEN
FIRST?**

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**54 ONE SUMMER MORNING,
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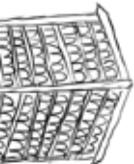
55 SCARE AT TIMES SQUARE

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56 SAD DAY

Dipu Sultan Topader





CAST OF CHARACTERS

Max Quinde Wiesner

I'm Jamal, and I'm about to "poison" myself. Yet again. A double hamburger, big fries, black water with bubbles, and a lot of ketchup. Despite knowing that eating this isn't healthy, "I'm loving it," and well, who cares?

Now I'm Carol, and I'm going to this new place where my BGF Jane told me that you'd find the absolute bestest salads in the world, and that they were, like, super expensive. If they're expensive, they must be good, right? I just have to try them, super healthy. O . . . M . . . G . . . these new shoes are killing me, but damn, I look amazing! Every window in stores or on cars is the perfect mirror to see my reflection. I'm gonna take a selfie. Let's see how many likes I get.

I'm Rubén, and I'm about to go to work. Over 10 hours a day (even Saturdays and Sundays), in a restaurant kitchen, for 11 dollars an hour. Every night when I get home, my back is sore, my feet are swollen, and my heart misses my country, but I see the loving eyes of my wife and my kids sleeping in peace. I know we have a better future here. What greater reward than that?

Now I'm Patrick. I'm in the gym and this is my last set of curls today. Afterwards, I'm running five miles, and I have to improve yesterday's time, which incidentally was better than the day before. The pills I swallowed have increased my strength, and the powder I put in my water energizes me. Speaking of pills, I've got only one of the blue ones left for this weekend, and I have two dates. I definitely need to stop by the pharmacy.

I'm Peter, and there's nothing better than walking while holding hands with the man I love without being judged.

I'm Jacob, and I'm crying because the sound of the fire truck woke me up; I'm wet, and I want my mommy to hold me and change me.

Right this second, in the subway, I'm about five thousand people getting on different lines, more than 550 people reading a book, and more than two thousand people playing an app on their cells.

On the streets, I'm more than half a million people eating pizza.

I'm more than a million people dressed in black.

I'm more than five million people wearing jeans.

I'm more than eight million people of all races, ethnicities, religions, cultures, philosophies, predilections, and tendencies, looking for a myriad of things, and throughout their journeys feeling and living freedom, independence, growth, effort, and success, which translates into self-acceptance and belonging. Without a doubt, we are looking for happiness and love.

I've heard that we're called "the melting pot" or "the mosaic." I truly think we should be called "the jigsaw puzzle," since each of us is a unique piece that fits in a specific spot. No one else is able to replace us to create what we are, a single image, a single painting, a single work of art.

I'm more than eight million people making me what I am, making me New York City.

A native of Ecuador, Max Quinde Wiesner came to the United States in November 2014. He was an artist and TV producer in his homeland. Now he studies English with ESOL teacher Robert Speziale. Tanzilya Oren is the site manager at the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center at the English-Speaking Union.





MY SECRET NEW YORK

Oksana Habruska

I have a secret. Only one knows my secret. It is New York. Do you know anyone who has the opportunity but doesn't want to live in New York? Someone who lives, works, and studies in Manhattan, yet dreams about another place? I am this person. If I were to tell this to my friends and family, they would think I was crazy. Only New York knows it. Knows and keeps silent.

My heart and my soul live in another city. Only my body and my mind arrived in New York some months ago. I came here because I tried to run away from myself. At the time, when the city of my soul had not fulfilled me, New York told me to come, try me. I listened to my mind, and that is why I am here.

I left everything that I had. I stepped into the terminal at J.F.K. International Airport without work, without English, without friends, without my only son. With only my clothes. New York welcomed me like a mother's smiling face. But you cannot run from yourself. New York knows it. It knows and waits.

I want everything, and I want it right now! If I can't have what I want, I feel that I will burst. And this feeling, of being in the eye of a storm, is the same no matter where I am, what I am doing, and who I am with. Anxiety is mixed with a constant need to run somewhere and do something, and with the constant fear that it will not be possible, there will not be enough time, or I will make mistakes.

The worst thing in this situation is that people near me consider it possible and even necessary to explain to me that everything will come gradually, step by step, and one only needs to be calm and wait. Everybody says the same thing! "You aren't the first; you won't be the last! Don't panic and don't hurry." But I want to cry when I hear this, "Don't talk to me; I feel crazy!" Only New York listens to my cry and doesn't talk.

During the period of my life when I dared to entertain these thoughts, I needed a job, the knowledge of English, and time and money for training. I thought that it might be better to be retrained or to study for a new profession, because a Ukrainian TV journalist and history teacher with not-so-good English isn't a major need of American taxpayers. And those needs were only a small share in my thinking and planning back then. They became just like a solid knot. I could not figure out how to untie this knot. I was afraid to approach it. So, only New York knew about it.

Then, New York began to speak to me. It spoke through people, but not people with vague reassurance—people with specific assistance. It was then that I finally understood that New York is not only a skyline or a lot of garbage. New York is not only expensive apartments and hard work. Principally, New York is people. Good people.

When you are in the eye of the storm in a new country, you have to listen to people who know specific objects, places, programs, professions, addresses, dates—everything that your mind can use. These people don't talk with you as if you are crazy. They, even without realizing it, do so that you may stumble a little bit less than they did. New York, thank you for your people!

The teacher at the Pedagogical University in my town, who is now the director of administration of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in America, Mr. Vasyl, printed my résumé, led me into a restaurant in the middle of Manhattan, and showed me how to ask for a job.

Roxolana, a parishioner at my church, the Holy Trinity Church of New York, during coffee after the service on Palm Sunday, wrote on an envelope the name of a college where she once studied. After a Google search, I was able to find almost all the schools in New York that offer free or inexpensive English classes.

An old friend, Natalya, who now lives in Bayonne, New Jersey, invited me to visit. She made me a cup of strong coffee and helped me reflect on why I came here. She outlined possible options for my future, and, while not forcing any of them on me, arranged these options on her own scale of priorities. I used her résumé as a model when I wrote mine.

I finally got my first job at a Manhattan branch of the Ukrainian National Federal Credit Union. From the first day, I got the impression that I was destined to be there and that they had waited eagerly for me and dreamed of teaching me banking. My colleagues are very different. They are my first American counterparts. They are my friends. They work, sometimes quarrel, make mistakes, and then come to each other's rescue. They have two things that unite them: honesty and humanity. They deserve a better ending to their story. Now, I pray for them daily. New York, thank you for your people!

These people are close to me now because kindness, honesty, and empathy don't have colors, nationalities, or religions. New York gives everyone a chance. The people help, but only you can achieve your own success. Only you can understand where your own home is.

Maybe New York will win my heart, or maybe my mind will find a way into the city of my soul. It's up to you, New York. Or it's up to me. Who knows? Time will tell.

Oksana Habruska came from Ukraine in April 2016. Her friends say that she won a lottery ticket, but she doesn't feel so sure she's "a winner." In Ukraine, she was a teacher and a TV journalist, and she now works as a bank teller. Her first goal is to learn English. She studies at CUNY's BMCC with ESOL instructor Joshua Stark. She says, "Like this, I start my life again." Denise Deagan is the director of Adult Basic Education at BMCC's Continuing Education Department.





MY NAME IS . . . ?

Hidetake Takayama

When I came to New York City, it was my first experience living in another country, and I found out how difficult it was to convey the correct pronunciation of my name. I used to go to a coffee shop, and they asked my name, and then my cup always came back with a different name on it. It made me confused and disappointed. I felt like I wasn't fitting in as a New Yorker. Then I tried to correct people by saying my name clearly and slowly. But it didn't work. So I ended up saying just "H."

One day, I changed my iPhone's language from Japanese to English because I needed to improve my English as soon as possible. I wanted to make my surroundings all English. Then I found that even Siri, a computer program that works as an intelligent assistant on iPhones, couldn't say my name. Siri made it sound like "Heidi." The correct pronunciation is "Hee-day." I know it confuses some people that it looks like the English word "hide" but is pronounced very differently.

But I didn't want to give up. I taught Siri about my name again and again. Then Siri asked me, "Your name is 'He Dead'?" At that moment, I felt it sounded super close to my name! So okay, I like it. I know the meaning is kind of weird, though.

From that day, Siri has called me "He Dead."

I'm feeling much better. It's like America finally accepted me.



Hidetake Takayama, a music composer, was born and raised in Japan. He graduated from Nihon University College of Art. During his college years, he began his career as a composer and keyboardist. He has composed commercial audio tracks for a number of television programs and advertisements. He has lived in New York City since November 2015 and now lives and writes music in Brooklyn. He studies English at the Tompkins Square Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, with Lead Instructor Kathryn Bonn.



JUST A SMILE

Kazi Gulshan

Only one month after coming from Bangladesh to America, I got a job at Popeye's, the fast-food chicken restaurant. On my first day behind the counter, I was excited and happy but also very nervous because I really didn't know what I was doing.

My first customer of the day, a well-dressed white man who looked about 40, ordered three pieces of spicy chicken with a side of mashed potatoes. But I mistakenly put in the order for three pieces of mild chicken. A coworker standing right next to me noticed my mistake.

"Get away!" she screamed at me. "I'll take this customer!"

Now I was even more frightened, nervous, and ashamed of my ignorance. I thought this mistake was going to cost me my job before I had even started it. And then something wonderful happened. The customer told my coworker to step aside. He wanted me to handle his order.

"Don't worry about it," the customer said to me, flashing a smile. "I know that you will be a good worker."

I have served thousands of customers at Popeye's since that day, but the first one was the one who mattered the most. I learned from him that no matter how bad things may look at the moment, there are nice people in the world who can help you get through.

And I learned that making a little mistake is not the worst thing you can do. And all this learning came from just a few kind words and a smile.

Kazi Gulshan immigrated to the United States in 2015 with her husband and teenage daughter. A teacher in her native Bangladesh, she hopes to improve her English so she can get a comparable position in New York City. For about a year, she has studied creative writing at the Adult Learning Center of the Queens Central Library. Her teacher is Mark Mehler, and the site advisor is Ken Tabano.



LADIES FIRST! GENTLEMEN FIRST?

Sangmi (Anne) Kim

I came to New York suddenly because my husband's company decided to move him here in June 2015.

New York City is strange and interesting to me.

I have never seen a man saying "good morning" to me. However, the man who lives next door to me opened the door and said, "You go first."

Oh! This country is kind to women! I thought.

In Korea, my husband always went first, and he does not hold doors open for me. In my country, men go ahead of women.

One day, my family went to a restaurant. They gave me my food first.

I felt so good. But my husband took my food. He was hungry and ate first.

I let out a sigh.

New York City is ladies first; but in my house, the gentleman goes first.

Do you think my husband is a gentleman?



Sangmi (Anne) Kim comes from Seoul, Korea, and has been living in New York since June 2015. She is still suffering from culture shock and adjusting to life in New York. She is proud to have received a driver's license, a real estate license, and a cosmetology license, all in English. "I want to work here, and that's why I'm studying English with Kathryn Bonn at the New York Public Library's Tompkins Square Adult Learning Center."



MR. OREO

Qiao Zhuang (Grace) Zhang

One Saturday morning this summer, my kids and I were on Long Island Beach for a church trip. My husband called and said, “Pray for the old guy, Oreo. He died.”

I was stunned and said, “But I saw him last night.” *He owed 25 cents for the bottle*, I thought.

“Yeah, people just told me. He was struck by a bus earlier this morning on the way to buy liquor from another store that opens earlier than ours. Just pray for him,” my husband said.

“He has passed away already. What’s the point of praying? If he is saved, he is saved.” I was surprised by my calm and cruel voice, and I was also wondering why my husband would tell me to pray for someone. My husband is not a Christian. Why did he suddenly think of calling me to pray for Mr. Oreo?

The next Monday, on the way to deliver dinner to my husband, I couldn’t help thinking of Mr. Oreo. Oreo was not his real name. People called him this name, but I didn’t know why. On the first day we had this liquor store, I met Mr. Oreo. He had lived in the neighborhood since he was a little boy. He was 50-some years old. He was tall and slim. He talked like an educated person. I heard he had a good degree and used to work in a hospital. He had some problem with one of his organs. He was not working and only helped clean and take away garbage for the deli next to our store. He was an honest man, so I liked to talk to him. However, I didn’t understand why he allowed himself to be homeless, drunken, and helpless.

I had thought I would be cold and unaffectionate at this person’s death. But when I saw, in front of the deli, Oreo’s pictures, candles, flowers, and people’s kind words on cardboard, I rushed into the liquor store’s toilet. I choked with sobs. I saw my red eyes in the mirror. My husband had noticed that I looked weird; he knocked on the door and asked nervously, “What happened? Anything happen?” I wanted him to leave me alone. I opened the door and told him, “I just feel sad for Oreo.”

Later, there was a poster on the wall stating Mr. Oreo’s funeral date. That day, a guy came into the store. I greeted him, “Hot today! You look tired!”

“I’m sad! I came back from my friend’s funeral,” he said.

“Mr. Oreo?” I asked.

He started to talk about Mr. Oreo. “I’ve known him for so many years. His mother and his brother already passed away. He was a good man, but . . .”

“I believe he is in a better place,” I comforted him.

He cheered up and said, “Yes, he’s in heaven with his family.”

A man’s goodness needs to be remembered.



Qiao Zhuang (Grace) Zhang left Fuzhou, China 18 years ago, when she was 18. Married, with two wonderful children, Irene and Jason, she studied English and writing at University Settlement. She writes, “I appreciate my ESOL teachers, who helped me to enjoy learning and become confident in my life. Living in a city surrounded by many people like ‘Mr. Oreo,’ I worry about whether people care about others or are careless, whether they show heart or are heartless, whether they have hope or feel lost.” This is her third LR publication.



A DIFFICULT RIDE

Zulaikha Alfatemi

Sometimes when I take the train or bus, people give me angry looks because I'm wearing a traditional headscarf and a long abaya. I feel bad. I don't look back at them.

Twenty-four-year-old Zulaikha Alfatemi was born in Yemen. She has lived in New York City for two years. She studies at the Parents' English Class at P.S. 24 in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, through NYU/Lutheran Medical Center's Family Empowerment Program. Jerilyn Sackler is her ESOL instructor, Sheldon Serkin is the program director, and Lena Jaffe is the teaching coordinator. Zulaikha Alfatemi loves studying English and playing with her little sons.



I WAS IN SHOCK

Rudelania Ferreira

One day, my husband and I were traveling on the A train to Manhattan when suddenly we saw something very strange smiling on the floor.

It was a set of false teeth, from a woman who had fallen asleep sitting on the train. The passengers looked at each other. The woman did not realize that her teeth were on the floor.

When she woke up and saw her false teeth on the floor, she picked them up and put them back in her mouth as if nothing had happened.

I looked at my husband and said, “OMG!”



Rudelania Ferreira, a native of the Dominican Republic, has lived in New York City for 23 years. She studies English at the Adult Learning Center of New York City College of Technology, where her teacher is Jay Klokker. About New York City, she says, “I like the snow and the opportunity.” In the future, she would like to buy a house.



LOST IN THE SUBWAY

Natalia Pavlova

My niece Olga lives in Manhattan. Olga invited me to visit her. So I took the N train. I took the train without knowing that the N train had changed its route. I had to get off in an area that was unfamiliar to me. Of course, I got lost.

I met a police officer. I asked her for help. She was very nice. She took me to my niece's house in her police car. She even came into my niece's apartment with me. My relatives were very surprised, as well as very scared, when they saw me with a police officer.

After they calmed down, they understood the reason the police officer was with me. They began to laugh. They laughed for a very long time.

Natalia Pavlova is a beginning-level ESOL student at the Dyker Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. A native of Russia, she is married to Valerii, who is also a student in the class. Valerii and Natalia don't sit together, so they are not tempted to distract each other from learning as much as they can. Lauren Klein is Natalia Pavlova's teacher and Lora Rosado is the site advisor. Haniff Toussaint is the ESOL and Basic Education Program coordinator.



I LOST MY BACKPACK ON THE D TRAIN

Lisa Szeto

On Tuesday, June 16, 2015—I will never forget that day—I left my backpack on the D train. When I realized I lost my backpack, I was shocked; I went back to the subway station to tell the station agent about my situation. She helped me call someone on the train, but they could not find it.

I went to the police station to report my loss. The police helped me write down what I lost. After the report was finished, my cell phone suddenly rang; it was my school calling. It sounded like Joe. (He was my former teacher; I hadn't attended his class for two years). On the phone he said, "Lisa, where are you?"

I said, "I am in a police station."

He said, "Did you lose your backpack on the subway? Somebody picked up your backpack. Inside, there is a computer, credit card, and ID card. He left his name and phone number."

At that time, I could not believe it was true. When I called him, he said, "Hi, Lisa. My name's Chris. I picked up your backpack on the D train. I found your school ID and called your school. I hoped they could contact you."

At that moment, my tears rolling down my face and in my heart, I said, "Thank you, thank you very much," and wrote down his address. When I hung up the phone, the policemen asked me if someone picked up the backpack. I said "Yes." And they said, "Oh! It is amazing and very honest."

I called my son William to come with me to meet the nice person who found my bag. He lives in the Bronx on 205th Street. We took the D train to 205th Street. When we arrived outside his apartment, I called him. Afterward, he came down, and we greeted each other.

He told me that when he opened the backpack, inside was a computer, ID, and credit card. And "Oh, my God, I saw something shocking . . ."

I interrupted: "What?"

He kept on talking. "I found an insulin pen. It is for diabetes patients. And inhalation aerosol, which is for asthma. I know this medicine is very important for patients because my son has diabetes."

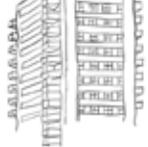
I said, “You are a very honest and nice person—you, your family, and especially your kids are proud of you.” We made small talk, and before leaving, I gave him a reward.

After we went to take the train, my son told me, “Mom, you are so lucky. You met a nice person today.”

I said, “I know. He is a great example for his children. I will call my school to thank them, and I will tell this true story for my friend. I have to praise him.”

Lisa Szeto was born and raised in Hong Kong. She and her husband have two adult sons, Victor and William. At University Settlement’s advanced writing class, she often writes about her family. “Everything is true!” she says. She also enjoys volunteering at a senior center, where she teaches people to use smartphones. The director of University Settlement’s Adult Literacy Program is Michael Hunter.





ONE SUMMER MORNING, WAITING FOR THE BUS

Julia Roman

One summer morning, waiting for the bus
on my way to work,
across the avenue at Broadway,
I saw two women
with a little girl between them.
There was nothing on my mind.
I was just following them with my eyes.
At the corner of Isham and Broadway,
they crossed the street,
and turned onto the sidewalk
where I was standing,
waiting for the bus.
I was still watching them.
It happened when they passed by me:
The little girl
looked straight into my eyes
and gave me a beautiful, precious smile.
That smile is sealed in my memory!



Julia Roman writes: "I was born in Maunabo, Puerto Rico, in August 1961. I am a middle child, with three sisters and two brothers. My parents came to New York City in July 1968, when I was seven years old, and I have lived in the Bronx ever since. I still travel to my beautiful island of Puerto Rico, to see the beauty of the ocean waves, the beaches, the palms, and the different flowers." Julia Roman studies with instructor Mindy Levokove at Lehman College's Adult Learning Center.

SCARE AT TIMES SQUARE

Wead Nagi



When I was back home in Yemen, I had always heard about Times Square in New York City. So, when I arrived here, I couldn't wait to visit this famous place. I decided to go with my kids; at that time, I had three children. I couldn't believe we were actually going.

I was carrying my youngest daughter, who was three years old. I was astonished by my surroundings. I felt like I was in an imaginary world with the tall buildings, lights spread all over, and people from across the world.

I put my daughter down so she could walk with me, while holding my hand. In an instant, her hand slipped from mine, but I didn't feel her letting go because I was distracted by the beauty of Times Square. Then I looked around and screamed her name, "Marwa, Marwa!" I searched for her, while crying, but sadly, I couldn't find her. Finally, I was losing hope. I took my other kids and sat on a corner. I kept on praying to God that no harm had been done to my daughter.

While I was worried and crying, I saw a man walking toward my children and me. He spoke to us, but we couldn't understand because we didn't speak English. Finally, from his hand signals, I understood that he wanted us to go with him. I saw a huge crowd and many police officers. I thought to myself that something terrible had happened to my daughter. All of a sudden, I heard my daughter screaming out, "Ummi! Ummi!"—our language's word for mommy. She ran to me, crying with fear. I hugged her, also crying. The crowd clapped and some police officers were even crying.

I will never forget that day.

Wead Nagi emigrated from Yemen almost six years ago, when she was 28. She is the mother of five children—two boys and three girls, ranging in age from three to 13. She is proud that she became a U.S. citizen last year. When Wead Nagi first came to this country, she knew no English and couldn't write at all. Now, her dream is to become a famous writer. She thanks the New York City Department of Education's Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center and her current teacher, Tilla Alexander, for all she's achieved so far.





SAD DAY

Dipu Sultan Topader

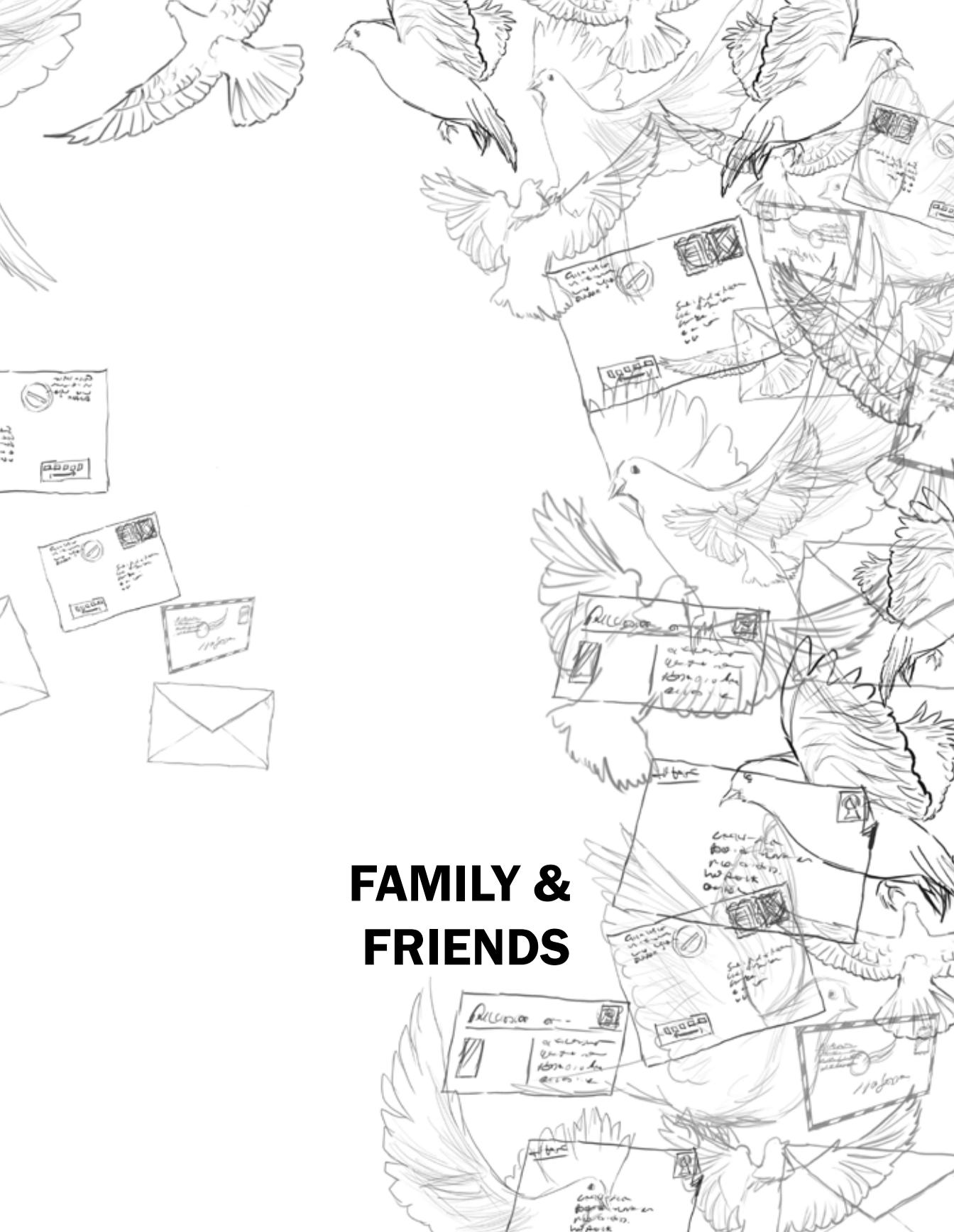
It was Wednesday, November 9, 2016. I woke up at 6 a.m. to go to work. When I got to the subway station, I was surprised how quiet people were. In my experience of using the subway for two years, I had noticed that it was always noisy and crowded. But this day was different from other days. I saw everyone with sad faces. No one was looking at each other or talking. After 40 minutes, I reached my workplace and began work. Many customers are friendly there; we usually talk a lot. This day was not the same. They just said hi, got their order, and left. I wondered what had happened. I tried to figure it out. In the afternoon, I left the store for a few minutes and saw that the streets had less traffic. It was not a windy day, and the leaves on the tree were still, but the sky was cloudy. After a few seconds, it started to rain, and I realized that the sky was sad, too. Even the sky was crying that day.

Later, I asked my customers why people seemed so sad this day. They explained to me that it was about the results of the presidential election. I understood then because I felt the same way.

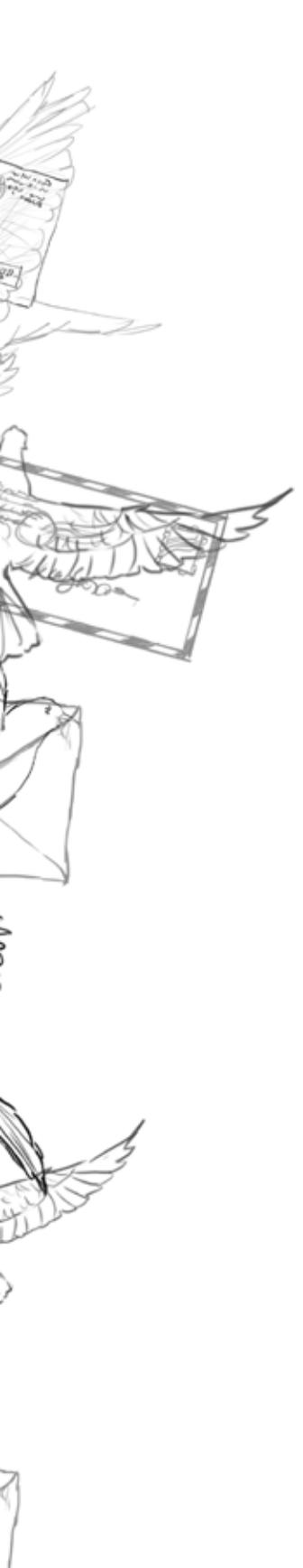


Dipu Sultan Topader, age 30, writes, "I am originally from Bangladesh, where I completed a law degree and was a social worker. I came to the United States two years ago. I am studying English so I can go to school and become a lawyer to help people." Dipu Sultan Topader enjoys playing soccer and cricket, as well as writing poetry in his native language of Bangla. At the New York Public Library's Seward Park Branch, his teacher is Lead Instructor Terry Sheehan.





FAMILY & FRIENDS



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Yahya Zaraie

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WHO DIED AT 26)**

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FAMILY

Yahya Zaraie

I was born in Damascus, Syria, to a big and famous family. My great-grandfather was famous in the Muslim world. His name was Mohammed Saeed Zorai. He was an imam and writer. He wrote more than 70 books on Islam and on the sciences and medicine. He was known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzeyah. My father was a Syrian Arab. My mother was Turkish.

I was born at midnight on January 9, 1940. It was cold and rainy, and the sounds of guns and thunder were outside. Not because of my birth. The British military had entered Syria, coming from Jordan and Palestine, clashing with the army of France. World War II was at its peak.

My father was a farmer. Our house was on the farm. Near our farm was the French army, staying inside the train station located beside us. Despite her fear, my mother's joy at my birth was expressed in her face.

For a month, my mother breastfed me. After that, her increasing fear of the war caused her to produce little milk. As an alternative, my mother passed me to her sisters, my aunts, who breastfed me.

In the Islamic religion, when a woman breastfeeds a child that is not hers, that child becomes a brother or sister of her children and all the children she breastfeeds. And all their parents become the parents of that child, too. So I have six mothers and more than 30 brothers and sisters. I am proud of all of them and still love them. Today, over one hundred of their children call me Uncle. It is very difficult to memorize their names.



Born in Damascus, Syria, where he was a clothing designer and manufacturer, Yahya Zaraie has lived in the United States for five years. He studies English at the Arab American Association of New York, where John Kefalas is his teacher and Susannah Bien-Gund is the Adult Education Program manager. Yahya Zaraie and his wife, Amal, have been married for 52 years. Their six children and 22 grandchildren live all over the world. They hope to reunite with their family soon.



1001 LETTERS (TO MY HUSBAND, WHO DIED AT 26)

Larysa Frankiv

My Dear Lovely Friend,

I wrote you thousands of letters, and I will never stop. I have never sent them to you. I don't know where you are. How are you? All the words in the world cannot explain what I want to say to you. I just want to tell you SORRY. Sorry for what? . . . I love you. I hate you. I miss you. Please give me one chance to see and feel you.

Who you are to me, I don't know. However, I clearly see you every night; in my dreams, you are still with me. You are with me there, but you are so far away. I can't reach you. I can't hug and kiss you. I can't tell you anything. I need you. I cannot breathe without you. I can't live without you.

You know what? I hate you so much. You kill me every morning. When I wake up alone, I realize it was a nightmare again. I will be reborn one night. I will walk with you in my dream. I won't ask you for anything. I will have this moment. You will be just mine.

Please don't disappear. You are my soul and heart. If you disappear, I will disappear . . . Please come to me every night. I wait. I cannot live without you or with you. I am sorry. I couldn't. I could. I cannot. I couldn't. Forgive me . . .

Larysa Frankiv was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and raised in Lviv, Ukraine. She has a son, Vitaly. "1001 Letters" is about her husband, Lyubomyr, who died in an accident when they were both 26, and their son was not yet two. Larysa Frankiv studies at University Settlement's advanced writing class, where Michael Hunter is the director of the Adult Literacy Program. She enjoys many sports, especially running.





LIFE'S APPRENTICE

Rodolfo dos Santos Rodrigues

When you showed me how to use a hammer to hit a nail,
I saw then that I would need balance in life.

When you taught me the right way to cut a piece of wood or measure something,
I learned then that in my life, I need to be accurate with my acts.

When you taught me how to replace a lamp, so we shouldn't stay in the dark,
I learned that when life leaves us in the dark, switch the lamp and bring the light back.

When we fixed a leaky pipe together,
I saw it doesn't matter what bad things happen to us,
we can work together and fix all the leaks.

When the boss yelled at you, or when the job site was hard,
you said to me, "Be positive and hang on!"
because other people depend on you in these services.

You showed me how to be a handyman, to do things well,
and how it was important to do everything well for everyone.

Even when I made a mistake or broke something expensive,
you didn't "ground me"; you taught me that we need to be responsible for our attitude.

And oh how I loved the smell of paint,
the texture of the wood,
the dust under our nails,
and the time we spent together.

My first job wasn't in construction with my father,
It was on the work of living with my dad.



Rodolfo dos Santos Rodrigues, age 28, was born in Santo André, Brazil. He arrived in the United States in June 2016. He is enjoying his quiet life in New York, while making new friends. And although he's always been interested in architecture, he's considering one day becoming a teacher. At the Queens Library's Elmhurst Adult Learning Center, his ESOL instructor is James McMeniman, and the center manager is Michelle Johnston.



THE LITTLE GIRL WITH A BIG HEARTACHE

Annabel Sermeno-Maher

What is heartache? How do you measure heartache? Especially for a child who should be enjoying just being a child? Is it by the number of tears that flow down her cheek? Or it is by how long and loudly she cries? Or how deep the scars are in her soul? How does one measure such things?

I will tell you a tale of a little girl with a big heartache. Patricia Anne is a beautiful, bright, and happy little girl on a small island, deep in the Pacific. She lives with her mother and her older sister, Ate, in their small native house. Her father works an ocean away, so she only sees him twice or sometimes three times a year. Growing up without the constant presence of a father is the norm for her. She might wonder sometimes, *Who is this guy, and what is his role in my life?* This is evidenced by her pushing the “strange man” away from her mother when she sees them close enough to kiss each other, saying “My mommy!” while hugging her mother.

Time passes, and the little girl has spent over four years mostly far away from her father before she and her mother finally join him on the same continent. She is fascinated with New York City and how different it is from the place she grew up. She is confused by the different seasons, yet enjoys each one of them.

She is starting to see that the “strange man,” who used to be just visiting seems not to be going away. Slowly, gradually, she comes to enjoy his presence. She also begins to understand his role in her life: the role of a father. A father who will love and protect her in any circumstance. She is beginning to feel the bond between a father and a daughter. She now enjoys riding on her father’s shoulders when she is too tired to walk. She is starting to accept the relationship between her mother and father, and her personal relationship with both of them.

Yet with all these acceptances, and the joy of finding a new person to love and rely on, the heart of this little girl is about to be broken.

How can you tell her that the father she now loves and respects is dying?

Annabel Sermeno-Maher was born in Quezon, a small town on the Philippine island of Palawan. She earned bachelor’s degrees in nursing and business administration. She immigrated to the United States in 2013. To prepare to reenter the nursing field, she strengthened her language skills by studying with Michele Persaud at the Kips Bay Branch of the New York Public Library’s ESOL program. She writes, “I would like readers to know that every one of us has our own struggles, heartaches, and pains that invade our souls. So we should show compassion to every person.”





TWINS

Valeria Lee

Even before I was born, I was not alone, because I had a twin: my lovely sister, Aleksandra. When I was a child, I thought everybody had a twin. On the playground, I met other kids and asked them, “Where is your sister or brother twin?” I was genuinely confused when they answered that they did not have one. When our mom explained to my sister and me that not everybody has a twin, I realized I was lucky.

It was incredible how similar we were. Looking at each other was like looking in the mirror: We had the same birthmarks, voices, smiles, and gestures. We both wanted to be ballerinas. We put on many skirts, one on top of another, and danced with each other. We played house and paid visits to each other with our husbands—teddy bears. We were even sick at the same time. When one of us was punished, the other asked to be punished, too. I knew Aleksandra’s secrets, and she knew mine.

One day Aleksandra got so seriously sick that she went to the hospital. She had hepatitis. And I didn’t. I was angry with her because she left me alone in our room. I sat in bed, closed my eyes, and cried. When I looked at her bed at night, I had mixed emotions: anger, loneliness, sadness, and pity. I kept telling myself that it was not her fault. I adopted her teddy bear. We started to write letters to each other, and our mom was the mailperson. I wrote to her about school, homework, classmates, and how strongly I missed her. She wrote to me about injections, drop counters, people in her ward, the books she read and, of course, about missing me. One day, she finally came home.

That was the first time Aleksandra and I were separated for a long time. Now we are separated by an ocean.



Valeria Lee, age 35, writes, “I was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. My native language is Russian. I arrived in the United States in April 2013. I like classical music, opera, and gothic rock. I also like to read books about history and psychology and watch detective movies. My hobbies are singing and drawing.” A student in the CUNY Language Immersion Program at the College of Staten Island, Valeria Lee’s teacher is Polina Belimova. The program director is Donna Grant.



MY BROTHER IS STILL ALIVE

Belquis Perez

On November 12, 2001, two months after 9/11, my brother left New York City to go home to the Dominican Republic with his friend. His friend forgot his passport, leaving it in his house. He went back to get it, and on the way back to the airport, there was a lot of traffic. He was going to miss the flight, so he called my brother and said, "William, I can't go with you because I am late."

My brother was inside the airplane at Kennedy Airport, arguing with the flight attendant because he wanted to get off the plane. She said, "You can't because we are going to close the door!" He said, "I don't care; I am going out." They called the police, who came and took him off the plane.

A few minutes after takeoff, the airplane crashed.

We tried to find out about him. When I called the airline, they said, "Sorry, he was on the plane." My family and I cried a lot. We called his friend, who said, "Your brother was on the plane."

That afternoon, my brother called and said, "I am still alive."

Born in Barahona, Dominican Republic, Belquis Perez came to the United States 20 years ago. A mother of two and grandmother of three, she owns a construction company. She enjoys decorating and playing basketball and baseball with her family. She studies English at the New York Public Library's Wakefield Branch, in the Bronx, where the hub manager is Eric Rosenbaum. When she wrote "My Brother Is Still Alive," her teacher was Carol Halebian. Belquis Perez has since been promoted to a higher level.





GRANDMA ESPERANZA

Maria Rodriguez

In my childhood, there was a lady who lived next to my house. She was around 70 to 80 years old. She was a kind, sweet, but lonely person because she had no family. Her house was small, but she had a big yard with big, tall trees. On the trees, she made swings for me because she liked to see me swinging. She enjoyed being with me. She made me rag dolls with her clothes and also told me beautiful stories. I enjoyed going to her house. She was poor but had a great heart. I didn't get to know my biological grandparents. She was a grandma to me, and I was like her granddaughter. My mom called her Grandma Esperanza. She died, but I remember her as if it were yesterday. I will love her forever.



A native of Puebla, Mexico, Maria Rodriguez studies English at the New York Public Library's Bronx Library Center. Her teacher, Lead Instructor Sarah Hidalgo, writes: "Maria Rodriguez wants to learn English better so she can help and communicate with her 12-year-old daughter, Zuleidy, and so she can get a better job. She would like to travel to every state with her daughter." Maria Rodriguez writes, "I like studying because it is important to understand other people." Decklan Fox is the hub manager for the site.



MY FRIEND FRANK

Dolares Jones

My friend Frank, everybody knows him as the pigeon man. When I go to work at 6:45 a.m., I always see him outside, feeding the pigeons, and there is always one sitting on his shoulder. He can tell the difference between males and females, and he named all of them. In the evening, when I'm on my way back home, Frank is outside feeding the pigeons.

One afternoon, I was going to lunch, and I ran into Frank. He was carrying a big black garbage bag, and he was very upset. I asked him what was wrong, and he said, "Follow me." At the corner, a big black truck had run over the pigeons.

Frank said, "Why did they do this?" He said that if the horn of the truck had been blown, the birds would have flown away. He said, "It was done on purpose. One of the truck drivers was smiling, and I was upset. I thought it was a mean thing to do."

Frank, who everybody knows as the pigeon man, was standing there with tears in his eyes. He said, "What goes around comes around."

Dolares Jones was born in Newark, New Jersey. A divorcée, she raised her two sons by herself in public housing, which was very challenging. She currently lives in Far Rockaway, and since her sons are now adults, she has time to study toward obtaining her high school diploma. At the Queens Library's Peninsula Learning Center, Ebru Yenil is the library literacy specialist, and Barbara Miller is the center manager.



MY LOVELY LOZA

Azza Zaki

One of the most emotional and difficult situations I've ever experienced was when I decided to give away a very sweet and lovely pigeon. My pigeon.

My daughter Dina brought her home one day when she returned from college. The pigeon's head was coming out of her bag.

At first, this pigeon gave us a hard time. She was frightened and anxious. She wasn't eating or drinking. In the house, she would fly and then rest sadly on the air conditioner. She was unhappy and feeling totally out of place because she was taken away from her friend, a pigeon who had shared a cage with her since they were brought from Yemen. They always flew together. They lived together.

When I saw how depressed she was, I brought her two pigeons to keep her company. She hated them. I could hear them screaming at each other. When anyone tried to calm her, she pushed them away with her wing.

Days passed, and we started to play with her more. I began to feed her like a baby. She was now eating again. She started to become very attached to us. She would sit with us in the living room, watching TV. Winter in Egypt is very cold. She didn't like the box we made for her to sleep in, so she would fly to Dina's bed and crawl under the blanket with her to keep warm. My daughter let her sleep on her chest.

We named her Loza. It means almond.

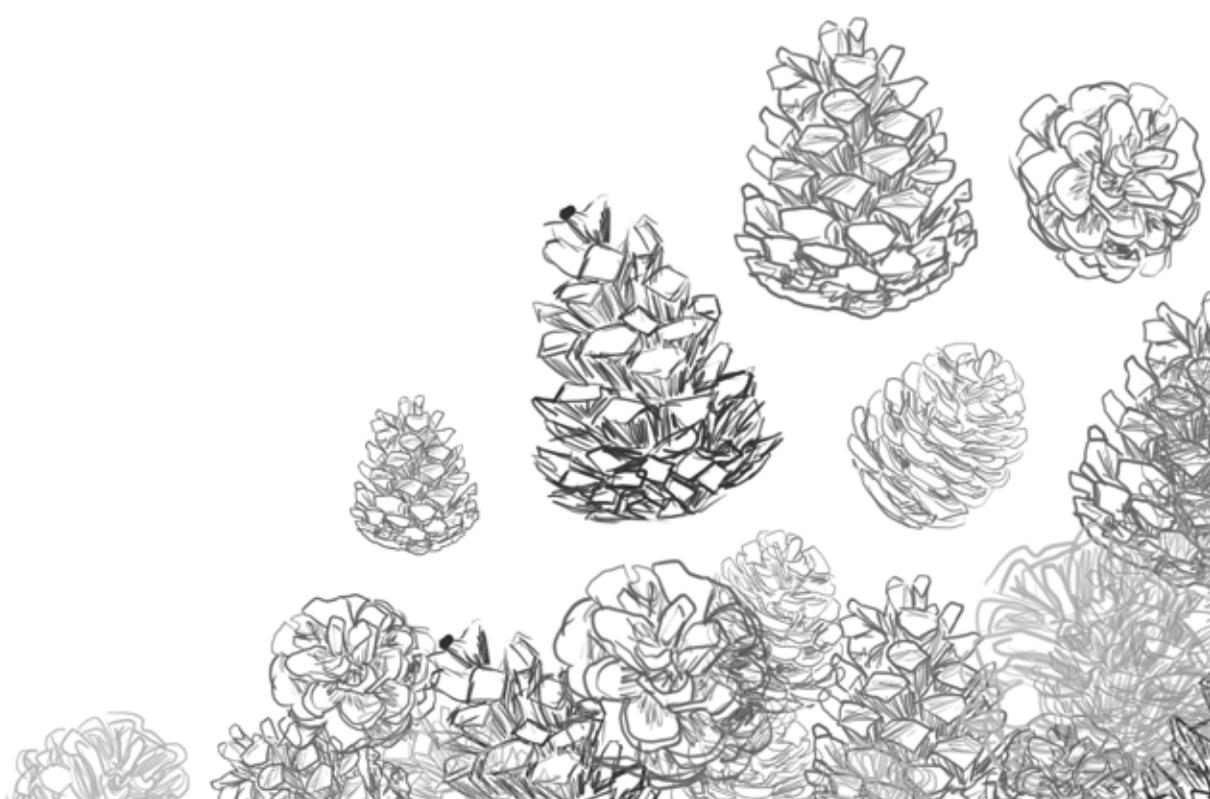
Loza became a very important part of our family. When we would leave her alone for a long time, we would return to find feathers everywhere. So we started to take her with us wherever we went.

It crossed my mind that this was not the natural life for a pigeon. She needed to fly with other pigeons. I knew I had to make a difficult decision.

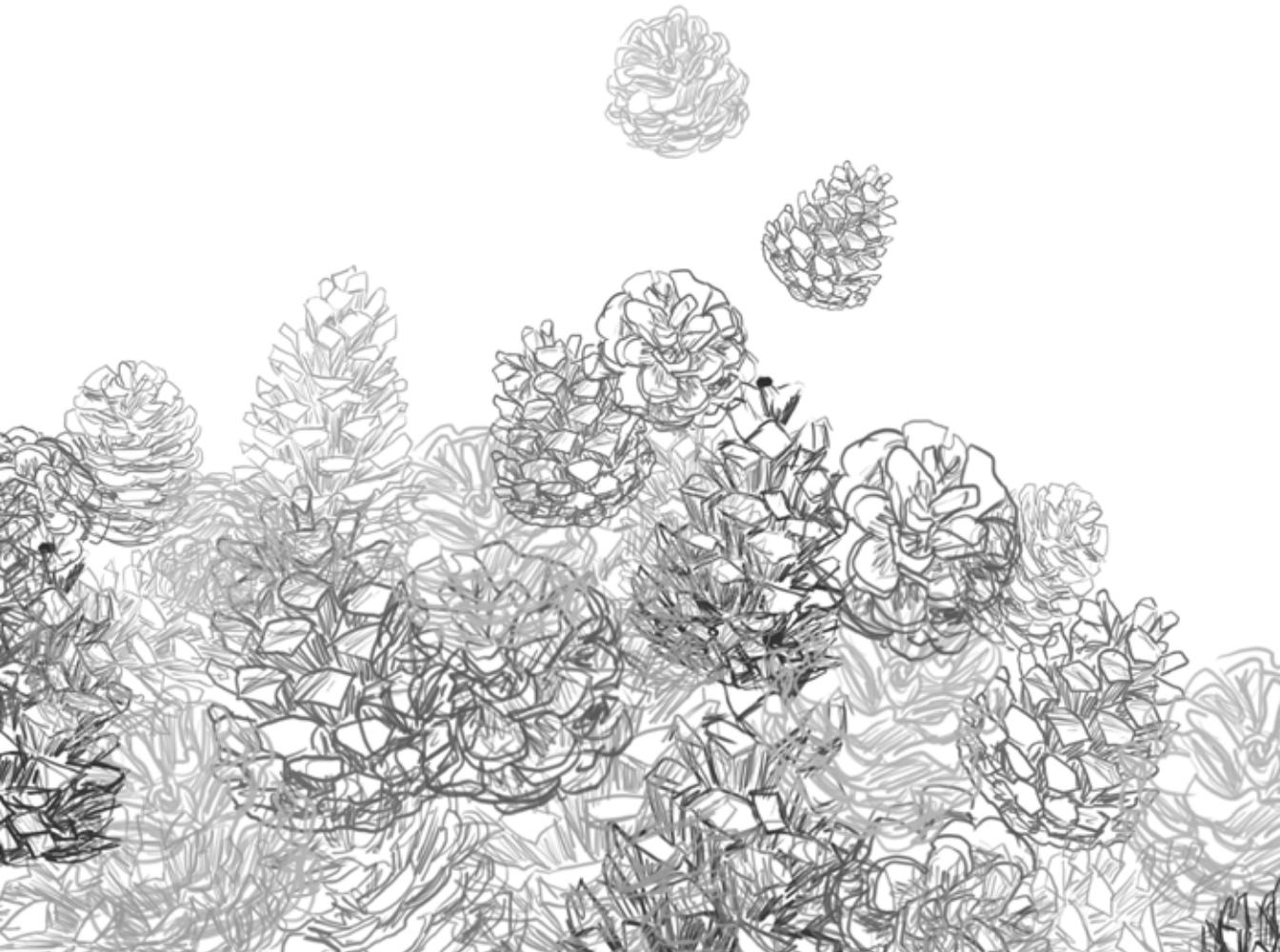
I gave Loza to a person who raises pigeons. He lets them fly and live the life they were meant to live. I miss her so much. But I'm happy for Loza because I know she is happy now, too. Loza, I love you.



Azza Zaki was born in Cairo, Egypt, where she earned her bachelor's degree in psychology with a concentration in early childhood development. Now living in Brooklyn, she is married and has two children who are young adults. She studies English at the Arab American Association of New York and volunteers there as an instructor of the beginning literacy class. Her dream is to become a social worker. Her ESOL teacher is John Kefalas, and Susanna Bien-Gund is the AAANY's Adult Education Program manager.



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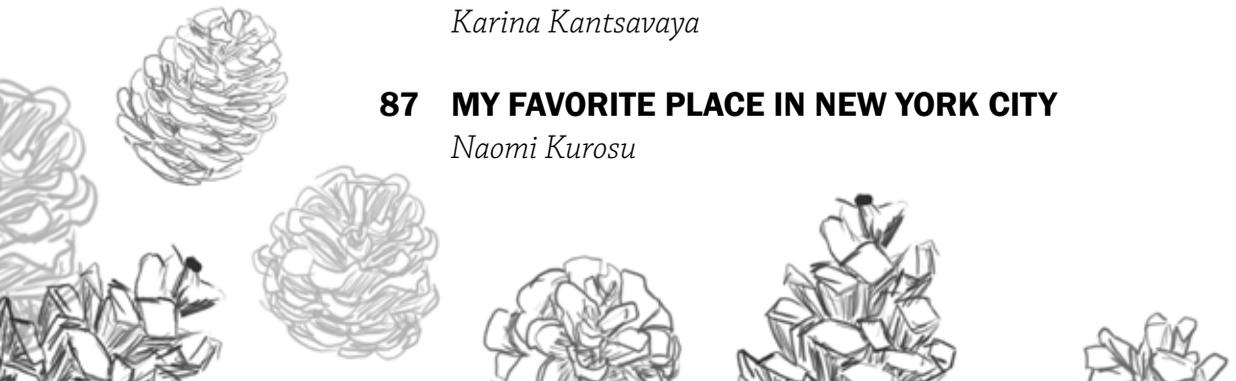
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OBAMA

Livingstone Broomes

He is nice.
He is a good dad.
He has a loving wife.
He is happy.
He is handsome.
He looks like me.



Livingstone Broomes, a 69-year-old native of St. Peter, Barbados, has lived in the United States since 1971. He studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Adult Learning Center, where the site advisor is Susan Knott and the literacy advisor is Matthew Greene. Livingstone Broomes writes, "I am a happy-go-loving guy. I love my wife and six kids. I have nine grandchildren. My favorite food is flying fish and cou-cou."



MY PINE TREE

Archil Ghonghadze

I was born in Georgia, in a small town called Khashuri. We were a big family, with me and my three sisters, my mom and dad, and my grandfather. My house was rather small, with a big, beautiful garden with many trees and different kinds of flowers. In the center of my garden was a huge and tall pine tree, whose branches were wide open. Under that was my modest and small house.

Generally, my town is very popular in my country because there are a lot of pine trees, and everyone has planted a pine tree in their garden. My grandfather planted this tree when my father was born. It always covered my house from snow, wind, and rain. It looked after my house and my family.

In the summer, when May started, a special tree dust fell, which was good for our breathing. In the autumn, the tree gave us many cones that we used in the fireplace. I remember this fire was different because when it burned, it smelled of pine. In the winter, my house was filled with that smell.

My father's birthday was important in my family because we celebrated this day for my father and for my pine tree. On his last birthday, my family went to the mountain close to our town. This mountain was covered by a lot pine trees. The air and smell were different. We did not see our house from the top of the mountain, but we recognized the pine tree in our garden. It covered everything.

We decided to play Georgian music. We danced and sang "Happy Birthday" for my father. He was happy. I will never forget this day.

Everyone has a sad moment in their lives. One summer day, when my pine tree spread its special tree dust, and we enjoyed ourselves with it, my father died. It was a shock for us, maybe for my pine tree, too, because every week it looked sad. Its branches drooped a little.

My pine tree was 50 years old. It was tired. It changed color from green to brown. One autumn day, my pine tree was withering, and it tried to lie down. We had to cut it because it was dangerous for my house.

This day was sad for me. I thought from this day forward, nothing would cover my house like my pine tree did before. This was a time of emptiness for me.

My father and my pine tree left together.

But then my life changed. In that same year, one day when I woke up early, I went out. Something funny had happened in my garden. In the same place where

my huge pine tree used to be, I saw a small pine tree.

It was more like a twig and very cute. It was like a bright light. I always believe that sad and unhappy days turn into happy and fine days. This was one of those moments. My family started to look after the little pine tree. Every day, we poured water and supplied it with minerals.

Now, that pine tree is nine years old. It is tall and cute. Its branches are wide open, too. I hope that my new pine tree will be huge, like its father was before, and it will cover my house again.



Archil Ghonghadze was born in Georgia. He graduated from Tbilisi State Medical University and Medical Academy. After the August War, he worked for the Red Cross as a paramedic volunteer, then in the Ministry of Internal Affairs as a doctor of internal medicine. He came to New York City in 2015. He writes, “This story is dedicated to the memory of my father.” Archil Ghonghadze studies English at the Harlem Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, with teacher Myrna Holguin, and volunteer assistants Julian Kalkstein and Terry Schwadron. The hub manager is Fatma Ghailan.



THE BEST POLICE OFFICER EVER

Pearl Batson

The best police officer ever is Tommy Norman. I read about him in the newspaper. He is from Little Rock, Arkansas. The kids in the neighborhood where he works just love him. The families know when he is coming because he plays music from his police car.

I hadn't seen anything like that before. That is what we need in America today. You want to be able to trust the police, so if there are any problems in the neighborhood, you won't feel scared to tell them about it. When you have trust between the police and the community, there is nothing you can't accomplish.

Born in Grenada, Pearl Batson studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Eastern Parkway Adult Learning Center, with Site Advisor Donna Alleyne. Pearl Batson writes: "I love to help people, and I love to cook. I enjoy watching history documentaries. I am trying to get my High School Equivalency Diploma, so that I can become a writer and a nurse."





MY GREEN AND RED MARBLE

Jorge Rivera

The soil under my fingernails, my shady cousin is running away from me and my mom is shouting, "Son, come home, it is already dark."

I do not care. My last green and red marble is lost in the grass.

My dad is playing his old acoustic guitar and singing off-key: "*Si entre tus sueños me miras llorando.*" His favorite song.

He says, "I don't understand pop music!"

I don't care at all! My green and red marble is yet lost.

Morning comes. Someone is shaking my leg.

"Wake up, Son," my mom says.

"Your dad is coming back from milking, and you don't want to get scolded."

The little boy is running to the kitchen for his milkshake.

My dad just looks at me. "Good boy! Drink it. You gotta be strong like Daddy."

Mom is coming with my red Spiderman schoolbag.

Oh no! Last night I could not find my green and red marble.

"Hurry up! I've got work to do," my dad yells from the car.

I don't care! My green and red marble is still lost.

School is boring this morning. I am thinking, *What am I gonna play with?*

That Miss does not understand kids. I hate her.

Especially today.

My classmate says, "I got a happy face on the homework."

I show him my tongue.

The break-time bell rings. I go out sad. My friend pulls me toward the playground.

I am thinking of borrowing a new marble from him.

Oh no!

"You are gonna cry, Cousin."

"Why are you playing with my green and red marble?"



Jorge Rivera writes, "I came to the United States from Guatemala at the age of 18. I like to write, I enjoy psychology, and I plan to continue my education in psychology. I love the diversity of New York City, as well as the opportunities." Jorge Rivera studies at BMCC's Adult Learning Center with instructor Lester Lambert.



LIXIA RICE, A SWEET MEMORY

Qian (Lucy) Huang

I grew up in Yueyang, in the Chinese province of Hunan, but my hometown is Lishui, in Zhejiang province. Because my mother came from Lishui, she always hoped that we would know some of the local customs of Lishui, and she wanted us to remember these customs. The best way to do this is through food. Therefore, our family's diet was always different from our Hunan neighbors' during times of traditional festivals. As we all know, Hunan cuisine is spicy, but our family liked to put sugar in the dish. So, although I grew up in Hunan, even today I do not eat hot peppers.

When I was a child, I liked the food and traditional customs of the beginning of summer, known in China as *lixia*—a solar term signifying the advent of summer. On the day of the Lixia Festival, my mother made *lixia* rice for the family. It is a unique custom of Lishui people. It is said that people who eat *lixia* rice in the beginning of summer will be healthy throughout the summer. We do not know if it is true, but we children loved the *lixia* rice story.

The main ingredients of *lixia* rice are sticky rice, fresh bamboo shoots, cured meat, garden peas, and dried mushrooms. Adding these ingredients to the plain white rice creates a colorful, festive dish. Today, these ingredients are all simple to find. But in China during the 1980s, these ingredients were hard to obtain, and preparation required several months.

My sister and I were given the job of peeling the peas. My mother taught us how to peel them. First, she grabbed one garden pea with her left hand, broke off the stem, and pulled the string down along the pod with her right hand. Then, she pressed each pod between her thumb and forefinger to open it. At last, with her right thumb, she pushed out each pea into the bowl. Following my mother's lesson, we peeled the peas, very slowly at first. Later, as we peeled more peas, our speed increased. Watching the bowl fill up with peas, my heart was very happy. I always felt pure delight when I ate *lixia* rice. Nowadays, we can have *lixia* rice

anytime. But it no longer creates the same happiness. Is this good or bad?

I'm very grateful to my mother for teaching us our traditional customs. No matter where I go, I will always cherish the memories of this taste. I will always miss this kind of simple happiness.



Qian (Lucy) Huang was born in Zhejiang, China. She has a degree from Shanghai Jiao Tong University and was an accountant in a commercial company. She and her husband have lived in New York City since November 2015. She writes, "Now I attend ESOL class at the Institute for Immigrant Concerns as well as volunteer for the school. I love my school and the opportunity of working with professional people." Freddy Jacobs is her ESOL instructor. Mark Brik is the education director, and Donna Kelsh is the Institute for Immigrant Concerns' executive director.



ICE CREAM

Zoya Lavrova

A tin with an opening was my money box. I seldom checked on it because I infrequently added to its contents. One day, 40 kopecks had finally accumulated inside it. It was a sacred amount of money: the price of a box of colored pencils. To buy colored pencils was my dream.

Our family wasn't wealthy. We never had anything but the basic necessities, and sometimes even food was scarce. We lived in a remote Siberian village during the postwar years, which should explain everything.

There was an omen: If you have a white spot on your nail, you will get a new piece of clothing. Sometimes, when I saw one, I was happy for a few days, waiting for a new dress. It never appeared, but I still believed in such omens.

Colored pencils were sold at the railway station. It was about two and a half miles from the countryside where I lived. It was unpredictable whether somebody would go in that direction, so I decided not to wait for a companion and set off alone. Crowds of people went back and forth, our neighbors and passengers going to and coming from the trains.

Across the tracks, somebody was selling ice cream. A young girl took a scoop of ice cream, placed it between two circle-shaped waffles, handed it to a customer, and counted change. The line went quickly.

I joined the line as everybody does. In my hand, I was clutching 40 kopecks and was waiting for a miracle. If I bought the ice cream, I would not have money for the pencils.

I didn't like that the line moved fast. I needed time to decide what was more important for me now, what I wanted more. So I went to the end of the line and moved ahead with the line again and again. The ice cream lingered in my mind and wouldn't let go.

I had never eaten ice cream but knew it was very tasty. I looked at my money and again hesitated about what to do.

After moving with the line four times, I heard a voice, "Hey, kid, here you

are.” I turned around to the voice and saw a middle-aged man dressed in a gray suit, who then poured some change into my cupped hand. The man quickly turned around and hurried to the train, and I could not even say anything.

I stood in line again, bought ice cream, and two boxes of colored pencils.

I have remembered that man and that day all my life, thanked him from the bottom of my heart, and thought that he filled my hand not with coins but with small pieces of warm coal that warm my heart every time I recall this.



Zoya Lavrova emigrated from Russia 10 years ago. A dental hygienist, her hobby is inventing, and she has two patents in progress. Her LR story is one of many her mother told her. Now Zoya Lavrova has grandchildren, and she is learning English in order to communicate with them better. She has also written stories for children. She studies at the New York Public Library's Jefferson Market Branch, with Jean Choi, ESOL instructor.



THE CABBAGE PIE

Iryna Chystsiakova

Once, my friend Alessandra asked me if there were any Russian dishes that I missed eating since my family had arrived in America. In Brooklyn, where I live with my husband and son, there are plenty of Russian stores. Here you can find everything that you used to buy in Russia. But the only food I really wanted to taste again was my mother-in-law's cabbage pie. She baked awesome cabbage pies! All of our relatives adored them. Her pies were always the flavor of any family reunion. Unfortunately, she is gone, and I never wrote down her recipe. We had already tasted a lot of cabbage pastries here, but none measured up to her pie. After a while, we gave up buying local ones.

For almost a week, I wondered if I could make the cabbage pie myself, and Alessandra urged me to do so. So I bought two different loaves of frozen baker's dough and a head of cabbage. I didn't even know how many loaves I needed for one pie, but just in case, I bought two to see which one was better.

It turned out that I didn't have many baking accessories: no rolling pin, baking pan, or cutting board. My mother-in-law used a cast iron pan and a wooden board. But I only had what I had. I never give in to difficulties. Instead of a rolling pin and a cutting board, I used a wine bottle and the top of the kitchen table. I rifled through the cupboards and closets in our apartment, looking for a suitable pan. I substituted an aluminum foil tray for a baking pan.

Now I was ready to take on the challenge. I took out one of the loaves of dough to thaw. Meanwhile, I prepared the cabbage filling. I began to roll out the dough with the wine bottle on the kitchen table that I had powdered with flour. The circle of dough came out clotted and uneven. I desperately tried to do my best. Then I began to shape it and roll it out by hand. I was exhausted. Sweat was dripping from my forehead. I brushed it off with the back of my right hand and continued rolling out the dough with my left hand. My face and clothes were covered with white flour, and I looked like a ghost. Luckily, nobody saw me at this time. But the circle of dough was still too small for a pie. I realized that I needed one more loaf. My torments were not over. I took out another loaf from the freezer to let it thaw. All my tortures began again.

Eventually, I rolled out two circles of dough, one different from the other. I spread the cabbage filling in the bottom of the pie shell and covered it with the remaining circle of dough. When I tried to press together the edges of the two layers, I found that they would not stick together. I hoped they would stick together while baking. I even remembered to cut a few short slashes in the top

crust to let the steam out. This was what my mother-in-law had always done. Finally, the pie was put into the oven. When the crust turned toasty brown, I decided the pie was done and pulled it out from the oven. It was a sorry sight! My work of baking looked ugly—just two separated layers of dough with the filling between. The top crust was uneven and its edges stuck up. I was ashamed.

That Saturday, my husband, Alex, was out at work, and I eagerly waited for him to come home so that we could taste the pie together. I saw that my pastry wasn't the prettiest, but perhaps it was the tastiest? I had never baked anything for all the 12 years that we lived in America. I wanted to surprise Alex. When he came home, we sat down for tea, and I shyly served the results of my baking. Strangely, neither he nor my son ever noticed the ugly appearance of my pie, and they just ignored the fact that the bottom shell turned out half-baked. They were stunned to see the homemade pie and ate it heartily with the greatest pleasure.

That evening was like a family reunion, and memories came flooding back to us. Everyone felt that we regained something that had seemed to be lost. My cabbage pie was definitely different from what my mother-in-law had ever baked. Her pies from homemade dough were always fluffy and tasty. Nevertheless, my husband hurried to buy me everything that I needed for baking, so I took this as a hint to try again. I hope that the next time, it will come out better. When I told Alessandra my baking story, she had a good laugh. She reassured me it was just Iryna's cabbage pie. "You must spoil before you spin well."



Iryna Chytsiakova was born on Sakhalin Island, the extreme eastern part of Russia. She dreamed about the mainland, a big city with skyscrapers, a subway, and celebrities. Her teacher advised her to study well, move to a big city, and get a good education. She moved from one big city to another: Moscow, Minsk, and eventually, New York, the capital of the world. Since coming to New York in 2003, she has studied English at the Adult Learning Center of "City Tech." She thanks her former teacher, Jay Klokker, who inculcated in her the habit of writing and reading in English, and her later teachers, Douglas Montgomery and Gabriel Skop, who continued to help her improve her English language skills.



A LOST LOVE

Rafelina Estevez

Two years ago, I found a new confidante and friend who changed my life, but nevertheless, at the time, I did not pay him as much attention as he deserved. I just used him for necessary things and then ignored him.

One day, we lost each other, and at that moment, I understood how important he was to me. I felt lonely, upset, exposed, and helpless because I could not deal with his absence. I recognized that he was the only one who did not judge me or ask questions. He supported me all the time: when I was in a good or bad mood, when I wanted to write to or speak with someone, and when I needed important information. He was always there, ready to help me. I started to appreciate and value him more.

I will never lose you again because I really missed you when you were gone. I love you, and I promise you that I am going to keep you with me forever, my beautiful and lovely Galaxy S6.

Rafelina Estevez moved to New York City from San Jose de las Matas, Dominican Republic, a rural area near Santiago. She came to the United States seeking a better life and better opportunities for herself and her family. After finishing her final semester in the CUNY Language Immersion Program, she is continuing her education at Hostos Community College, majoring in criminal justice. Her main goal is to set an example for her daughter, Daniela, with whom she enjoys reading and cooking. Rafelina Estevez's teacher is Jeff Strack, and the site director is Laura Kleeman.





THE FREEDOM OF BEING A READER

Kenrick Demesvar

As Frederick Douglass said, “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.” It is one hundred percent true because being a reader gives us a lot of joy. Learning to read is one of the most important achievements. It is an adventure. An open door of information. It is a gift. But reading should not be a privilege. When you know how to read, you are no longer the same. You get the possibility to express yourself, your thoughts, imagination, and creativity. Once you know how to read, your eyes are not closed anymore. You no longer accept everything as truth or the final word. You develop a critical sense of questioning. Everyone should be able to read. When you read, you discover the world of unmeasurable knowledge. When you read, your mind is free. I read almost every kind of book. I cannot see a book somewhere without touching it, then opening it.



Kenrick Demesvar was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and speaks French, Creole, and English. He writes, “My parents always told me that education is the key to success. They encouraged me in my studies and gave me the privilege of learning the Bible. I became a teacher to help others get their education.” After earning a Ph.D. as an historian and ethnographer, a specialist in heritage, he worked as an independent consultant. Currently studying English at “City Tech” with ESOL instructor Martie Flores, Kenrick Demesvar is also majoring in history and cultural anthropology.



THE UNREAD BOOK

Karina Kantsavaya

My mother likes to read. When she was a child and came home after school, she did her homework quickly and then she devoted the rest of the day to her favorite activity: plunging into the world of epic adventures.

Sometimes she was so passionate about reading that she overlooked the time. So that nothing would distract her from knowing new heroes and their exciting stories, my mom found a way to get out of household chores. She disguised her books so that they looked like school textbooks, and then she enjoyed reading under the guise of schoolwork.

But in time, my grandmother figured out my mother's pranks. Once again, she asked my mom to help her with the housework. My mother once more told her that she needed to study. And then my grandma got so angry that she took the book my mother was reading! And she didn't return it. Ever.

So the book was left unread. That was the most terrible punishment for my mother. Because that book was rare, she looked for it for years without success.

The book was *Wandering Stars* by Sholem Aleichem. This is a novel about love and the fate of two young people, teenage runaways in love who soon lose each other and then try for many years to find each other.

My mom could never get the plot of that touching story out of her mind. What happened to the main characters? Would they find each other or just remain memories? Unfortunately, my mother couldn't answer that question. So, she came up with her own version of the ending of that story.

Years passed, and my mother left her small town to study. And then one day, in her friend's personal library, she suddenly saw the exact same book. After all those years of looking, she finally found it!

But when she finished *Wandering Stars*, she was disappointed. The ending was so different from what she had expected. She had imagined a different scenario for so many years that she believed her version with all her heart. How hurt she was!

But how can reading and freedom be related?

As my mother's story shows, reading is not only a pleasure. It is, above all, a great freedom of imagination. It allows you to fall in love with or to hate the characters, to care about their feelings, to dive into their world. It allows you to believe that they are real people. Reading forces you to be a part of their world, to be pleased with their successes or upset about their failures.

Reading is the chance to be somebody else or just to be yourself, to understand yourself or somebody else, or just to spend some time alone. Reading is your private time. Reading is your personal freedom.

My mother is still reading a lot. Every month, she goes to the library for new books. And here's what she thinks about the link between reading and freedom, "Now, when I have a lot of free time, my love of reading is particularly useful. That is, my love of reading defines my freedom. I don't need somebody's attention to feel comfort. I have things to do."



Born in Minsk, Belarus, Karina Kantsavaya immigrated to the United States in 2015. She writes: "I graduated from the Environmental University in Belarus and worked as a biologist in the Sports Research Center. Now my dream is to continue studying in New York and find a similar profession. I live in Sunnyside, Queens and attend English classes there at the Queens Library. I think this has made me feel more confident and proud. I thank my teacher, Fran Schnall, for her help." The branch manager is Joseph Schiavone.



MY FAVORITE PLACE IN NEW YORK CITY

Naomi Kurosu

My favorite place in New York City is Central Park before nine o'clock in the morning. This is the time the park allows dogs to be "off-leash." So my dog, Nicole, and I can enjoy much of the park with a special kind of freedom. This is an awesome system!

Unfortunately, Nicole is very shy and won't play with other dogs.

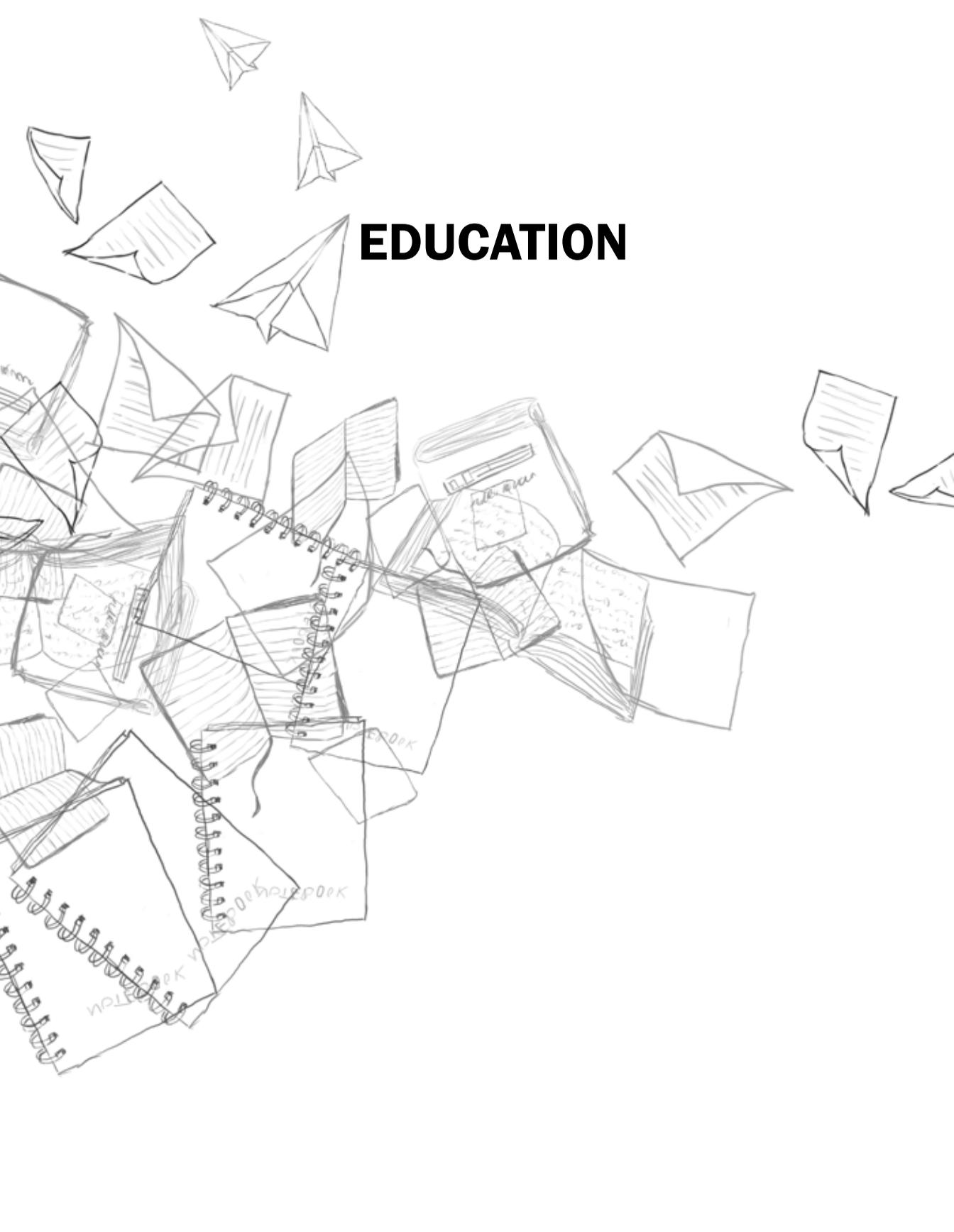
But we still love Central Park!

And I love my dog!

Naomi Kurosu came from Tokyo, Japan when her husband was temporarily transferred to his company's New York City branch office. Happy to be living here with her husband and dog, she's taking English classes at the New York Public Library's Hudson Park Branch. Her teacher, Daniel Littman, says, "Her friendliness, sense of humor, and desire to learn inspire us all."



EDUCATION





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I AM AWAKE

Carol Darius

The first day I walked into class, I said, “I am awake.”

My dream was coming true. I was about to learn to read and write, and I said, “I am awake.”

This made me think about years ago, when I volunteered at my daughter’s kindergarten. I always wanted to read to her, but I could not because I didn’t know how to read and write. She was little at the time. She would say to me, “It’s all right, Mama.” She would give me a hug.

I raised three children, who are adults now. When I came home from work, the youngest always had something to say, so I would tell her to write it down on a piece of paper and stick it on the refrigerator because I was too tired to listen to her right then, between working all day and taking care of the home. On the weekend, my eldest daughter read those notes aloud to everyone at our weekly family meeting.

Now I am in a school for adults. Recently, I got a book from my teacher, and I opened the first page. I was surprised that I could read it and understand it, so when I got home, I read three pages from that book to my children. They were very happy to hear me read aloud.

I told them that the sky is the limit for me because I am in school.

And I am awake.



Born in Guyana, Carol Darius, 62, is a native English speaker. As a young woman, she moved to Suriname, where she learned to speak Dutch. She has lived in the United States for about 20 years and is now relearning English. At the Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library’s Seward Park Branch, her teacher is Lead Instructor Terry Sheehan. Sherin Hamad is the hub manager.



STEREOTYPE

Alessandro Lima Braga

Some people I know, including friends, thought I was a bad guy when I was young. They thought I was a drug addict because I used to wear a black jacket, and I had a piercing and long hair.

I have a story about how stereotypes can be a crazy thing.

My ex-girlfriend had a very conservative grandmother. One day, I was in my girlfriend's home when her grandmother arrived. My girlfriend was worried about her grandma seeing me there and having a heart attack, so I needed to do something to avoid a tragedy. I quickly dove under the bed and stayed there for almost an hour.

That was not cool, but I think I saved a life that day.

We should not think things about a person we do not know. Every person is different. It is wrong if you have never talked with a person and you have bad ideas about them.

Alessandro Lima Braga writes: "I'm a blues/rock singer and bass guitarist, from São Paulo, Brazil. I came to New York City with my wife, Karla, in October 2015. At the New York City Public Library's classes, my first teacher, Sue Woodman, was so kind and helped me improve my English. My last teacher, Jorina Laurin, at the St. Agnes Library, guided me in writing 'Stereotypes.' I'm going back to Brazil in a few months. I will miss New York and the people I met here, but I'm grateful for everything I have learned and experienced."





STEREOTYPES EQUAL SURPRISE SOMETIMES

Thierno Diallo Ibrahima

In my country, Guinea, many people share transportation fees in a taxi. One day, I got in a taxi where there were different people from different ethnic tribes than mine. Maybe they were friends or family. As soon as I got into the taxi, they started speaking in their local dialect, which is Kissi. They started stereotyping me in their dialect, saying rude things about me. They kept doing that for more than 15 minutes. They thought I could not speak their language.

I wanted to show them that I could speak their language without saying even a single word to them. So then, I took my phone and called a friend of mine who speaks the same language as they do. Then we started our conversation in that language. They were surprised, uncomfortable, and ashamed. They started looking at each other and sometimes glancing at me.

When I arrived at my destination, they were so ashamed. They apologized, and they wanted to pay my transportation fees. But I refused because I was so nervous about their behavior and all the things they had been saying about me.

Then the taxi driver said to them, “If you would have shut your mouths, that would have been better than paying money to him.” They were surprised again—and so was I—because they were not expecting the taxi driver to speak their language.

The taxi driver and I told them that what they did was not good.

What is surprising in this story is that neither the taxi driver nor I said a word to them during the trip. We stayed calm until I arrived at my destination.



Thierno Diallo Ibrahima, born in Guinea, writes: “I had lived in New York City for a year and a half when I wrote this essay. I worked in my country at Mer-Guinée. I have master’s degrees in finance from the University of Clermont-Ferrand, in France, and the University of Regensburg, in Germany. I study English in the advanced English class at CUNY’s ‘City Tech,’ with instructor Gabriel Skop. The program director is Gilberto Gerena. My goal is to study Computer Information Systems. I would like to thank those who helped me in my life.”

I WILL NEVER STEREOTYPE AGAIN

Qiao Bing (Nancy) Zhu



It was a beautiful morning in August. My cell phone was ringing. When I picked it up, a familiar voice came from the phone. It was my childhood friend, Miss Zhou. She was coming to the United States with her daughter, Ying. I made a reservation for them at the Hilton Inn in Manhattan. The next day, Miss Zhou told me that Ying wanted to write a book. She asked me to come to convince Ying to drop the idea. Oh, I forgot to tell you: Ying is an unlucky 24 year old. She was born with Down syndrome. I hadn't seen her for several years. A picture was forming in my head—a heavy young girl with dull eyes. The feeling was heavy in my heart.

I got off the elevator and stepped into their room. Pink slippers were waiting for me on the floor. I slid my feet into them. Ying led me to her bed. It was covered with neat notebooks and an assortment of pens laid out in order. I forced myself to look at Ying and to smile. I knew what Ying was waiting for: my approval. But I had to support her mother. Miss Zhou wanted to teach her daughter only the skills of daily life, to learn to live independently.

At that moment, I hesitated. But quickly, I made up my mind to stand by her mother. I never forgot that when Ying was six years old, her mother taught her how to eat with a spoon. It took them exactly one month to accomplish this task. I asked myself: How could I tell her that I'm trying to change her mind? I was afraid to meet Ying's eyes. But in spite of that, I cleared my throat, then said to Ying: "Hi, Ying. You've grown into a pretty, good girl! Could you tell me how you can do something to make your mom happy? I am sure you can do some cooking. You also can use the washing machine."

Ying stood up, very angry. What a failure to chat on my part!

Two months later, I got a call from China. My friend screamed, "Let Ying tell you, okay?" Ying told me that her poetry had been published in the local newspaper.

Here is an excerpt: "I'm on the George Washington Bridge. I hold both my

dream city, New York, and the beautiful New Jersey in my arms. I'm a lovely boat, floating happily on the surface of the Hudson River. My mom, dad, and grandma are in it. . . ." She told me she was going to write a new story about an explorer.

I think the explorer may be herself.

After this, I never stereotyped again!



Qiao Bing (Nancy) Zhu, age 49, arrived in New York City in May 2015. She loves the diversity of cultures here. In Suzhou, China, she owned her own boutique, called Light Up Your Life, and she and her husband plan to start a new line of clothing in the near future. Nancy Zhu attends an ESOL class at the Kingsbridge Branch of the New York Public Library. Her teacher is Diana Vayserfirova.



THE IMPORTANCE OF PRONUNCIATION

Polina Voronovitskaya

I am the kind of person who always enjoys learning and trying new things, such as drawing, playing piano, driving, new languages, and even belly dancing!

When I came to the United States, I decided to improve my English by working with a volunteer who would teach me idioms and pronunciation.

In our first class, she asked me how I spent the weekend, and I told her about my exciting trip to a ballet. However, to her it sounded like a “belly.” So I kept talking about ballet, and she kept hearing “belly.”

Finally, much to her, and even my own, surprise, I got up and showed her my version of a ballet, which, from where she was sitting, should have looked like the dying swan’s dance from *Swan Lake*. Her dropped jaw and square eyes did not stop me from then showing an impromptu excerpt from a belly dance, just for her to see the difference.

At the end of all this, we were both laughing hysterically, but she realized how I spent my weekend, and I learned how to pronounce “ballet.”

Polina Voronovitskaya was born and raised in Moscow, Russia, where she was a university professor. She moved to New York City five years ago to help her daughter, a hardworking attorney. She enjoys dancing, drawing, and listening to classical music. Polina Voronovitskaya attends conversation classes at the New York Public Library’s Riverdale Branch. Her teacher is Diana Vayserfirova; the hub manager is Eric Rosenbaum.





A PENCIL

Manuel Cifuentes

The lead inside you
Has the unbelievable power
Of shooting my ideas onto the white of the paper.
You describe and draw what I don't even think I've thought.
You witness my struggle in creating stories,
You help me to free my silence.
You give shape to what is born in my mind.
You are a voice when I have no voice.
You leave marks and traces when you walk along the lines—
A slave to my impulses,
A perfect tool that dances in my hand,
A restless talker.

Manuel Cifuentes writes: "I was born in Maracaibo, Venezuela, in 1970. I graduated from medical school and practiced as a physician until 2012. Then I was kidnapped and held for ransom for seven days. I was released, but because of this incident and all the problems with the government in Venezuela, I decided to start over in the United States. I now study English at the College of Staten Island, and I want to earn a nursing degree." Manuel Cifuentes studied in a CLIP class with Polina Belimova. The program director is Donna Grant.



HOW I CHANGED MY MAJOR

Adrian Guerrero Cordova

Even though I am afraid of spiders and snakes, when I lived in Ecuador, I studied biology at the College of Guayaquil—the city where I lived. As a biology major, I was going to learn about life in all its expressions: the morphology of animals—which means their bodily structure and form—and the environments in which they live. To study these forms of life, I had to go on several sample-collecting trips around Ecuador’s west coast.

After one of the trips, on a very sunny day, my friends Alejandro and Anna and I decided to take a ride to the Jauneche Forest to look for animals and plants. We traveled for four hours to get there, and we arrived in the early afternoon. The sun was very bright in the cloudless sky. I walked deeper and deeper inside the forest. I saw dry trees around me and brown ground covered with dry leaves under my feet.

Suddenly, I saw that a really big spider was approaching me. I knew this huge monster was trying to catch me with its fast-moving, robot-like legs and that it was determined to eat me with its big mouth. I could not look around to see where my friends were because I had to watch the approaching beast. Then I said to myself, *Just turn around and run!* I was happy none of my friends were near, so they would not see this embarrassing moment of my running like a child to his mother. As I was running through the forest, I felt as if the spider were running behind me. I was running in circles, screaming to my friends, “Alejandro, Anna, where are you?”

Suddenly, I saw a snake right in front of me. I almost stepped on it! Its head was a brown triangle similar to a dry leaf, and it had rolled up its large brown body, looking like a big stone. I felt completely trapped. What would I have to do to escape from it? I heard my friends shouting: “Don’t make any sudden moves! It can be dangerous.” Now I know the origin of the word “petrified”: It comes from the word “petro” which means “stone.” I turned into a stone as I looked at that snake. Alejandro took a thick long stick and began to scare the snake away. As Alejandro was saving me from the angry snake, I started to walk away from it. In

the back of my mind, I knew I should not go back near the spider, either.

Every time I tell this story, I feel embarrassed because people ask me, “Why would spiders and snakes scare a biology student?” The only thing I can say is: “My major is plants.”



Adrian Guerrero Cordova is 23 years old. His hometown is Guayaquil, Ecuador. He writes: “I arrived in New York City in April 2016. I love animals and everything that Mother Nature gives us. I believe in God because He has blessed me a lot. I am an earnest and honest person.” Adrian Guerrero Cordova studies in Polina Belimova’s CLIP classes at the College of Staten Island. Donna Grant is the program director.



READING, WRITING, AND RUNNING

Timea Wranek

When I went to my first class in the U.S.A., I was so excited. I had to wait for my husband because we didn't have a babysitter. He was late, of course. His train was in a traffic jam. I waited for him in front of the door, and when I spied him, I just started to run.

When I was running to the Ninth Street YMCA, I tried to think of what I would say when I arrived: "I'm Timea Wranek, I came from Hungary," etc.

When I entered the classroom, it was empty. I looked at my teacher, and I said my professional sentences: "I'm Timea. This is an ESOL class? I think, but I'm not sure."

But the teacher told me: "I think it's not your class. Your class is on 15th Street." Oh, no! I came from 15th Street. I live there. Okay, I was running. *Again*, I thought.

Finally, I arrived at the 15th Street YMCA, and the teacher checked the list of names: "Your name is not here."

All right, it was official. I was lost.

Why did this happen? I had confused my teacher on Ninth Street. He thought I was not a beginner because I spoke confidently. He didn't realize that I knew just five sentences.

Timea Wranek, age 38, was born in Hungary and worked there as a human resources consultant. She arrived in New York City in August 2015. Now she lives in Brooklyn with her husband, Istavan, and their sons. She loves reading and going to the theater. At the New Americans Welcome Center of the Prospect Park YMCA, her teacher is Donna Powers. The coordinator is Alejandro Vilar, and the site director is Nabila Khan.





MYSELF

Natasha Torres

Have you ever seen that girl who sits in the front of the classroom and always raises her hand, even before the teacher can finish the question? It almost seems as if that student and teacher are on the same page and have the same understanding of the educational material. Well, unfortunately, that was never my style. I was the student who was discouraged by her surroundings since they did absolutely nothing to motivate me. They only made me slack off. Some say we are a product of our environment. I feel that is true in most cases, but it is possible to rise above certain conditions, and that has become my goal.

I have thought about my time in high school, and there were many occasions when I did not understand the classwork or the reason it was being given to me. I was too shy to raise my hand and ask for help when I needed it because I didn't want to feel inferior and feared I would be judged. I now realize that my behavior was not wise since everyone, at some point in their life, needs a helping hand.

I spent the years in high school wasting time, cutting classes, and hanging out with the wrong people, people I once called friends. In short, I gave in to peer pressure by taking the easy way out, and I sought their approval, never taking my classes or my education seriously. I feel like I never paid mind to my homework, books, or assignments. As a result, I feel like I have nothing to show for my high school years.

I can honestly say that is not what I want for my future. I should be focusing my efforts on improving myself and becoming someone my family and I can be proud of so I can be an example for my younger siblings. I realize that when someone works hard to get what they want, there will be bumps in the road and obstacles to overcome. During these times, many people will want to give up or take the easy way out, as I have done in the past. That is why it's important to keep my eyes on the prize. I know that I need a solid foundation in order to grow and meet the challenges ahead. I am proud of myself for getting this far.



Natasha Torres, age 24, was born and raised in the Bronx, New York. She is a student at Phipps Neighborhoods. She writes, "My teacher, Gale Shangold Honts, has inspired me to become better and successful in achieving my goals." Regina Campbell is the site's assistant executive director for learning and career development, and Dianne Morales is the executive director and CEO.



THIS IS MY WISH

Carol Smith

Once I found a wishing well. I thought to myself that all my wishes could come true. I threw a penny into the well and made a wish.

“Ouch,” said the wishing well.

The next day, I went back to the well, I threw a penny into the well and made a wish.

“Ouch,” said the well.

The next day, I went back again and threw a penny into the well. I wished that the well would not say ouch. What to do if my wishes could never come true?

I ran home. I took my pillow from my bed, and I ran back to the well. Then I threw the pillow into the well and made a wish.

“Ah, that feels much better,” said the well.

Now I could start wishing. I made one wish: My wish was to be able to read.

Soon my granddaughter said, “Please tell me a story.”

I said, “I will do better than that: I will read you a story.”

Carol Smith is originally from Jamaica. She studies at the Brooklyn Public Library’s Eastern Parkway Adult Learning Center with Site Supervisor Donna Alleyne. Gladys Scott is the literacy advisor. Carol Smith writes, “I love people, and I like to make friends. I’m always a happy person.”





AN UNTOLD STORY

Dhaima White

This is a story that I never read before. It's about my life. My name is Dhaima White. I live in Brooklyn, New York. One day, I had to work in Manhattan, to take care of a woman named Mrs. Friedman. She asked me to help her read her pill bottle for her. She said to me, "I am blind. Can you help me to read the pill bottle?" But I knew I couldn't read. I was so scared. I did not know what to say to her because I was so embarrassed that I could not read. But I knew I had to tell her that. I said to Mrs. Friedman, "I cannot read," and she looked at me and said, "It's okay." But it was not okay for me because I felt so embarrassed that I could not read.

The following weekend, I went to work with Mrs. Friedman, and I realized how wonderful she was. She is a wise woman, 102 years old. She said to me, "I will help you learn how to read. You just have to spell the word to me because I am blind." So the next week when I went to work, I brought a book with me. I started to read the book, spelling every word, to her. She started to help me to read. I was so grateful to this woman for the time and help she gave me. She could not see the book that I was reading to her. But she could hear the book that I was spelling to her. It made her happy to know she was helping someone learn how to read. I thank Mrs. Friedman for helping me.

That's my story.

Dhaima White writes: "I came to America from Jamaica when I was six years old, in 1985. Now living in Brooklyn, I am trying to make my life better. I told myself that I had to learn how to be a better reader, and I found that the library had a program to help adults. I love to come to the library because I am becoming a better reader." Dhaima White studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Flatbush Learning Center. The site supervisor is Gladys Ortiz, and the literacy advisor was Luz Diaz.





BASKETBALL ZONE

Shaikh Fahad Hossain

My favorite sport is basketball. When I first started playing, I was really bad. When I went for a layup, the ball would fly off the backboard. So I asked my friends, “How are you so good at ball?” And they were like, “You have to practice every day!”

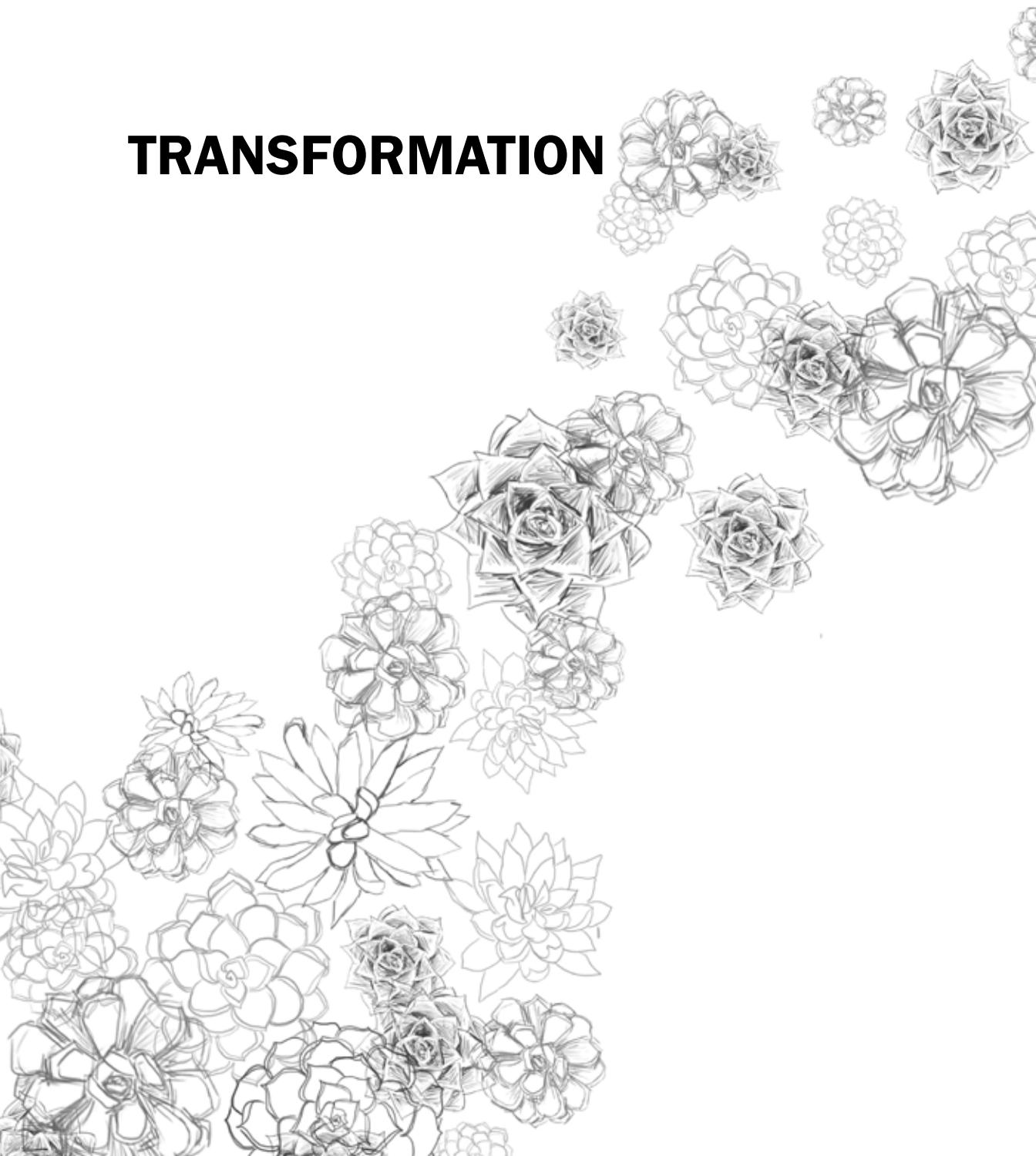
I practiced every day, in the morning and after school. After a few months, the ball started going in the hoop, instead of flying off the backboard. Then I started shooting from the three-point line, and over time, my shots got better. That’s when people started noticing me. I had gotten good. I became so good that I could beat most of my friends at ball. People started wanting, and picking, me for their teams.

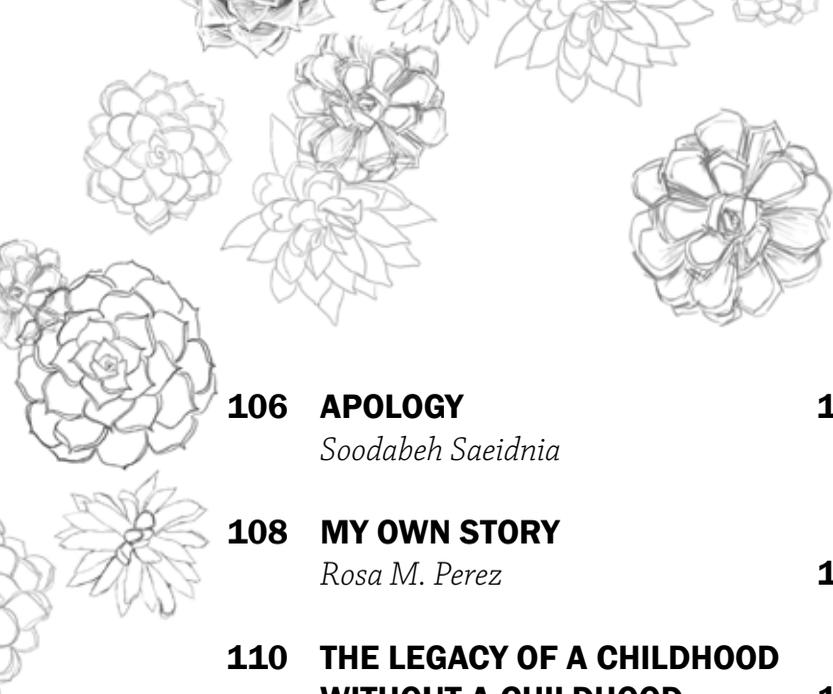
If you want to become good at something—whether it’s basketball, school, or work—you have to practice.



Shaikh Fahad Hossain, age 17, was born in Brooklyn, New York. He writes, “I love basketball and consider myself a pretty good ball player.” He studies at the Young Adult Literacy Program (YALP) of the Brooklyn Public Library. Justin Hyatt is his instructor, Aneicia Washington is the coordinator, and Anna Limontas-Salisbury is the student advisor.

TRANSFORMATION





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APOLOGY

Soodabeh Saeidnia

I owe you an apology
I didn't steal
I only borrowed your tongue
to make my crafts
I'm afraid mine is too odd to make sense

Instead, I promise to return
a mixed emotional poem
a brown hybrid of black and white cauldrons
in which all your words are afloat in a panic stew

A poem in which kids drop their slippers
and run on the landmines that no longer hide
beneath the hot, barren soil
The soil that is no longer cultivated

A poem in which adults throw up
and whimper of wandering in a hopeless boat
climbing and stepping on each other's shoulders

and during the time I am searching for
the correct plural form of corpus
they've already stacked corpora of withered bodies

and while I am wondering if I should unify the number of lines
in all stanzas, they've lost a number of their siblings and kids
I think I owe an apology to them and to myself

To my ancestors who lived in Cyrus the Great's empire
and already carved human rights on rocks
Who never expected their offspring, including me
to translate it from other languages to the mother tongue.

Soodabeh Saeidnia was born in Iran, where she was a pharmacognosist (a pharmacologist who is an expert in herbal medicine). She came to the United States in September 2014. She has been writing poetry in Persian since age 12 and is passionate about English literature. Her poems have appeared, in Persian and in translation, in Iranian and international publications. She loves singing, songwriting, and reading science fiction. At the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center at the English-Speaking Union, Angela Wilkins is her teacher.





MY OWN STORY

Rosa M. Perez

A person's childhood is the most important period of their development; it's when things come to be good or bad. Many injustices happen daily to children. Their emotional and physical security can be in danger, and their parents sometimes don't have any idea about it. According to UNICEF, six out of 10 children suffer sexual abuse, and in recent years, the number has increased. Sexual or other types of abuse happen in the family or with someone the child knows 65 to 85 percent of the time. Child abuse occurs in all cultures, races, ethnicities, and societies.

My life has always been marked by difficult situations. At only 21 years old, I have overcome many tough experiences. It was a spring afternoon in 2003 in my country, the Dominican Republic. I was eight years old, and I had just left school. My mother worked all day as a teacher, so I had a babysitter. She was a very good, sweet person. I wanted to play at my friend's house, and I managed to convince my babysitter to allow it. My friends and I were playing hide and seek in a big house with a huge garden.

I was always easy to find because I didn't know how to hide well. So this time, I thought to hide in a room of the house. While I was closing the door, a hand touched my shoulder. I felt panic, someone covered my mouth, and I wanted to speak but couldn't. Quickly, somebody threw me on the bed. He was very strong, and he was trying to open my legs. I felt extreme fear; I couldn't see who was doing this. My heart beat very fast, my sight was fogged from my tears, but in one second, struggling to free myself, I hit his genitals and ran out. For two seconds, as I escaped, I looked at him. He was my grandfather's best friend.

My mom had no idea. My parents were divorced; my father never had money for me and my sister, so my mom had to work. For this reason, I never said anything to her about this experience. Many problems started to appear in the following months. I had trouble sleeping, and when I slept I had many nightmares. Countless nights, I wet my bed. I was born with hormonal problems but ate normally, only now my appetite increased. I was very anxious. Another problem was my difficulty in learning. My mom changed my school twice. Many times I felt culpability about what that man wanted to do to me. Although I knew nothing about sex, I still felt nasty and ashamed.

Some years later, my body started to develop. My chest was growing, but I did not like it. When I was 13 years old, my first menstruation arrived. At this time, I had more knowledge about what had happened to me. I wore big clothes,

so the changes in my body would not be seen. Another thing I didn't like was boys. I felt disgust with them. I also suffered from bullying because I gained a lot of weight due to my eating habits.

My grandfather's best friend attempted to hurt to me only once, but that was enough to mark me. On August 19, 2010, he died. I was 15 years old, and that day was the best day of my life. I felt that my heart was free. His death was not natural; he killed himself. Since that day, my life started to change. Despite the bullying I experienced, I started to gain confidence in myself.

When I was 18 years old, I dated a boy; it was the first time a boy liked me. But when we tried to be intimate for the first time in my life, I could not do it because the image of the man trying to hurt to me reappeared in my mind. It was like I was reliving this experience. I discovered that I was still traumatized, despite the years that had gone by. I needed help, to value myself, and to close this chapter in my life.

Two years ago, I arrived in the United States. This country is amazing and has a lot of diversity. I felt I belonged here. I started to search for help for my obesity, and for the first time, I decided to open up to my psychologists. I received therapy for bullying and also for the attempted abuse. After much therapy, I feel like a new person. While I was in therapy, I met an amazing boy. He knew about my problem with obesity, but he did not know anything about the attempted abuse that I suffered. As my boyfriend and I grew closer and more intimate with each other, the bad images in my mind disappeared. The psychologists in New York City are amazing. They truly helped me, and every day I am grateful for that.

The writer Toni Morrison said, "If there is a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, you must to be the one to write it," and I agree with that. This is the first time that I am writing about my trauma. Many years ago, I would have loved to read something like this, because when things like this happen, many times the abused people feel that only they have experienced it. If you are suffering any type of abuse, you need to search for help. Life is unpredictable and often hard, but we need to be strong and know that only we have the power to write our own story.

Rosa M. Perez emigrated from the Dominican Republic in 2014. She writes, "My life has had some difficulties, but I am a strong woman because I used my bad experiences to grow as a person and overcome my obstacles." Rosa M. Perez is a student at York College's Adult Learning Center, where the site advisor is Sarah Marranca, and the director is Hamid Kherief.





THE LEGACY OF A CHILDHOOD WITHOUT A CHILDHOOD

Sther Rosero

I came to New York City from Cali, Colombia in 1991. I was escaping an abusive marriage, my children urged me to leave, and I had to come alone.

I grew up with my mother, stepfather, four brothers, and two sisters in a humble home—a small house in the Alfonso Lopez neighborhood. My mother, who never went to school, washed people's clothes. My stepfather was in a wheelchair and couldn't work, so my older brother found a job when he was 13. He gave half his pay to my mom and stepfather, and the other half he saved to pay for our studies.

He did this for five years, but he died when he was 18. We never knew exactly how he died because we were told three versions of his death. One version is that he drowned swimming across a river with a package his boss told him to carry.

I started school when I was nine. Six months later, my teacher moved me to second grade because she said I was very intelligent. Every month, the school principal gave me a medal of recognition. I wanted to study medicine and languages. But when I finished third grade, my mom gave me bad news. She said, "Sther, I'm sorry, but you can't continue to study. I don't have money, so you have to go to work. Besides, you will get married, so your studies are not important." I started to cry, and I knelt, begging to continue my studies. She gave me an absolute "No."

One year later, I decided to live and work in a convent. In exchange for free schooling, I prepared the nuns' breakfast, worked in the kitchen, and ironed their clothes. When I finished elementary school there, I got married. I was 15 years old. My marriage was painful because my husband physically and verbally abused me, but I lasted 10 years. Divorce did not exist then in my country. My daughters witnessed the abuse, and it was their idea that I move to another country. With pain in my heart, I left. But I promised my girls we would be together again as

soon as possible. And I accomplished it three years later, with the help of the Make-a-Wish Foundation.

I feel very proud of my role as a single mother—it was a great success. Now I’m a grandmother, and I study English at LaGuardia Community College’s Center for Immigrant Education and Training. I’m at the highest level.

Sther Rosero has lived in New York City for about 25 years. In Cali, Colombia she grew up poor but managed to finish the sixth grade with luck and hard work. She currently studies English at LaGuardia College’s Center for Immigrant Education and Training. Kate Lynch was her teacher when she wrote “The Legacy of a Childhood without a Childhood.” Hillary Gardner is the director of the CIET, and Paula Michelin is the coordinator.





SUCCULENTS

Mahnaz Attarha

Right or wrong, every afternoon, succulents—those hardy plants of many varieties and great beauty that need little care—force me to hit the streets on foot. I live on the border of Los Angeles and Santa Monica, just one block from Highway 10. My apartment does not have room to grow plants, so I walk around and try to find succulents in the front yards of homes in the neighborhood.

Every afternoon, as soon as I find the succulents, I stop in front of them, excited, and stare at them until I get tired. Then I sit on my butt and continue staring at their beauty, tolerance, and complacency. In fact, this is the only way I have discovered to charge my empty heart. And now I know succulents are one of the best sources of gaining energy.

Every afternoon, little by little, this energy will draw me from sinking in suffering. I had been walking on that path for many years. That was a dark and stinking path. That was too stuffy. That path kept tempting me to fill my pockets with rocks and throw myself in the river, or turn on the gas valve and lie down to bed, or be afraid of waking up having been transformed into an insect. But succulents kept protecting me. They made me think of chocolate and strawberry ice cream tastes. I have some of those ice creams at my home.

Every afternoon, as their taste comes to my mouth, I stand up and walk back: When I am passing the Highway 10 bridge, I hear the sound of a waterfall. If I listen carefully, I will realize this sound comes from the fast-passing vehicles on the highway. But I don't want to listen carefully. I like it to be the sound of a distant waterfall. When I am passing the bridge, I turn my eyes to the magnolia trees instead of the highway and let the nice breeze touch my body kindly.

Every evening, while the sun is going to set, I come back home with a heart full of love.



Born in Kashan, Iran, Mahnaz Attarha is a journalist, novelist, and short story writer, with four published books. The first woman to work as an environmental journalist in Iran, she also managed a plantation of five thousand trees. After the revolution, she was forced to leave Tehran. She now studies English in the advanced writing class at University Settlement, where Michael Hunter is the director of the Adult Literacy Program.



RASTAMEN SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS

William Fraser

I remember how terrifying it was back then for Rastamen in Jamaica. It is so sad to remember. When I was a kid growing up in Jamaica, Rastamen were not welcome in our society at all. They were treated like wild animals living in the jungle that are very dangerous to the public.

First of all, once a person started to become a Rasta, it was a no-no for our society. They looked at you and described you as the worst loser: dirty head, worthless. They would never accept it, not even your own family. I saw a parent turn their back on my own cousin when he became a Rasta, and say that he had to get out of their home. He left and went in the bushes to build his little thatch house to live in.

The Rasta could never get a job. They often had to find ways to create income to survive. They did farming and made things to sell. In the late '70s and '80s, the government sent out the army to catch them and cut off their dreadlocks. I remember my cousin Morris and his Rasta friends ran away to hide in the hills from police and soldiers.

They told us that Rastas were black-hearted, that they were killing and raping people. But the police were the ones who drove around in those big, black, dark-glass cars, examining us. It was so scary and sad.

The reason Jamaica eventually accepted the Rasta was because of the popularity of their reggae music. Their music got popular in the United Kingdom and in many other countries. It started to bring in a lot of tourists. The attention was on reggae concerts in Jamaica. Tourists from all over Europe and the rest of the world had fallen in love with Rastamen music. It started to bring in lots of income and made the economy grow so fast.

Nowadays, Jamaica uses Rastamen pictures on the tourist posters to advertise their business. Just the other day I called Sandals Resort to book a reservation. In the background, I heard Rastamen reggae music playing. The sounds of the sweet melodies hit me and made my heart pound with joy.

Born in Jamaica, West Indies, William Fraser became a U.S. citizen last year. He attends the Brooklyn Public Library's New Lots Learning Center. The literacy advisor is Nicolas Simon, and William Fraser's tutor is Ayana Maurice.



LIPY AND ME

Nazmun Mahar

Lipy was the best friend I ever had. We were inseparable.

My parents and brothers had all moved to America, and I was very lonely in Bangladesh. Lipy's friendship was so very important to me back then. We shopped, ate dinner, and traveled together. We completed our bachelor's degrees together at National University in Dhaka.

Lipy got married before I did and had a beautiful baby boy named Rakib. In March 2003, I celebrated his first birthday with Lipy's whole family. I remember little Rakib stumbling around the room but managing to stay on his feet.

My own wedding day came only a few weeks later, on April 3. Lipy came to my home to help me handle all the arrangements and left Rakib in the care of her mother-in-law. The day before the ceremony, Lipy went shopping with my aunt to pick up some last-minute items for the wedding.

While she was gone, her mother-in-law called. She said Rakib had somehow gotten onto the roof of their house and had fallen off. He was severely injured. When Lipy returned from shopping, I gave her the bad news. We all rushed over to the hospital, where Rakib lay unconscious in his bed. Lipy and her husband stayed all night at Rakib's bedside. In the morning, Lipy was told by the doctor that her only child was dead.

The next day, I got married. In my religion, one goes through with a marriage even in the face of tragedy. It was a strange day, full of joy and sadness. I thought of Lipy and Rakib before, during, and after the ceremony, but mostly I was caught up in all the formalities and festivities, and the more than two hundred wedding guests who were crowding around me throughout the day. I was also thinking about starting a whole new life of my own. That night, when all the festivities were finally over, I came to my new home in my husband's house and was welcomed by my new family.

Two days later, I visited Lipy, but she remained in shock and could barely speak. I heard her mother-in-law blaming her for Rakib's tragic death, saying the little boy would never have crawled up onto the roof if Lipy had been at home taking care of him as she should have been.

These were the cruelest words I ever heard.

Over the coming weeks and months, I spoke a few times with Lipy on the telephone, but it was clear that our close connection was over. I was busy living my new life and starting a family, and Lipy was still suffering in silence, refusing to share her pain with me or anyone else.

Two years after Rakib's death, Lipy and her husband moved to Canada and cut off all contact with her old friends in Bangladesh. With my husband and son, I later immigrated to New York to live with my parents and brothers.

I followed Lipy a little bit on Facebook and found out that she and her husband had another child in Canada. Even though I was happy for her, I was still sad that the horrible thing that happened the day before my wedding had destroyed our friendship.

I have finally accepted that life can be wonderful and horrible at the same time and that we all have to make the best of it. But I still miss my best friend, and I know I always will.

Nazmun Mahar, who taught economics at a college in her native Bangladesh, came to the United States in 2014. She hopes to teach someday in this country. Toward that end, she studies English at the Adult Learning Center of the Queens Central Library. Her teacher is Mark Mehler, and the site advisor is Ken Tabano.





HATRED AND MISUNDERSTANDING

Kim George

A white woman asked my mother why I had long, black, beautiful hair. My mother said, “Why not?” and the white woman said that an African American child should have nappy black hair. My mother turned and said, “Who said my child can’t have long, beautiful hair; who told you that?” The white woman said it’s always been like that; she said white people are to have long hair.

I asked my mother why the white woman was looking at me, and my mother said, “She was looking for the truth, and the truth is you are half Indian and half black, and that is why you have long hair. That’s the truth. You are a beautiful African American woman, and I want you to remember that for the rest of your life. I don’t want you to think that you have to be afraid of who you are or what you are. Be yourself; that’s all I want for you.”

My mother told the woman, “You know the truth of why she has long hair. You said only white people are supposed to have long hair, but it’s not true, is it? We are not slaves anymore. You are still thinking that we are slaves, and we are not. People like you are the reason we are in a hateful world.”

Somewhere over my head I heard ladies saying, “Lord bless the child, and praise God.” My head was up, and my eyes were open, but I didn’t see anything or anyone. My mother said, “Yes, Lord, bless my child. She is pretty and has beautiful, long hair, and I want the whole world to know it.”

When my mother stopped talking, the woman said to my mother, “I made a mistake and said the wrong things to you and your child; that’s the truth. You will be forever free.”

My mother said to the woman, “We are free. Didn’t you know that? We are not slaves anymore; we are free. So you are a slave of hatred; you are not free of it. You only see white; you don’t even see me. I’m here; I’m black; I’m beautiful. Why don’t you see me? You are still a slave of hate. Until you stop hating people of color, you will never be free.”

My mother kept talking. “I want to ask you a question: If you saw me walking down the street, would you run away from me and my child, or would you say ‘Hi,’ or would you walk around me? Would you go on the other side of the street, or would you say good morning to me and my child, or would you be afraid of me? If I was white, and I saw you walking down the street, I would say, ‘Hi,’ or ‘How are you doing today?’ I wouldn’t see a white woman or black woman. I would only see you.”

My mother said to me, “Give me your hand, Child,” and we walked down the street. My mother said, “God will love you, but you have to love yourself first. Don’t hate; love everyone.” As my mother walked away she said, “Yes we can; yes we will. We already have.”

Kim George was born in Brooklyn. She studies at the Brooklyn Public Library’s New Lots Learning Center, with teachers Tiffany Mingo and Lorna Clouden. The literacy advisor is Nicolas Simon.





TONIGHT I SLEEP, A SAVAGE

Rony Lys

I once felt a love, a love unknown and unspoken of, a love that enhanced me. A love that taught me words will never suffice to express feelings, matters of the heart. A love that must be felt to be understood. I walked the avenues of that love, with a feeling of being lost and found so profound and heavy that at times it felt I was anchored right where I never wanted to leave. It is yet the most impressive expression of art I've come across. It's an art you cannot appreciate until you go beyond the fifth sense, encompassing every element of life in a way that is as unique as it is complex. Yes, it is art, and at its finest.

I've experimented with a different kind of art, one that overlaps with the heart but isn't love. A wise man told me that Love don't love nobody, yet we all want to be loved. So how come Love don't love nobody, but we all want to be loved? With this art, I'm an artist! With brush in hand, eyesight locked on canvas, I'm feeling like Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel. It feels right tonight. There isn't such a thing as a second home. I've experienced a home away from home. Nevertheless, it was never home; it was home away from home.

Tonight, I revisit old shores of savagery, lust, power, and control to perpetuate my being with the most vivid imaginary design to corrupt at will. I accept my nature like a silver bullet. I have but one purpose, and I embrace it. I find myself coming back like ocean waves kissing the shores of my calling. Tonight, I lay to rest in peace because tonight I sleep, a savage.



Rony Lys, born in Haiti, has lived in New York City since childhood. At 17, he was in a car accident and lost the use of his arms and legs due to a spinal cord injury. Rony Lys studies at Open Doors at Coler Specialty Hospital. Melanie Greenberg, the assistant director, notes that he has "a facility for languages, and is currently learning to speak his sixth." She believes it is his "faith, passion for learning, and love of writing" that "have kept him strong through his hardships." Jennilie Brewster is the Open Doors supervisor.



I AM FROM

Janice Foster

I am from Kingston, Jamaica, where reggae's roots are from
I am from where people come and go
I am from sunshine city, good morning butterflies

I am from the wood and water of the blue sea
I am from the mountain heaven and earth
I am from the river of Babylon

This is where I am from

But now, I am in America
Brooklyn, New York
My eyes seeing things I have never seen before
Twinkling lights, high-rising buildings
I am proud of myself
Where I came from

And where I am now

Janice Foster, age 43, a native of Kingston, Jamaica, arrived in the United States in 2015. She writes: "I always dreamed, since I was a little girl, that I would come to the United States. I made a promise to go back to school. Now I attend the Adult Learning Center at the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Library, and I am proud of myself." Winsome Pryce-Cortes is the site manager, and the literacy advisors are Felice Belle and Christina Best.





DO NOT WAIT

Val Balano

Eat it while it's hot. Drink it while it's cold. Life isn't short, it's merely quick.

Do not wait. Go on red. At everything. You don't need permission to do what you believe in.

Do it the way nobody ever did. That's how this town has been built, and how it works.

Fail. Fail again. Fail more. Fail better. Nobody became perfect at once. Further, there should be something incredibly stupid in your memoir.

Do not wait. Hurry up. Try, discover, share. The most exciting Instagram accounts belong to those who live exciting lives.

Tell her or him or them both that they look awesome. Your English is terrible? Come on, it's only terrible when your mouth is shut.

Do not wait. Think. Think small. Think big. Think different. Make believe. Be stupid. Go beyond. Keep walking. Challenge everything. Just do it.

Learn English. Speak English. Listen to English. Read English. Think English. Even eat in English.

Do not wait. Sort garbage. Get a free library card. Download a subway app. Make the worst purchase at Best Buy. Wear bright sneakers with a suit. Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you.

Be inquisitive. Be interesting. Be awake for 30 hours. Volunteer. Buy an extremely expensive painting in SoHo. Then buy a used book for five bucks in SoHo.

Meet Hugh Jackman on a street. Eat pizza lying on grass in the park. Adopt a dog. Act responsibly. Love New York, but respect the city, too.

Create your own list. Do not wait.

Val Balano writes: "In high school I read only one book, ONE TEENY-TINY BOOK! I thought that reading was deadly boring. Well, somehow today I have a degree in journalism; I am an award-winning advertising copywriter and now a budding writer. I read a lot, I write a lot, and I know what karma looks like. I arrived in the United States from Belarus in October 2015 and learned English writing short stories about New York City and studying writing with ESOL teacher Angela Wilkins at the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center at the English-Speaking Union."



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CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATING SITES

ARAB AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK

Primary Adult Education Site
6202 Sixth Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11220
Susannah Bien-Gund
Education Coordinator
susannah@arabamericanny.org
John Kefalas, ESOL Instructor
john@arabamericanny.org

CONSORTIUM FOR WORKER EDUCATION

Workers United Education Program
83 Maiden Lane, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10038
212-229-9221
Jackie Christine Bain, Instructor
jbain@cwe.org
Sherry Kane, Director
skane@cwe.org

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION OF THE UNITED STATES

Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center
144 East 39th Street
New York, NY 10016
212-818-1200
Angela Wilkins, Instructor
Robert Speziale, Instructor
Tanzilya Oren, Manager
toren@esuus.org

FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER

Community Empowerment Program
NYU/Lutheran Medical Centers
6025 Sixth Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11220
Jerilyn Sackler, Instructor
jerilyn_s@yahoo.com
Sheldon Serkin, Program Director

FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE

294 Smith Street
Brooklyn, NY 11231
Carolyn Wright, ESOL Coordinator
cbcwright@gmail.com
Chris Curran, Director of Adult Education
ccurran@fifthave.org

INSTITUTE FOR IMMIGRANT CONCERNS

122 West 27th Street, Floor 10
New York, NY 10001
212-421-9538
Mark Brik, Education Director
mbrik13@gmail.com
Donna Kelsh, Director
dkelsh77@gmail.com

OPEN DOORS

Coler Specialty Hospital
900 Main Street
New York, NY 10044
646-761-2635
Jennilie Brewster, Supervisor
Melanie Greenberg, Assistant Director
Melanie.s.greenberg@gmail.com

PHIPPS NEIGHBORHOODS OPPORTUNITY CENTER

Pre-HSE Program
1071-A East Tremont Avenue
Bronx, New York 10460
718-304-2100
Gale Shangold Honts, Instructor
gshangold@verizon.net
Regina Campbell, Assistant Director,
Learning and Career Development
Dianne Morales, Executive Director, CEO

UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT SOCIETY

Adult Literacy Program
 184 Eldridge Street
 New York, NY 10002
 212-533-6306
 Michael Hunter, Director
michael@universitysettlement.org

YMCA, PROSPECT PARK

New Americans Welcome Center
 357 Ninth Street
 Brooklyn, NY 11215
 212-912-2375
 Donna Powers, Instructor
 Alejandro Vilar, Coordinator
 Nabila Khan, Director
nkhan@ymcanyc.org

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY ADULT LEARNING PROGRAM**ESOL PROGRAM****DYKER BRANCH**

8202 13th Avenue
 Brooklyn, NY 11228
 Lauren Klein, Instructor
 Lora Rosado, ESOL Student Advisor
lrosado@bklynlibrary.org
 Haniff Toussaint,
 ESOL & BE Program Coordinator
 718-230-2465
htoussaint@bklynlibrary.org

BEDFORD ADULT LEARNING CENTER

496 Franklin Avenue
 Brooklyn, NY 11238
 718-623-2134
 Matthew Greene II, Literacy Advisor
mgreene@bklynlibrary.org
 Susan Knott, Site Supervisor
sknott@bklynlibrary.org

CENTRAL ADULT LEARNING CENTER

10 Grand Army Plaza
 Brooklyn, NY 11238
 718-230-2191
 Felice Belle, Literacy Advisor
 Christina Best, Literacy Advisor
 Winsome Pryce-Cortes, Site Manager
wcortes@bklynlibrary.org

EASTERN PARKWAY ADULT LEARNING CENTER

1044 Eastern Parkway, 2nd floor
 Brooklyn, NY 11213
 718-778-9330
 Gladys Scott, Literacy Advisor
gscott@bklynlibrary.org
 Donna Alleyne, Site Supervisor
dalleyne@bklynlibrary.org

FLATBUSH ADULT LEARNING CENTER

22 Linden Boulevard
 Brooklyn, NY 11226
 718-856-2631
 Luz M. Diaz, Literacy Advisor
 Gladys Ortiz, Site Supervisor
gortiz@bklynlibrary.org

NEW LOTS ADULT LEARNING CENTER

665 New Lots Avenue
 Brooklyn, NY 11207
 718-649-0417
 Jean Marie Maher, Site Supervisor
jmaher@bklynlibrary.org
 Nicolas O. Simon, Literacy Advisor
nsimon@bklynlibrary.org

YOUNG ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM (YALP)

496 Franklin Avenue
 Brooklyn, NY 11238
 Aneicia Washington, YALP Coordinator
a2washington@bklynlibrary.org
 Anna Limontas-Salisbury, Student Advisor
alimontas-salisbury@bklynlibrary.org

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK ADULT LEARNING PROGRAM

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Adult Basic Education Programs
25 Broadway, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10004
212-346-8890
Lester Lambert, ESOL Instructor
llambert@bmcc.cuny.edu
Joshua Stark, ESOL Instructor
jstark@bmcc.cuny.edu
Denise Deagan, Programs Director
ddeagan@bmcc.cuny.edu

COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND

CUNY Language Immersion Program
2800 Victory Boulevard
New York, NY 10314
Polina Belimova, Instructor
pbelimova@gmail.com
Donna Grant, Program Director

HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CUNY Language Immersion Program
590 Exterior Street
Bronx, NY 10451
718-518-6645/57
Jeff Strack, Instructor
Laura Kleeman, Site Director

LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

29-10 Thomson Avenue, Room C-239 East
Long Island City, NY 11101
718-482-5460
Kate Lynch, Instructor
Hillary Gardner, Director
Hgardner@lagcc.cuny.edu

LEHMAN COLLEGE

Adult Learning Center
250 Bedford Park Boulevard West
Old Gym, Room 019
Bronx, NY 10468
Mindy Levokove, Instructor
mlevokove@me.com
Brian Rausse, Interim Director
brian.rausse@lehman.cuny.edu

NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Adult Learning Center
25 Chapel Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-552-1140
Alvard Berberyan, Instructor
alvardberberyan@gmail.com
Jay Klokker, Instructor
jklokker@earthlink.net
Caryn T. Davis, Instructor
CUNY Language Immersion Program
carynterri@msn.com
Martie Flores, Instructor
ins.mflores@gmail.com
Gabriel Skop, Instructor
eightnineten@yahoo.com
Gilberto Gerena,
Director of Education Programs
718-552-1141

YORK COLLEGE

CUNY Language Immersion Program
94-20 Guy Brewer Boulevard-SC 114
Jamaica, NY 11451
718-262-3766
Sarah Marranca, Site Advisor
sarah.marranca@yahoo.com
Stephanie Mueller, Site Advisor
smueller212@york.cuny.edu
Hamid Kherief, Director
akherief@york.cuny.edu

NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ADULT LEARNING PROGRAM

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212-666-1920
Tilla Alexander, Instructor
esltilla@gmail.com

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212-369-2714
Stephanie Burnes, ALC Hub Manager
stephanieburnes@nypl.org
Michele Persaud, ESOL Instructor
michelepersaud@nypl.org

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Decklan Fox, ALC Hub Manager
decklanfox@nypl.org
Sarah Hidalgo, Lead Instructor
sarahhidalgo@nypl.org

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Fatma Ghailan, ALC Hub Manager
fatmaghailan@nypl.org
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myrnaholguin@nypl.org

HUDSON PARK LIBRARY

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212-673-4528
Sherin Hamad, ALC Hub Manager
sherinhamad@nypl.org
Laura Dotterer, ESOL Instructor
lauradotterer@nypl.org
Daniel Littman, ESOL Instructor
daniellittman@nypl.org

JEFFERSON MARKET LIBRARY

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212-529-2909
Sherin Hamad, ALC Hub Manager
sherinhamad@nypl.org
Jean Choi, ESOL Instructor
jeanchoi@nypl.org

KINGSBRIDGE LIBRARY

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718-994-8782
Eric Rosenbaum, ALC Hub Manager
ericrosenbaum@nypl.org
Diana Vaserfirova, Instructor

RIVERDALE LIBRARY

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 Bronx, NY, 10471
 718-994-8782
 Eric Rosenbaum, ALC Hub Manager
ericrosenbaum@nypl.org
 Diana Vaserfirova, Instructor

SEWARD PARK LIBRARY ADULT LEARNING CENTER

192 East Broadway
 New York, NY 10002
 212-529-2909
 Sherin Hamad, ALC Hub Manager
sherinhamad@nypl.org
 Ivana Ferguson, Lead Instructor
ivanaferguson@nypl.org
 Terry Sheehan, Lead Instructor
theresasheehan@nypl.org

TOMPKINS SQUARE LIBRARY

ADULT LEARNING CENTER
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 New York, NY 10009
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 Sherin Hamad, ALC Hub Manager
sherinhamad@nypl.org
 Terry Sheehan, Lead Instructor
theresasheehan@nypl.org
 Kathryn Bonn, Lead Instructor
kathrynbonn@nypl.org

WAKEFIELD LIBRARY ADULT LEARNING CENTER

4100 Lowerre Place
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 718-994-8782
 Eric Rosenbaum, ALC Hub Manager
ericrosenbaum@nypl.org
 Carol Halebian, Instructor

QUEENSBOROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY ADULT LEARNING PROGRAM**CENTRAL ADULT LEARNING CENTER**

89-11 Merrick Boulevard
 Jamaica, NY 11432
 718-480-4222
 Ken Tabano, Center Manager
ktabano@queenslibrary.org
 Mark Mehler, Writing Instructor
markmeh@msn.com

SUNNYSIDE LIBRARY

43-06 Greenpoint Avenue
 Long Island City, NY 11104
 718-784-3033
 Joseph Schiavone, Branch Manager
joseph.schiavone@queenslibrary.org
 Fran Schnall, Instructor
franschnall@gmail.com

ELMHURST ADULT LEARNING CENTER

86-07 Broadway
 Elmhurst, NY 11373
 718-271-1020 (temporary)
 Michelle Johnston, Center Manager
mjohnston@queenslibrary.org
 James McMenamin, Instructor
semaj9m@yahoo.com

PENINSULA ADULT LEARNING CENTER

92-25 Rockaway Beach Boulevard
 Rockaway Beach, NY 11693
 718-945-7058
 Barbara Miller, Center Manager
Barbaramiller@queenslibrary.org
 Todd Capp, Instructor
tcapp@queenslibrary.org
 Ebru Yenil, Instructor
eyenal@queenslibrary.org

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The Writing Program includes a curriculum of about 35 courses each semester; a Writing Center staffed by undergraduate Peer Writing Assistants; several event-series: Global Writers, Careers in Writing and Publishing, Writers in Progress, Gallatin Teachers Reading, and Students Reading Their Writing; Confluence, an online platform for student writing, art, and research; *The Gallatin Review*, an annual student literary and visual arts magazine; and two Civic Engagement Projects: the Literacy Project and Great World Texts.

The Literacy Project dates from 2001 and is comprised of a Literacy in Action course (co-sponsored by the Community Learning Initiative) that combines the study of the adult literacy/ESOL field with volunteer work at several partner organizations; a weekly writing class at University Settlement; publications of writing by adults, including *The Literacy Review*, *Refugee Writing*, *Where I’m From*, and *Unique and Incomparable*, 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 Brooklyn Preparatory 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. The Writing Program also supervises students as writing mentors at several public high schools.

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