

The Literacy Review

VOLUME 17

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The Literacy Review

VOLUME 17

An annual journal of writing by adult
students in English for Speakers of Other
Languages, Basic Education, and High School
Equivalency programs in New York City.

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Introduction: A Cento

The Editors

If you want to know a city, you have to start navigating
in its deepest roots
I opened one of the windows from the second floor, so the wind
would do its magic and help a little bit
The noise of life calling,
I felt it in my soul my mind started to fly
I want the knowledge, the shining light that's there.
Everybody needs a place where they can be themselves

The thing is, nothing moves me more than little pieces of paper,
a little notebook, with pens and pencils.
As some of us grow older, sometimes we wish to go back into certain
moments to live them again
My writing is a witness of my growth
Holds untold stories in safekeeping until they are ready to be told.
faces, stories, lives
the scent of something rhyming

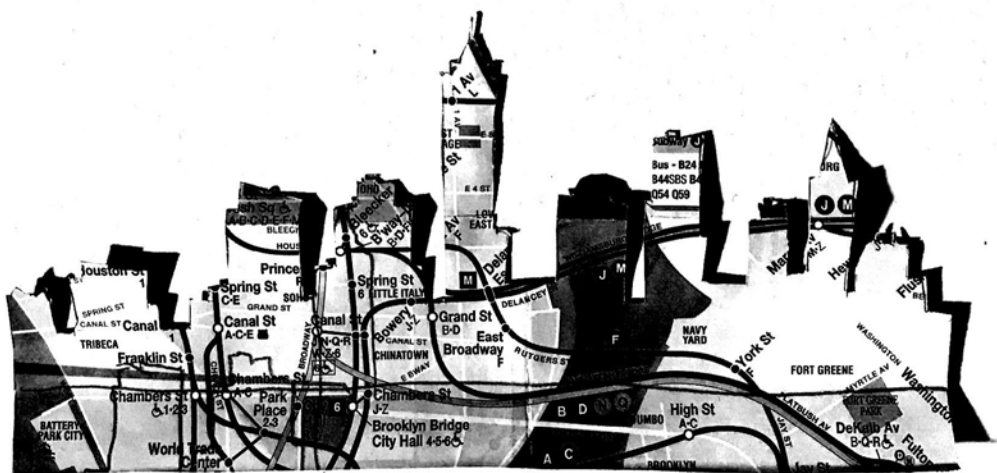
When that smell went right up to my nostrils, something happened
to me:
I could feel the smell of fresh squeezed lemons, the juicy yellow
cherries in my mouth, and the wet ground from the yard on my feet
Through the process of photosynthesis, I thrive in the ground
A huge mountain full of sunflowers, roses, and trees
My heart is bleeding inside from the things I see
The war came and spread us all over the world
Under the darkness there was still hope
for a few minutes, I felt a little like I was participating in a great
adventure, too.

I started looking around and thinking about where these people came
from, why they were there, and where they were going.
many homes and many names
A home is not just what's inside—it's the feeling, the sounds,
the smells, and the people that complete a home.
I found a love I never knew existed.
we are now writing the best scenes of our lives.

A cento is a literary work made up of parts of other works. The editors of this volume of *The Literacy Review* found this form the most appropriate to express one of the major purposes of the book. One of the reasons *The Literacy Review* is such a joy to edit and publish is that it involves collaboration among the editors, photographers, designer, and advisers. Even more importantly, the book works to bring together the writing from students at literacy sites throughout New York City. At the annual *LR* celebration, the warmth of community and connection fills the room. At its heart, *The Literacy Review* brings people together, and so this year, for the introduction, the editors are bringing the writers' words together in this cento.

Credits (in order of first appearance):

Antonio Pontecorvi, Jairo Sneider Galvis Pabón, Vinícius de La Rocha, Dorisela Hernandez, Curtis Lewis, Angie Stitt, Marília Valengo, Ashjan Mashrah, Yulian Ou, Noah Goodwin, Maddalena Maltese, Murielle Mobengo, Roosevelt Pugh, Hui Hui Li, Nusaibah Alsafari, Tito Cruz, Andres Molina, Kamila Jarosz, Norie Eliza Nakashima, Rumiko Sameshima, Yasemin Gulyanar, Sharnett Reece



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The City of My First Times

Carlos Luis Sotolongo Puig

Until that June day, New York was nothing but a desire written over and over again in the pages of some incomplete journal of adolescence. At 29 years and 10 days old, I undertook the most unpredictable trip of my life, with the uncertainty of the emigrant. Since then, everything has been a kind of rebirth.

I am not mistaken if I say that New York has been, in a certain way, the city of my first times. The first airplane I ever took, the first subway, the first Halloween, the first Thanksgiving, the first autumn, the first time in front of masterpieces by Delacroix and Van Gogh, the first time I saw the snow—all those stories have as a common denominator this city that never sleeps.

At the beginning, like any newcomer, you live in a constant daze, when you must contain your astonishment so as not to give away your virginity in travel. At first, New York is the city of romanticism—of walking over the Brooklyn Bridge, going up to the Empire State Building, taking the ferry to Staten Island and greeting the Statue of Liberty from afar, of being overwhelmed at the World Trade Center, and of experiencing new flavors and smells.

Then you discover the New York that is like a Tower of Babel, where you hear more than seven different languages on the same street; the city of hectic everyday life, which is cooked in the sweat and the work of natives and immigrants; the land that always welcomes one more

son or daughter coming from any corner of the planet; the place where millions of people come in search of happiness.

Thus, New York changes your life and reveals your secrets, unknown until then. You merge with the city, until you make it yours, even when you know that your essence remains in another place. And you realize that undertaking this trip at 29 years and 10 days old was not a crazy idea after all.



Carlos Luis Sotolongo Puig was born in the city of Trinidad, which he describes as “a magical city in the middle of Cuba.” He studied journalism at Marta Abreu Central University, in Santa Clara, worked on his province’s journal, and collaborated with some online magazines. Daily stories and photography are his two passions so far. Currently, he is a student in Sandra Ham’s class at the New York Public Library’s Hudson Park Branch, for which the site advisor is Sherin Hamad.

Tick Tock

Danielle Abreu

Tick tock tick tock
It's time to wake up
Starbucks or Dunkin' Donuts?
Downtown or Uptown—express or local?

Tick tock tick tock
Uptown
Stand clear of the closing doors
What does the audio from the subway conductor say?
I never understand!

Tick tock tick tock
Getting out of the train
Which direction?
Fifth Avenue, west to east
How many kilometers away? It's miles!
Mile, inch, foot, square foot, cup, gallon, ounce, pound, yard!
Downloading a converter . . .

Tick tock tick tock
It's cold! How cold is it? 35F
Checking a converter . . .

Tick tock tick tock
Through crowded streets
I rammed someone!—Sorry!
Look up at old building, new building! How nice!

Tick tock tick tock
Wee woo, wee woo, wee woo—ambulance siren screaming in my ears
Lights are on, crossing the street
Why did this car turn towards me?

Tick tock tick tock
Time to go to bed and tomorrow restart all that again
We love New York City



Danielle Abreu emigrated from Belo Horizonte, Brazil, to New York City in 2018. She studies English at the New York Public Library's Kips Bay Branch, where her teacher is Michele Persaud. Dani, as she likes to be called, studied architecture in Brazil and loves the architecture of New York City. Day by day, she has been falling in love with New York City. She notes that a number of *LR16* works inspired "Tick Tock."

From Wonderland to City of Sad Faces

Christian Rivera

Born in the land of wonders where everything has its own beauty

Sun is bright and the moon smiles at the stars

Colors so bright they will make you smile at the timeless wonders

Moved to the city of sad faces where everything is gray and colorless

Sun doesn't stay long and the moon is lonely in the sky

Sad faces everywhere drained of their joy and laughter,
soulless faces

Fast city without the time to slow down, slowly becoming the
sad face I was afraid of.



Christian Rivera was born in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, and arrived in the United States in 2001. At the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Learning Center, his tutor is Craig Adams, and the literacy advisor is Matthew Greene. Christian Rivera writes, "I love classic movies and books. I am a proud father and an awesome cook. I like to see the beauty in the world, and poetry is one of my hobbies. The Bedford Learning Center gave me a second chance to learn again and get my life back on track."

Memories of the Bronx

Myra Lee Machado

I remember walking in the Bronx and looking for the DHS's Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH). It was March. I remember the sky. It was gray, like a piece of paper, no sun, no wonderful clouds of Baudelaire, maybe no God.

I remember walking with my two kids, Camila and Ignacio, with three suitcases, one soccer ball, crayons, and leaves to draw. Ignacio was 10 years old and Camila six years old. He loved to play football, and she loved to paint. Both of them loved candy. Camila said, "I want to have a superpower—that the candy feeds me and makes my hair grow long." We bought candy in the deli.

Inside the PATH office, the people were rude and unfriendly. Except one man, the receptionist. He attended to the families and filled out the spreadsheets. He told me in Spanish, "In this city there are opportunities, but only if you go out to look for them. You need to learn English, because if you don't, the city will make you pay for that. May God take care of you."

I went to the first floor for my first interview. The Spanish girl called my number. She did the interview in Spanish. At the end, she told me, "This system was made to get out the people who don't need help, but in this process, many people suffer. You need all the papers in order, because if they aren't, the people on the second floor will negate the case. The people on the second floor don't care for people in general and even less for our people."

I remember seeing Hispanic and black people. Many spoke Spanglish, like the young couple with a little baby in the stroller. The baby sat in the stroller for hours, and the father talked. The baby started crying, and the father said, "Shut up!" The baby continued to cry. The mother pushed the baby, who hit the stroller so hard that the blow sounded throughout the room. The mother saw me. I'll never forget her eyes. Eyes of victim and victimizer.

I went to the second floor for my second interview, with my papers in order. We waited a lot, maybe eight hours. Ignacio asked me again and again, "How much time left?" Camila slept on the chair. Suddenly, someone called my number. She was a small woman and looked tired and moody. She screamed at me, "I called your number. Why didn't you hear me?" I don't remember answering. Maybe I said, "I'm sorry."

In the office, she asked me, "Where was your last house?"

"Bay Ridge."

"Where was the address before the last one?"

"In Caracas, Venezuela."

"This house, was it rented or did you own it?"

"It's mine."

"Why do you stay here?"

I made an effort to answer. I felt a lump in my throat. I remembered my house like a dream, where the past and the present was confused with the uncertain future. I remembered seeing the eucalyptus tree out of my windows, very green. "I'm seeking asylum," I said.

After that, we lived in a shelter in the Bronx for one month. We woke up at 5:00 a.m. and took the downtown train to Brooklyn, Bay Ridge, for school and work. Nevertheless, I felt warm in the winter because the people helped me in the streets. On the bus. When I needed help for directions, anytime. They were great people. In the night, when we came back to the Bronx, I loved to eat Jamaican food or pizza or fried chicken with Ignacio and Camila.

Now we live in Queens. We have gone back to Yankee Stadium, and I loved that. The sky has many brilliant colors.

From one of Roberto Bolaño's books, a quote comes to my mind: "De la verdadera violencia, no puede escapar, al menos no nosotros, los nacidos en Latinoamérica en la década de los cincuenta." *It is impossible to escape from real violence, at least for us, those born in Latin America in the Fifties.* Even today, Latin Americans cannot escape violence.

But now, I think we can fight against violence and help people get out of violence.



"I'm the mother of two amazing and sweet kids," writes **Myra Lee Machado**. Born in Venezuela, she came to New York City two years ago. She studied sociology at the University Catholic Andrés Bello in Caracas. She thanks her teacher, Jay Klokker, at the New York City College of Technology (City Tech). She writes, "Some people come to this world to help others, and Jay is such a person."

I Am From

Noah Goodwin

I am from futton mattresses

From Cup Noodles and Top Ramen

I am from the rundown boonies, notorious for blackouts
and house fires

Smelly, dark, oddly nostalgic

I am from flowerpots out the barred windows

The only thing with the power to break the monotony

I'm from family reunions and long hours on the phone

From the 24/7 transit worker and the 17-year guardian

I'm from the late-night arguments and early-morning apologies

From the "stop and think about it" and the "no street"

I'm from Methodists and the grandmother I never knew

Crispy fried chicken and mom-and-pop pizza

From the mother whose circumstances taught about adulthood

The father who wants his sons to grow up like him

A small box in my closet and a scrapbook from ages ago

Hold untold stories in safekeeping until they are ready to be told



Noah Goodwin, born in 2001 in Brooklyn, is a young man with a big dream of becoming an author. His passion began with a short story assignment in fifth grade, when the praise he received encouraged him. Over the years, he has sharpened his skills and is currently working on what he hopes will be his first published novel. He studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Young Adult Literacy Program at the Bedford Learning Center. His teacher is Justin Hyatt.

The Roads of Staten Island

Marly Sampedro

When you drive on Staten Island, you have to pay attention, not only to pedestrians but also to the big and small neighbors you can find on the road. I drive a school bus, and every day, I discover very peculiar neighbors. Driving along the side of South Beach, you will see many turkeys. If you drive near the parks or forest, you will see deer. In spring and summer, you will see ducks all over.

In the morning, you observe the deer searching for the entrance to the woods because during the night, they go for a walk on the roads. It seems that they are lost, looking for their herd. Sometimes the deer are crushed on the road so quickly that you do not have time to stop. But sometimes when I'm lucky enough to observe them, I delight in looking at them. The little ones are curious, the younger ones are shy and scared, but the older ones stand imposing and majestic.

I believe they see us. Sometimes when people see animals, they wonder where they came from and what they are doing there, as if they were invading us; but it is we who are invading their space. That is why when you drive on Staten Island, drive carefully, and if you see them, slow down and enjoy them because you never know if you will see them again.



Marly Sampedro, age 48 and a native of Colombia, writes, “I came to this country in 2001 as a single mother of a six-year-old boy and was granted asylum. Now I am an American citizen. I have three children and a beautiful family. I have been living on Staten Island for 10 years. My teacher at the College of Staten Island is Judy Falci. Every day, I want to continue learning English because I like it, and it helps me to move forward and achieve my goals.”

The New York City Subway

Antonio Pontecorvi

If you want to know a city, you have to start navigating in its deepest roots. The subway is the right place to understand people and how they belong to a great metropolis like New York.

In the subway, watching and listening carefully to people, it is as if the geographic map of the world unrolls, and you start traveling around the world while you are moving on rails. What is observed is not just different ethnicities, but a true sociological manifestation.

There are people who use mobile phones to help time pass by fast, most of them chatting or playing, others dancing and singing while listening to their own music, others eating, drinking, asking for money, giving money, reading books—although not many of them.

Diversity, acceptance, tolerance, education, misbehavior, wealth, poverty, solidarity, solitude, all are enclosed in the space of a train car, and in the time between two station stops. Those who get off leave a city pulsing on the rails, continuing their journey through the veins of this city. The subway is New York!

Originally from Rome, Italy, **Antonio Pontecorvi** arrived in the United States in 2018. He is 50 years old. At the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Learning Center, his instructor is Elaine Sohn, and the literacy advisor is Matthew Greene. Antonio Pontecorvi writes, "I always like to change my life. I hope to succeed once again."

A Parallel World

Norie Eliza Nakashima

Today, in the middle of commuting, I started looking around and thinking about where these people came from, why they were there, and where they were going. My imagination was activated—only because I forgot my headphones.

Then, I realized that the subway is the most democratic place in New York City. First, you can meet all kinds of people, all genders, all ages, all social categories (the homeless and not homeless, for example) and economic types (poor and rich, for example). They can be accompanied by children, dogs, bikes, scooters, food bags, shopping bags, or just bags.

Visually, it is an explosion of styles, depending on the season. You can see many different colors, textures, details, creative clothes combinations, all types of shoes, makeup, accessories, headphones, cellphone covers. It is an explosion of brands right in front of your eyes. You don't need to be in front of a TV, reading a magazine, or watching a video on YouTube to see an advertisement. And if you are not interested in people, you can be distracted just looking at the walls of every station that the train passes by.

It is always noisy. Too noisy. Annoyingly noisy! But sometimes you can hear a sound that you like. This happens a lot with me in the subway. Stay tuned.

Also, the subway is a place where you can have lunch, read a book while holding a cup of coffee, sleep or rest, dance alone or in

a group, study, knit a scarf, or make small talk with a stranger. It is a place to exercise your empathy.

The same people you see on New York City streets are somehow different in the New York City subway.



Norie Eliza Nakashima, age 44, comes from São Paulo, Brazil. She is a first-generation Brazilian, a “Nissei”—her parents emigrated from Japan. She speaks Portuguese and English and can speak, read, and write in Japanese. She also knows a little French and Spanish. She loves dogs and the arts in general and is curious about different cultures. She studies at the New York Public Library’s Hudson Park Branch, where her teacher is Sandra Ham and the site advisor is Sherin Hamad.

Underground Memories through a Big Apple World

Rosa Marlene Peña

Ride the New York City subway! It's a complete adventure, one of those that leads you to places and situations you never thought of. Even your imagination can't get the complete picture of what it is, a day or a night New York subway ride. This is what I call an underground world in a Big Apple world: The morning rush hour, the noon, the afternoon rush, the evening, the magical night, all of them are ready to give us the best show on our real-life channel, a performance as great as the best Broadway play.

The actors and characters are we, yes we, the daily commuters: mothers, children, native New Yorkers, tourists, homeless, workers, immigrants, grannies, rich, poor, students, and even if you don't believe it, maybe an alien, getting off at 34th Street, Penn Station, to buy some Louis Vuitton at Macy's. The script changes minute by minute: Please make some room; there is some empty space in the middle; hey, could you please move; hey Mom, can I get this; oh damn, I missed the train; don't push; what did the operator say? Oh, this train doesn't stop at what? Is it express?

Oh no, rush hours are crazy, but, no, rush hours are showtime: Singers, musicians, dancers, acrobats, they just pass in front of you inside the train cars, showing their best, but the main performance happens inside the stations, giving us that sweet relaxing moment when we need it, so get your spot inside the train station. And the Best Street Performance Grammy goes to _____? Oh gosh, there is really good talent right there. And what can I say about the nights, when the extravaganza of a great fashion show will be in front of you, on your way home or on your way to a party, you never know.

You can get lost in the New York subway too, even if you are a native. The map can help, but the Planned Work Service Change will mess up your day, and if you are a tourist, I promise you will finish in the next borough, 10 stations away from your destination; though, if you are lucky enough, it could be five. I know what I am talking about because I have been there, worse yet at midnight, when my supposed one-hour ride became a three-hour nightmare.

But this is New York, and we love it—well, unless it’s just me, but I know you do too. New York City is an inspiration, no matter what you ride, underground in the deep heart of the city, inside the subway or the wild beautiful outside, with its buses and yellow cabs. You just go with the movement of the city, a movement that changes second by second, like flashes in a New York club or sweet memories that you will always treasure: The red color ride via the West Side, 1 goes local, 2 and 3 express; the green color ride, the East Side, just don’t forget to stop at Spanish Harlem to get something to eat; the orange and yellow ride through the center; if there is no delay, everything will be perfect. I was just thinking of moving to Brooklyn in May, so please don’t close the L train, but if I change my mind and move to Queens, I know my purple 7 will be waiting for me. For now, I am still in Manhattan, and I love my local 1 because it always gets me to my ESOL class on time.



Rosa Marlene Peña was born and raised in Venezuela. She earned a bachelor’s degree in education and worked in organizations for children with special needs. She moved to the United States because of the repression and persecution of Venezuela’s dictatorial government. Beginning a new life wasn’t in her plans, but it has been “a wonderful learning process.” She studies at Columbia University’s Community Impact, where Kent Katner is the ESOL program manager.

Manhattan and the Runner's Point of View

Christian Goldoni

I love running. When I moved to New York City, I was looking forward to running in the middle of places I've seen so many times on TV or in movies. I like to run because it produces endorphins and a sensation of well-being. During workouts, you are absorbed in the landscape, and you are able to feel your breath. That's very relaxing.

Then, sometimes, you come up with a new idea while running. You don't actually know where it comes from, but you know that it comes when you are running. Above all, however, I like running from a philosophical point of view because you find meaning to your struggles. Somehow, it's an American Dream metaphor: Work hard to achieve what you desire. So your effort makes sense, and you can reach results you thought were impossible, like running a marathon.

This is my goal for 2019, to take part in and finish the most famous marathon in the world. It's not easy to enter the New York City marathon because there are so many people who want to run in it, from so many different countries. But I finished the "9 + 1 program" that consists of completing nine races and volunteering at one event promoted by the New York Road Runners, the association that organizes the marathon. I am very excited to run 26.2 miles through the five boroughs of the city, and I am already planning my training schedule to be well prepared for next November.

Paradoxically, it would have been so much simpler to enter the New York City marathon from my country. In fact, I could have booked a vacation from a travel agency that included the flight, the

hotel, and the entry fee to the race. As an immigrant in New York, it's been harder. However, it's not the only difficult thing here. Moving to the other side of the world, far away from family and friends, isn't easy. But it's not impossible if you really want it. For me, moving to New York is somehow like running a marathon. It means rethinking myself and being willing to work hard to fit in this community.

After all, the biggest city in the world could appear as just a dot on a map. Sometimes we need to watch our circumstances from the right distance to avoid being overwhelmed by fears. When we are too involved, our emotions can paralyze us, and everything seems insurmountable. The right distance can help us to realize that our problems are not so big. I think about that when I begin my workout, from the corner of First Avenue and 34th Street, and as I run along the East River toward downtown. I pass through Williamsburg, then toward Manhattan over the Brooklyn Bridge, and I see the Statue of Liberty on the horizon. When I arrive at Battery Park, my run continues through Hudson River Park and toward Uptown. At 34th Street, where the High Line begins, I come back toward the East Side. I cross all the avenues, repeatedly speeding up and slowing down due to traffic and signs.

From 34th Street, I see Penn Station and Madison Square Garden, and then I look up at the Empire State Building. Eventually, I come back home, and when I upload the course on my computer, I find out that I've run for 17 kilometers (about 10 miles). I'm surprised because I thought the run was way longer!

So many places are part of my journey: from Washington Square Park to Wall Street, from Chinatown to the East Village, from City Hall to Chelsea Market. And the list could be longer. So I look at the map on the screen and the route of my workout, and I think that this huge city and its neighborhoods, after all, are not so huge. “That’s all a height and perspective matter,” the man watching the city from the World Trade Center Observatory would say. That’s true because from the right distance, you can see and understand things better.



Christian Goldoni comes from Milan, Italy, where he was a radio producer for a national news and talk show. In February 2018, when his wife, Alessandra, found a job in New York, he decided to move here with her. Currently, he works in a supermarket in Brooklyn and studies to improve his English at the New York Public Library’s Hamilton Fish Branch, where his teacher is Sandra Ham. His main passions are running, politics and current affairs, and everything about pop culture.

A Beautiful Day

Yuling Gao

Because I am interested in traditional Chinese medicine, I went, accompanied by my friend Sara, to the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine in Lower Manhattan on October 25. It's nice to go out with Sara. We've been out together many times. Around noon, after exiting the college, we enjoyed a rich buffet filled with numerous delicacies. Sometimes, when we eat out, we stay hungry because of unpalatable food, but Sara and I felt satisfied this time. The day was cloudless and sunny. We took our time and basked in the sunshine. Sitting on a bench in front of a hotel, Sara intoned a poem excitedly. Life was so good. At that moment, a little bird with a long beak dropped from the sky. She couldn't fly and couldn't open her eyes. I picked her up by the hotel windowsill. She was not moving anymore. Sara wrapped her up in paper at once. The hotel staff gave us a box and a bag. It was a temporary home for her. It was interesting how the bird got a lot of attention. All the people who saw her asked how she felt. The bird woke up as we walked along the street. She must have been frozen and may not have eaten.

We were onto a great story as we discussed how to get the bird home. Sara reasoned that if I brought her back, she would starve to death because she was so small and couldn't eat by herself. That was true. What was the next step? We needed help. Accordingly, we inquired of passersby. We asked a beautiful lady where the animal protection center was. The lady was very kind. She didn't know, but she looked it up from mobile navigation and phoned. The bird finally had a home. She wanted to fly out, as if she had recovered from a bad situation. What was worth cherishing was that Sara was willing to take the bird to that future home, the Wild Bird Fund, on the Upper West Side. Though the place was remote, and we had a long walk,

Sara didn't complain. She is really kind. It took us about 40 minutes to arrive at the destination. The staff at the Wild Bird Fund accepted the bird and said they would check it. Sara and I were relieved. Inside the Wild Bird Fund, we found three white swans convalescing (healing their wounds), and there were some stranger birds, who we thought were also healing. I had been to pet hospitals, but this was my first time at a wild bird protection center. Sara and I were very touched. It radiated love. Though we were very tired, our enthusiasm never slackened. We got home when it was getting dark. This beautiful and significant day was coming to an end. Sara and I enjoyed delicious food and sunshine, met many good people, and saved a bird. These things made us feel most happy and fulfilled in life. And more importantly than all of that, the friendship between Sara and me grew deeper than oceans.

Yuling Gao came to the United States from China in 2017. She has many hobbies, but she likes traveling the best. She enjoys studying Chinese medicine with her friends. She studies English at the Queens Library's Elmhurst Adult Learning Center, where her teacher is James McMenamin, and Michelle Johnston is the center manager. Yuling Gao regards her hometown, Qingdao, as a beautiful place. She loves the beer for which her city is famous, spelled Tsingtao in the United States.



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I Am From

Gailan Kaid

I am from Yemen
From the war and destruction
I am from houses destroyed
Road riots, hunger, injustice
I am from the oppressor always overcoming the oppressed
I am love's peace and courage
From Nathirah and Farouq
I am from loving imagination and looking to the future
From traveling with my grandmother and learning how to become
an Oriental woman
I am from Islam and prayer to one God
I am from Sana'a civilization
Assed, Marak, Sahoke
I am from mothers who lose their sons when the boys are on their
way to school
I am from those tragic moments

Gailan Kaid, now 22 years of age, joined the Young Adult Literacy Program at the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Learning Center in fall 2018. Her instructor is Justin Hyatt, and Aneicia DeSheers-Washington is the program coordinator. Gailan Kaid loves Yemeni and Turkish music, dancing, and spending time with her family.

I Am from the Incas' House

Angela Acosta

I am from the Incas' house,
where every wall has authentic designs.
I am from traffic,
from a place where we don't talk, we yell,
where everything is picarones;
I am from places that smell like trash outside,
but like flowers inside.
The place where you drink tea at 6:00 p.m. and eat bread with jam,
butter, cheese, and ham;
where the meat and the hot dogs always go with the fries.
I am from the place where we are always asking for rice, and if they
don't have it, we start to argue.
I am from the place where everyone helps each other even if we
don't know the person.
Where a kiss means hi and a hug too.
I am from a place where, on the bus, we always have to hold
onto the handrail if we don't want to fall.
Where we always have to have money in our hands and where
50 centimos can buy a lot of candies or a bag of Lay's.
I am from the country where some places are dirty but their beauty
outshines it.
I am from the country where the markets smell like dead animals,
but ready to cook.
This is my place, where the cars always scare you.
I am from the place where you can cook even if you don't have too
many ingredients or money to buy them.
I am from the place where our sushi is a spicy ceviche.

I am from the place where some people are scared and others
fascinated by the old places and our culture.
I am from the country where everyone thinks about Machu Picchu
first, but they don't know about the Nazca Lines, Huacachina,
Vinicunca, and Huascarán.
I am from the Incas' country.
I am from Peru.



Angela Acosta was born in Peru into a huge and close family. She is 19 years old and has lived in the United States for three years. In her free time, she likes writing, drawing, and singing. What she likes most about writing is her ability to communicate in an imaginative way that can be read differently by different people. She feels extremely happy and proud that a poem about her country is being published. Veronica Jordan-Sardi is her teacher in a CLIP class at CUNY's College of Staten Island.

I Am From

Kamaal King

I am from America
A land run by the whites and built by the blacks
I am from a place where racism still exists
A place of pain, hurt, and sorrow
I am from a country that lies to its people
They tell us it's the home of the free, but there's nothing free in it
I am from a country with high rent and small spaces
I am from Brooklyn where being black is a crime
 and cops stop you if you're out past nine
I am from the projects of Bed-Stuy where people always let bullets fly
From a place where I am judged by my skin color,
 and when shots ring everyone ducks for cover
I'm from a place where church makes us feel at peace,
 go every Sunday to hear the pastor preach
I'm from a place where we were once slaves
A place where mothers bury their sons in graves
I'm from a place where people work at day and cry at night
Because of all of the pain we endure in life
I'm from a place where drugs sweep across the nation
I'm from a place where family members are imprisoned
 with barely any visitations
I am from a place where there are gangs and there's always a war
I am from a place where you can get killed just for walking to the store

Kamaal King is an 18-year-old Brooklyn native. He studies at the Young Adult Literacy Program of the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Learning Center. His instructor is Justin Hyatt, and Aneicia DeSheers-Washington is the program coordinator. The eldest of five children, he has many artistic interests and talents, such as writing and playing the piano, and he sings from time to time. In addition to honing his athletic skills, Kamaal King plans to learn as many languages as he can.

The War in My Backyard

Kamala Thapa

I remember the day the war came to my village, far from the fighting. The Nepal Maoist Party had started the revolution in 1996. It lasted 10 years, during which time 14,000 people died and many thousands more were wounded or went missing.

I was a teenager, and all I knew of the war was what I read in the newspaper or watched on TV. But that all changed one autumn morning in 2004. People on the street were whispering a rumor that a local police officer had been kidnapped by the rebels and was being held prisoner at a water-pumping station. That station was located less than 30 yards from our backyard fence.

My family took the news hard. This tragedy was happening right on top of us, and there was nothing any of us could do that wouldn't put our lives at major risk. But my younger brother, Bimal, had never shown much fear of anything, and my parents could not stop him from at least trying to save the officer.

Bimal began sneaking out to the pumping station. On his third visit, he finally caught a glimpse of the police officer through the window. The prisoner was standing up, his hands chained to the water pump. When he saw my brother, he cried out, "Help me!" and started to sob. He said he had a wife and two young children and didn't want to die. My brother reported that the officer's black hair was dirty and matted, and his lips were so dry and chapped that it must have hurt him to speak.

"Everything will be all right," Bimal said to him through the locked window. My brother came back to the house after his visit and told my mother he was going to go to the rebels' local headquarters to urge them to release the officer. My mother absolutely refused

to allow that. She said this would definitely put our entire family in danger of being killed.

So that was all there was to do, except pray. My brother did go back to the water station to see the prisoner one last time, but he was gone. We hoped this meant he had been released.

But the next day brought the news we had dreaded. Someone had seen the officer's body, lying beside a main road out of town. It had been sliced to pieces.

And that was our war. No gunfire, no explosions. Just a frightened husband and father, chained to a water pump, waiting to die, right outside our backyard.

I don't remember anyone in the neighborhood ever mentioning this incident again. But the victim remained—and still remains—in the thoughts and prayers of me and my family. And I guess, in this case, that has to be enough.



Kamala Thapa was born and raised in the Parvat district of Nepal. She and her husband immigrated to the United States in 2014, and two years later, welcomed a son. Kamala Thapa was a professional journalist in her native country and would like to one day practice her craft in English. Toward that end, she joined Mark Mehler's creative writing class at the Jackson Heights Library's Adult Learning Center, in Queens. Tsansiu Chow is the site advisor.

A Sound I Will Never Forget

Martha Ekpo

One Sunday morning back in Nigeria, my uncle and I went to church. While we were inside the church, my uncle's child started crying, so I took her outside. I heard a loud explosion, and then people started running out of the church.

Many people, including my uncle, died during this explosion. His daughter saved my life, because if she had not started crying, I would also have been inside the church, and we too would have died.



Martha Ekpo comes from Nigeria. After becoming widowed, she raised seven children, while running her family farm, which her children run now. Her uncle brought her to New York three years ago. She is employed as a care worker in Brooklyn. She would like to thank her tutor, Susan Marlin, and the New Lots Adult Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library, where Nicolas Simon is the literacy advisor.

Fear

Fabricio Nuñez

In my country, the Dominican Republic, every two years, we celebrate the production of the best cocoa. When I was 16, I was at such a festival with my family. At 11:34 p.m., I was feeling tired and decided to go home. Three houses before my house, I looked back, and I saw two men behind me. I could not see their faces clearly as it was dark. These two men approached me and pushed me to a wall, pointing at me with guns. In my mind, I was frantically trying to understand what was happening. Was I being robbed? One of them said: "Don't move, and shut up if you don't want me to shoot you." Then they asked me the same question twice: "Who sells you?" I was puzzled: "Who sells me what?" At this moment, I realized that they were undercover cops. I saw a regular green car approaching. The second I figured out they were going to get me into the car, I could only think of loudly screaming my grandfather's name; however, I did nothing. I felt as if I was made of cotton.

Once I was inside the car, the men started to drive away, and I began to cry. They asked me my name. I was very scared because I had previously heard that the police toss drugs to people as an excuse to lock them up. After a few minutes, one of the men called their boss and asked him about the name of the person they were looking for. They asked me my name once again. When I repeated: "Fabricio Nuñez," one of them said, "He isn't the person." They kicked me out of the car in front of a church and told me not to tell anyone about what had happened because they knew where I was living.

When I left the car, I made an effort to walk normally for a few moments because they were close and could see me. After the car disappeared around the corner, I began to run, not stopping until I got home. When I arrived at my house, I went to bed. I did not tell

anyone about what had happened. The next morning, I heard that a drug dealer had been arrested. I saw the man on TV. I did not have any physical traits similar to his. I told my family what had happened, and they told me that I should not go out alone at night. After that night, I could never be the same. I felt afraid to go out into the street at night because I thought it could happen again. They created that fear in me, although it was by mistake because they were thinking I was a drug dealer.

In many countries, the police harass and even kill people because they take them for criminals. Is it a prejudice? An innocent mistake? Or is it their own fear that they pass on like a contagious disease?

Fabricio Nuñez was born in Joba Arriba, Dominican Republic, and came to the United States in 2017. He writes, “I like to play basketball, listen to music, and read books. I came to the United States with the goal of studying and becoming a professional in this country. At first, it was difficult because I did not know English, but with the passage of time, I learned it, and I am striving to fulfill my goals, which is to be a great psychologist.” He studies in Polina Belimova’s CLIP class at the College of Staten Island. Donna Grant is the program director.

Argentinian Maté

Patricia Quimesó

I come from Argentina, which has many customs and traditions. I would like to tell you about one particular tradition, called maté, an infusion made with herbs and warm water in a glass container. Nobody drinks maté because they are thirsty. Maté is the opposite of TV: It makes you talk if you are with someone, and it makes you think when you are alone. When someone arrives at your house, there are two greetings: The first one is “Hello,” and the second one is “Got maté?” This happens in all houses, rich and poor, with women and men, young and old. It is the only thing that is shared, regardless of political preferences. When your child is not well, you give him maté, lukewarm with sugar, and he immediately gets better. It’s hard to describe this transition.

When you meet someone and you don’t have enough trust yet, you ask them, “Bitter or with sugar?” If they answer, “The same way you take it,” then trust is established. Yerba maté is something that is never missing in a house, even in times of inflation or a poor economy. If you don’t have it, you can borrow it from your neighbor. He’s definitely got some.

In other cultures, a boy is considered to have become a man when he goes to college, wears long pants, grows a beard, or obtains a driver’s license. In Argentina, this happens when he drinks maté alone for the first time. It is believed that then he will have discovered his soul.

Maté is a demonstration of values; it is solidarity and acceptance, the ability to talk, to listen, and to search for your soul.



Patricia Quimesó was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1964. Her first language is Spanish. She arrived in New York City with her husband and two children in December 2014. She currently works as a substance abuse counselor. She would like to teach yoga, as she did in her country. She studies English with Diana Vayserfirova, at the New York Public Library’s Kingsbridge Branch. Eric Rosenbaum is the hub manager.

The Flavor of Eid

Asalah Alhababi

After the exhaustion and hardship of 30 days of fasting comes the joy of Eid. The joy of the girls starts on the night of Eid, as the mothers draw henna inscriptions on their hands in different shapes and patterns. After the sun rises on the morning of Eid, we listen to the festivities, and the happy day begins. Everyone is wearing new clothes, and the smells of perfume, incense, and the wood of Arab lutes are everywhere in the house. After that, everyone goes to perform the Eid prayer. After the prayer, all members of the family, large and small, meet with the oldest person in the family, for instance, the grandfather, grandmother, or great uncle. They exchange gifts and money. All kinds of sweets, such as different biscuits, and all kinds of nuts and chocolate, are prepared. We also exchange visits with the rest of the family, such as aunts and uncles. Then we gather for the lunch that has been prepared since morning. It contains the best tasty foods, which you can smell even before entering the house. On this day, we go to parks or gardens and spend a beautiful and enjoyable time with our families. On the second, third, and fourth days of Eid, everyone exchanges visits with family, friends, and neighbors. But it is not like the first day, which is especially for families. After Eid, the adults return to work, and the students return to their schools or universities.

However, these past two years, I have been in the United States, and some of my family is far away from me. They are in Yemen, in the war. My mother is in Egypt. She can't come to the United States because Yemen is one of the banned countries. I just have my father and two brothers here. The past two Eids were so difficult for me because I missed my family so much. I wished they were here with me. Family gives true flavor to Eid. I hope that next Eid, I can celebrate with them.



Asalah Alhababi, who is 19 years old, was born in Yemen, and her first language is Arabic. She arrived in the United States in late 2016. She lives with her father and two of her brothers, the youngest of whom is six. Her mother and another brother left Yemen for Egypt, where they are waiting and hoping to be reunited as a family very soon. Asalah Alhababi studies in Heidi Fischer's CLIP class at City Tech. Gil Gerena is the director of education programs.

The Little Wooden Box

Luis A. Loli

When I was a boy, I used to watch black and white TV shows, like *Popeye*, *The Flintstones*, *Batman*, and my favorite, *Combat!*, with Vic Morrow, while seated on a little wooden box. In those days, I thought I was the owner of the little wooden box, which I sat on many times.

One day, when I was a teenager, my older brother Gustavo and I started to talk about TV shows, and inevitably we mentioned the little wooden box. He told me that our grandpa Florencio made it in the 1930s, and I thought that probably all my uncles and my mother could have been seated on that box, and I was right—but not for watching TV. In those days, television did not exist in Peru; they used it to rest.

Although the little wooden box was made of strong wood, it was very comfortable to sit there. I don't know why. Maybe because that place gave a sense of being alone, but at the same time accompanied by my family around the house—my grandparents cooking the meal, my uncles studying or listening to music, my mother cleaning—and of course, thinking about my father returning home to take me out to drink a Coca Cola with a soda cream cracker.

When I wondered about the whereabouts of the little wooden box, I was relieved to know it remains at my aunt's house in Peru to this day, because it has significance to our family history. Thinking about that little wooden box takes me back to a time when everything was fine. I mean, today, everything still is fine, but nothing compares to those days, when I was a boy resting and watching TV in that magical place.



Luis A. Loli, who is 57 years old, was born in Lima, Peru. He immigrated to the United States in 2001. He likes to read books, swim, and spend time with his family. He's crazy about playing the guitar, especially Beatles music. He credits The Beatles' lyrics with introducing him to his first English words. He studies with James McMenamin at the Elmhurst Adult Learning Center of the Queens Library. Michelle Johnston is the center manager.

My Barahona

Quennia Muñoz

I grew up in a city in the south of the Dominican Republic. Its name is Barahona, a place surrounded by a beautiful sea of turquoise blue water on one side and large mountains on the other side, where rivers of sweet, fresh water run down the hills.

I remember my childhood days. We used to go every afternoon after school to splash in the sea. We were left alone to cross a large avenue and then spent all afternoon catching crabs and snails and riding the waves. My siblings, friends, and I spent hours grabbing crabs and swimming to see who did better. We always climbed the big rocks to play pirate. I remember that I had to walk overboard with my brother or friend.

Even though the relationship with my siblings is the same as then—warm and close—and some of my childhood friends are still present, the place of ours has changed. Now, our beach is private and no longer a public beach. Where the pirate’s rock was, there is a small bridge. Where we used to have our campfires, there is now a terrace for tourists to look at the deep turquoise sea.

We have to stay out of our magical place and remember our childhood adventures on Pirate Rock!



Quennia Muñoz was born in Barahona, Dominican Republic, and came to the United States in 1997. She is the proud mother of two and works full time, but always likes to learn new things. While she likes to read, she has never considered herself to be a very good writer until now. Her goal is to go back to school for her nursing assistant certification. She says Carolyn Wright, the ESOL coordinator at the Fifth Avenue Committee, and the excellent tutors have been guiding her on her way.

Reminiscences

Jeryang (Kacey) Choi

The TV series *Reply* was very popular in South Korea several years ago. The drama covers a group of youth in “Reply 1988,” “Reply 1994,” and “Reply 1997.” My favorite is Season 3, the oldest time setting, during the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, when I was a second grader. I remember how in 1988, I was so excited, and how exciting the atmosphere was. Our teachers used to emphasize following rules, especially traffic regulations, as part of our preparations for the Olympic Games.

Every scene in the drama has detailed features. The background music is the most popular songs from 1988. The characters’ fashion is retro blue jeans and hairstyles with bangs. They listen to the old radio tunes at night, the broadcaster’s voice sounding exactly the same as I remembered. The funniest part for me was that the characters were surprised by devices that are now obsolete, like the computer 3.5-inch disc. I also used to be amazed at the 600 megabyte storage capacity of computers that are now outmoded, and the auto-rewind cassette tape players. These were the new items and high technology at that time. The reason the drama made such a splash was that it awakened the viewers’ memories. I can easily empathize with people’s feelings for the things of the early 1990s that I now can’t see or use. Through this TV drama series, I can look back on a childhood that I can’t return to.

How can we recall the memories of the past more clearly? I read a book of essays by O-young Lee, a famous Korean novelist. The author said, “People don’t remember by themselves when they were born, and people can’t see when they die with their own eyes, even though these are the most precious moments of life.” Instead, we rely on various kinds of records to reimagine the past. The recorded pictures can show us most of our special events.

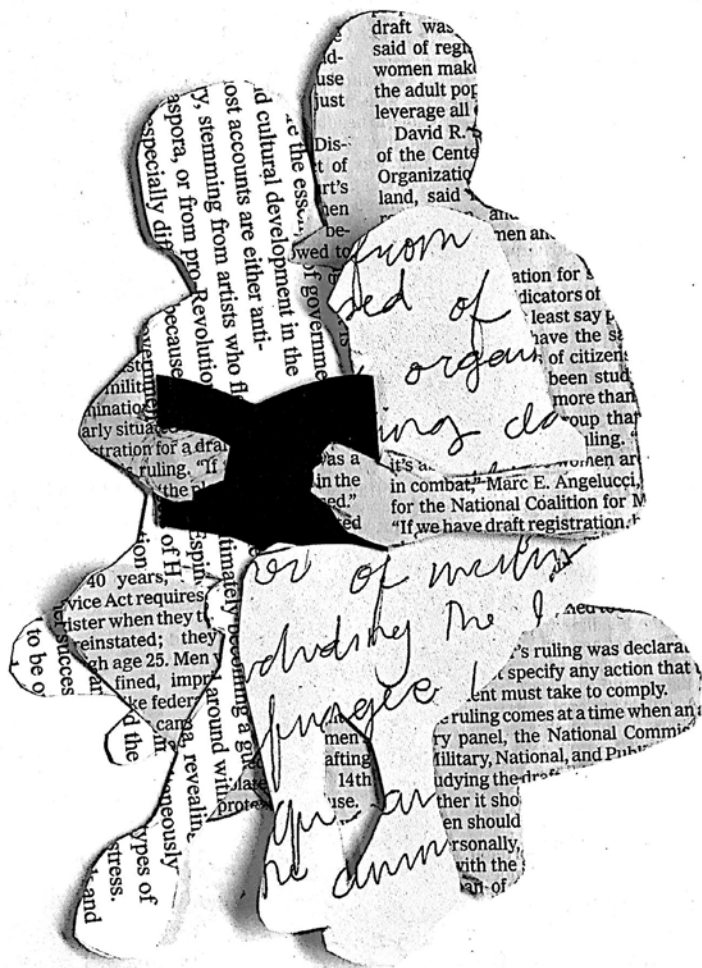
But somehow these records control my memories. One day my son said that he barely cried when he was a baby. I searched my videos and photos on social media like Facebook and Instagram. My son doesn't remember how frequently he cried because I didn't take pictures of him crying. It seemed like he didn't trust what I said. And I have little proof to show him. I have only smiling, happy photos. They retouched even my memories; I was confused as to whether he really cried a lot. Although I can listen to and see the most memorable events of the year, I am not able to recollect the moments I didn't take pictures of. Obviously, there are some limitations to using records to recall the past.

Also, I can't record the scents and feelings that I touch. I came to the United States and have lived in New York since I've been married. The rest of my family members live in South Korea. I can listen to my mother's voice on the phone. But I can't touch or smell my mother. I can only try to imagine that I have experiences with my mother. My father passed away 10 years ago. I remember his face, voice, and scent, but these are dim, like faded old letters. I still miss him and find peace of mind by seeing pictures of him.

Even if there are limitations to record keeping of the past, I can still etch in my memory the big events of my life to make my own time capsule.



Jeryang (Kacey) Choi, age 38, writes: "I was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea. I arrived in California in December 2007 and moved to New York in 2015. My favorite writer is Haruki Murakami, who has inspired me since I was 19. I have two sons, ages 10 and six. I appreciate Fran Schnall, who teaches me English at the Queens Library at Sunnyside, and always encourages me, and I thank my husband, who has given me opportunities and has been both a good husband and a good father."



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The Vows

Vinícius de La Rocha

To her

I know that we have never cared too much for social conventions like weddings, engagements, exchanging wedding rings, and so on. However, that doesn't matter, for we are getting married for the second time! We want to get married and celebrate every year from now on, and so this year we decided to exchange the rings that we didn't want to use before. I think all these things say a lot about our way of being, our lightness, our "jazzy style" of leading life, and about the magnitude of our love and our affection for each other.

I want to live forever by your side with our improvisations, with these thoughts out of the box that make our relationship perfect for me. Whether we are going to live in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, San Diego, or New York, I only know that, anywhere, I will always be with you, no matter the place. I say this to you every day, so today is just another day to say "I love you so much," but the difference is that now I love you with wedding rings. And I love being married to you with wedding rings.

To me

Instead of reading my vows, I would like to share a scene. This is marriage: innumerable, repeated scenes of two people who have chosen to share their lives.

The cell phone rings. It's 6:45 a.m. The sound that awakens me is noise. It's life calling us. You get up out of the bed, snooze the cell phone alarm, and then you come back to bed. I lie down in your arms, and we both know that we have just a few minutes before we start a new day. In your arms, I feel the safe, blurry touch of my dreams, still with me even after the noise of the alarm.

Today, this scene is what marriage means to me. The noise of life calling us, the comfort of our bed, our safe, blurry dreams, and your arms making me feel safe and at home.

To her, after her

Our marriage is like a screenplay. And we are now writing the best scenes of our lives. Using movie structures as a reference, we already lived (a long time ago) Act 1, when the characters are introduced. We also finished Act 2, when the story develops with its plot points, and we have even written our climax and the resolution. After all, we got married. Twice. How many people do you know who got married twice with the same groom or bride? And still better: with the first wedding in São Paulo, Brazil, and the second in New York, the United States, in front of the Brooklyn Bridge, one of the most famous places in the city? Somebody that you know did it?

Yep. Definitely, we can't compare our marriage with the classic

script. Our relationship is more a nonlinear narrative. And this is what I love about our story. During this journey, we will endure so much drama, comedy, suspense, horror, sci-fi, romantic comedy, everything, all kinds of films. But know that, regardless of the genre, I will be by your side at the end of this story.

Now let me wake up. The cell phone is ringing, and I need to go out to live life with you. It's calling for us.

And our documentary is a continuous and wondrous work-in-progress. But I don't want to finish this movie. Never, ever.



Vinícius de La Rocha is a Brazilian screenwriter, documentary filmmaker, and journalist based in Manhattan since August 2018. He worked for Brazil's largest magazines, TV channels, and content production companies. Now, his focus is finishing his own documentaries, which he started in California in 2016, and entering this country's TV and cinema industry with his own fictional screenplays. He studies English with Manal Grant at the New York Public Library's Aguilar Adult Learning Center.

The Voice I Will Never Forget

Ashjan Mashrah

As some of us grow older, sometimes we wish to go back to certain moments to live them again. Moments that keep haunting our memories forever and time will never make them fade. Whenever I sit alone or wander away with my thinking, I always remember something. I remember his voice calling my name, asking me questions. Recognizing his name brings laughter and tears at the same time.

I miss my father's voice.

I am longing for his voice, like a tree longing for a drop of rain
in the middle of the desert.

I miss the tone of his voice still playing in my ears just like
a musical instrument.

A tone so magical I can't compare it to any other sounds.

My name sounds different when his voice calls it.

His voice was the warmth to my heart, the home of my soul.

His voice runs deep in my ears, just like a river running
in the forest.

Sometimes I wish his voice was recorded, and I could hear it
all day nonstop.

I miss my father's voice.



Ashjan Mashrah calls herself “a daughter who misses her dad and appreciates the presence of her mom. A mother who is trying to make a bright future for her daughter. A sister who loves and cares for her siblings. An optimistic person from Taiz, Yemen.” She studies at the Brooklyn Public Library’s Central Library, where the site manager is Winsome Pryce-Cortes, and Felice Belle and Christina Best are the literacy advisors. Ashran Mashrah is working toward getting her high school diploma.

My Mom/My Dad

Sunmi Wei

“Feifei, I go to school,” I said when I was a student. “Feifei, I go to work,” I said when I was a worker. “Feifei, I am so happy!” I said when I got a good grade or got my first job. “Feifei, I am so sad today,” I said when I had some problems in my life.

Feifei is my mom; she is my best friend, too. Feifei is her nickname. I love to call her by her nickname because her friends do. She has short, straight black hair. She is fat, but she is active. She loves to travel, but she doesn’t like to spend money.

Feifei is strict about my studies and my life. I remember when I was a high school student, it was New Year’s Eve, and I had a date with my classmates to celebrate at midnight. Feifei was angry with me. She called me many times, but I didn’t want to reply to her. When I got home, I was locked outside. Then I rang the doorbell, but nobody answered. I sat on the ground near the door all night. At eight in the morning, Feifei opened the door. When I saw her, I cried. I felt sorry because she looked worried and upset. I couldn’t sleep all night and she couldn’t sleep either. I never did anything like that again.

I haven’t met my father in 15 years. My parents divorced when I was 10 years old. After that, I lived with my mother. I don’t have any memories of my father. I have impressions of him, but they are not clear. In my memory, my father was tall and thin. He had short, straight black hair. His skin was dark because he worked outside.

I think I hate him. When I was born, my father was unhappy because I am a girl. He wanted a son. He didn’t care about me and my

mom. I remember my father loved smoking very much, but I didn't like it. He said, "I can stop eating, but I can never stop smoking."

I think I miss him. One day, I saw a man taking care of his kids, and they were playing and laughing together. I cried because I was jealous of them. I wanted to be with my dad.

So far, I have heard some news of my father through my mom. I want to meet him if I have a chance. I will hug him and say thank you to my father because he gave me life.



Born in Shenzhen, China, **Sunmi Wei** speaks Cantonese and Mandarin. She immigrated to the United States in 2016, works as an office assistant in a supermarket, and enjoys doing web design. At University Settlement's Adult Literacy Program, her teacher is Jon Eckblad, the assistant director. Lucian Leung is the director.

Selfless Love

Hui Hui Li

Remembering the warm hand gently touching my shoulder
The beautiful songs wandering in my ears
The gentle smiling face
I will always remember this sweet moment

Remembering that she patiently educated me
Again and again
From using chopsticks to coping with social problems
She never gave up
I will always remember this meaningful memory

Remembering all of her hard work
Simple food to delicious food
Trying to do better
I will always remember everything she did for me

She is the dazzling sun in the sky
Through the process of photosynthesis
I thrive in the ground
I will always remember the great love she gave me

Remembering all the good things she left to me
Rough hands working for a comfortable life
I will always remember the selfless love she gave me



Born in China, **Hui Hui Li** immigrated to the United States in 2016. Her birthday is the Fourth of July. The first Hui in her name means smart, and the second Hui means virtuous person. She is continuing her studies in instructor Vincent Zompa's CLIP class at CUNY's Queensborough Community College.

The Necklace

Begzana Rapce

When I was 18 years old, my father gave me a necklace for my birthday. I didn't know that it would be a special necklace for me. It was something my father had kept for a very long time. It was the only memento he had from his mother. My grandmother gifted him with the necklace a week before she passed away.

For others, it may not have any value or be anything special when they look at it. But going back to the time when my grandmother was still alive, she was very proud of this necklace since it was her first jewelry, given by my grandfather when they married. I remember one day, she told me that she felt that her husband was still with her wherever she went, and I realized that she could somehow feel her husband's presence by wearing the necklace.

When Grandmother was dying, she passed on the necklace to my father. She told him to handle it with care. He never took it off. Before my father passed away, he handed me the necklace. Surprised and confused, I asked him, "Why me?" I have six brothers, and we were all so close to our father, but I was the one he gave the necklace to. I remember that he died without having a chance to explain why.

It has been a while since my father passed away, but his memory remains. Every time I look down and touch the necklace, I feel the presence of my father. I begin to understand why he wanted me to have it. He knew that one day, I would live far away from my family. He wanted me to feel him, to be close to him, and to remember him everywhere I go.



Marshella Lie, teacher of **Begzana Rapce** at Hostos Community College, writes: "Born and raised in Albania, Begzana Rapce has never given up on her dream to become a fluent speaker of English. Although she has to work 15 hours a day, five to six days a week, she always attends classes and does her best to practice English whenever she has a chance. Her favorite advice is, 'If you realize that wasted time is a wasted life, you will start running away from TV, movies, and games. You will start learning.'"

My Angel

Ummay Chowdury

In the middle of the dark, stormy night,
I was sleeping in my little room.
Father dragged me awake, he had teary eyes.
He put me in the white car.
The black sky was crying outside, and father was inside.

After two long hours, I discovered
we had arrived at my village home.
Relatives were crowded in all the rooms.
Some of them were praying, some crying.

Everywhere was incense, that sweet smell
like the smell of my grandma.
We went to my grandma's room.
She was lying on the black floor
covered with the white blanket.

Father tried to convince me
she would now fly forever.
I was too little to understand.
Still, I felt the missing of my beautiful angel.

When I saw her for the last time,
she was smiling at me like always.
People talked about the storm outside.
The sky was crying outside, and I was inside.



Ummay Chowdury was born in Bangladesh, and her first language is Bangla. She immigrated to the United States in 2017. A fan of music, travel, and innovation, she believes life is too short to be serious all the time. She currently studies in instructor Vincent Zompa's CLIP class at Queensborough Community College.

The Chinese Mythology of Flower Gods

Li Liu

When I was five years old, I lived in my grandmother's house with my cousin. We were both naughty children and usually played in our grandmother's garden, which we could not do at our parents' homes. One day, we took all of the flower buds off and used them to pretend to cook in the garden. Later, our parents found out and felt very angry about what we had done. However, our grandmother blocked our angry parents, held our hands, and told us a story.

In China, people believe each flower has its own flower god, and they usually represent real people in Chinese history. The plum flower is Caiping Jiang, one of the famous wives of an emperor in the Tang dynasty. The apricot flower is Yuhuang Yang, one of the most beautiful woman in Chinese history. The 12 best-known historical figures were chosen to represent the flower gods each month. For instance, the plum flower god, Caiping Jiang, represents January. February is represented by the apricot flower god, Yuhuang Yang. Each flower blooms in the month it represents. However, right here were two children who picked all of the buds to play games, making them unable to bloom in their month.

My grandmother said this was not fair because we took away their right to bloom, and that was not good behavior. I felt sorry at the time and asked to do something to make up for my mistake. My grandmother helped me to write a letter of apology, bury it under the flower trees, and kindle incense sticks on the soil. She told me that if

the flower trees bloomed this season, I would be forgiven. Therefore, we took care of the flower trees every day and wished we could be forgiven. Finally, after three weeks, the flower trees grew new buds and bloomed a few days later. I have never seen such a beautiful scene and felt happy to make up for my mistake and get the forgiveness of the flower gods. However, most importantly, I learned that I cannot pick any flowers because they only bloom once a season, and I had no right to take away the flower gods' right to bloom.

My grandmother passed away in 2018. However, I still remember when she told me about these flower gods. Nobody should take away anyone's rights; even animals and vegetation should be treated in a humane way. Even though I miss her every day, I will forever be grateful for my grandmother's place in my childhood memories.



Li Liu's teacher, Joshua Stark, writes: "Li Liu arrived in the United States from Fuzhou, China, in 2014. She speaks Fuzhounese, Mandarin, and Cantonese. Even in her first semester at BMCC CLIP, Li Liu attacked all her writing assignments with fire and passion. But this one has an aching tenderness that stopped me in my tracks." Li Liu writes, "This story commemorates my grandmother, who passed away in August 2018. I have so many good memories of her from my childhood. I miss her so much."

For What It's Worth

Wendell Williams

I had to learn and learn,
every culture has its turn.
Every time I saw a tradition,
it made me understand where I was born.

Walking on the beach, early in the morning,
Grandma brought us fruits to play with.
That was part of our tradition.

Our culture spans food to clothes.
Waking up every Sunday morning to radio voices,
that was what we called “the good old days.”
Keep our heritage alive, with songs and praise.

That’s what Grandma told us over the years.
Always remember your culture,
and hold back your tears.



Wendell Williams was born in Barbados. At age 63, he has seven children and 15 grandchildren. A vegan for 45 years, he loves to cook. He works in security and enjoys taking care of the public. Two years ago, a teacher encouraged him to get his high school diploma and gave him a computer as a gift. In January 2018, Wendell Williams enrolled at the Brooklyn Public Library’s Eastern Parkway Adult Learning Center. Donna Alleyne is the site supervisor, and Gladys Scott is the literacy advisor.

Nature and Time with Yaba

Wendyam Ilboudo

In Burkina Faso, West Africa, we call a grandparent “Yaba.” When I was about 10 years old, my mother decided I had to spend more time with my paternal grandmother in Kunda, 25 kilometers west of the capital, Ouagadougou, where we lived. It was my fifth-grade vacation. I was excited because I had wanted that for a long time.

One Saturday morning, I went shopping with my mother. She always did that before going to visit Yaba, but this time was different. She shopped for both my grandmother and me. The next day was Sunday. Early in the morning, my mother took me on the back of the motorcycle, with my suitcase in the front. It was fall, the rainy season, and on the sides of the road were farms full of fields and some trees. I asked my mother what was growing in the fields. “Millet on one side and rice on the other,” she said. I was turning my head left and right because I could not decide which side to watch. After we left that road, there were mountains. That day, they were covered with flowers and small trees. I wanted to get some flowers, but my mother said that it was dangerous to stop there because of thieves. I was very scared.

Not far from the mountains was a bridge under which was a lake. That day, the water was the color red. It amazed me, and I wanted to play in it. My mother refused, and I asked her why the water color was red. She said that there were “genies” in the lake, invisible to the human eye, who wanted to drink human blood. I got afraid, and I did not want to cross the bridge. My mother forced me to cross the lake.

Sometime later, we got to the village. I was happy to see my grandmother and to stay with her for some days without my parents. My grandmother could see on my face that something had happened on our way there. I explained it to her, and she said, “I am more powerful than the genies, and I will always protect you.” Her words

relieved me. She put out a big empty plate on which I stood, and she used a small plate of warm water to help me shower in the middle of the house. It was fun. I was so tired that I fell asleep right after eating.

The next morning, my grandmother brought me to the farm. I was so happy that I could touch what I saw the day before on our way there—the fields. I ran—most of the time in the cornfield, trying to catch insects and birds. I loved the feeling of the leaves on my skin. I found the butterflies beautiful. I picked the dry plants and put them on the side of the fields. I ran all over the farm to make noise, so the birds would fly and not eat the seeds. At lunchtime, Yaba and I sat down to eat in the middle of the farm, under a big tree I picked.

During lunchtime, we were not talking. Yaba wanted me to listen to nature. It was quiet, except for the song of the leaves of trees being moved by the wind or the birds, the fruit falling to the ground, and the birds singing. At the end of lunch, Yaba asked me if I understood what the birds were saying. I said no, and she said that I had to learn bird language, so I could tell her what they talked about next time. I said, “Okay, Yaba.” In the afternoon, we looked for leaves to cook. There were three different kinds of leaves—peanut, corn, and rice—that she used to make a traditional dish, babenda. I asked the name of every leaf she chose, and she answered me with a smile. On our way home, she allowed me to take some flowers that I wanted to put in my hair the next day.

At night, after doing the housework, we lay outside. With Yaba, I watched the sky and chose which star was Yaba and which was me. She also told me stories about the village and animals before we went to sleep. I liked the smell of the ground because it had rained the day before. I also liked the light of the moon when it rose in the sky. She

always said that I was like the moon, and she was like the stars. It meant that the stars were always in the sky with the moon, and she would always be with me, even if I could not see her.

I loved staying with my yaba. When the time came to go home to my parents, I was sad. My yaba told me anything that had a beginning had an end. It was the end of this vacation, but we would have many more. My father was the one to bring me back home. On our way home, I kept him telling what I did with Yaba. I kept telling the same stories for long time at home. When school started, I told everything to my three friends. They were amazed. One of them said she would go to her parents' village for the following vacation. Another friend said that she wanted a yaba like mine, because hers was not nice to her. The third one said that she wished that her yaba was still alive. I told that to my mother, when I got home, and she was sad. The next day, my mother talked to my friend's parents, and they decided that the next year, my friend whose yaba had passed away would go with me to my yaba.

Sadly, my lovely yaba passed away the same year. We were very sad. I still think about her and miss her today. When I feel lonely, I look at the stars, and I think about what she told me. Then, everything becomes all right.



Wendyam Ilboudo was born in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and her first language is More. She emigrated in 2012. She has a 13-year-old daughter. Wendyam Ilboudo plans to study construction management in college and would like to have her own company one day. She studies in Karen Schmauk's CLIP class at BMCC. The director of education programs is Gil Gerena.

Nonna Maria and Her “Specials”

Alessandra Reali

Every year, my grandmother used to come to Milan and spend several months with my family. If you are thinking of a sweet, smiling and warm Italian nonna, this does not entirely match her portrait.

Born at the beginning of the 20th century, she was among the few people in her community to receive an education at that time. She worked as a teacher, and she married the man she loved, against her father's will. Unfortunately, my grandfather passed away in World War II, and she had to raise two daughters by herself in an extremely difficult time; she provided for their needs, and, whenever possible, gave them the best treats. More importantly, she paid for their education in order to allow them to get a good job in the future and be economically self-sufficient once married.

She never remarried, I guess because she liked to decide for herself a lot, and actually she had a kind of strong and dominating attitude. When she came over, my sister and I had to be very quiet, and nothing could be done in the afternoon until she'd had her nap, and my father and mother had little to say about almost everything.

She was a great cook, always working to prepare wonderful meals, and crocheting while the dishes were cooking. Our kitchen—the place where we usually gathered to have a cup of tea and chat in the afternoon—was literally taken over by her.

Everything was worthwhile. I can still smell the delicious aromas that filled our home. That was pretty unusual, because my mother used to work and didn't have a lot of time for cooking stews, ragù, or roasted meat. Moreover, my mother had never been much of an eater, so we always had quick and light meals—very healthy, but really not memorable. With my nonna, we had all the traditional slow-cooked dishes, and what I remember most is her risotto with mushrooms

and saffron. It was delicious because she cooked it with butter and real meat broth. My mother did not like risotto that much, and she never cooked it, so for my father, my sister, and me, it was really an event. What's more, my granny used to cook a lot of it, in order to make her special risotto balls the following day. The risotto tasted even better, and the little balls, covered in breadcrumbs and fried in olive oil, were paradise! I loved the crunchy crust outside and the soft, tasty risotto inside. This dish was a must every time she came to us, and I was ready to put up with every rule and restriction to my usual life when she was at home, in order to have her delicious food.

Now I realize that this was her way to say "I love you."



Alessandra Reali was born in Cremona, Italy, and raised in Milan. She moved to New York City in 2016 because of her husband's job. She and her husband love art and enjoy going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art whenever they can. She is fond of American history and culture and is fascinated by New York's history and diversity. Alessandra Reali studies at the New York Public Library's Seward Park Branch with Lead Instructor Terry Sheehan.

Famous Jelly Cake

Kenya Livingston

My favorite memory is when my grandmother, Anna Green, showed me how to make her famous jelly cake from scratch. I remember it like it was yesterday, her warm smile looking down at me while she pulled out an old pan. She used it every time she baked. My mom and uncle bought her new ones, but she loved that old, heavy black pan.

Grandma started getting her ingredients, like flour, butter, sugar, baking powder, and other magic ingredients. The rest is a family secret. We had such a wonderful time listening to an old brown radio with silver knobs. The radio would have a crackling sound when you turned it on. She had it for years. I believe it was her mother's.

When we put the cakes in the oven, the whole house would be filled with the smells of sweet honey and cinnamon. We would be baking and singing. Much too quickly, she passed away. I really miss her singing. She had one of the most beautiful voices ever. It sounded like a hummingbird on a clear spring morning. To this day, I'm the only one in my family who knows how to make her famous jelly cake. So now every Thanksgiving and Christmas, I make about six jelly cakes for my family. I took on her baking role. If she could see me now, she would be so proud.



Kenya Livingston writes: "I was born in Brooklyn, and at an early age became a foster mother to four children, as well as a mother to two of my own. I went back to school about four years ago to get my High School Equivalency Diploma, and despite health challenges, I am almost there. My goal is to work in the children's health-care field." Kenya Livingston studies with Gale Shangold Honts at the Phipps Neighborhoods Opportunities Center in the Bronx.

Food Memories

Miguel Alberto Canelon Rauseo

I was blessed with a lovely, caring, and loving mother and, on top of that, she was a truly wonderful cook, I must say. I grew up being fed many different cooking styles because of our Lebanese, Italian, and Venezuelan heritage. My mother learned to cook with my great-grandmother and my grandmother (they were also excellent cooks) and over time, she developed her own unique seasoning and flavor. She was always praised for her dishes, and very often, my house was packed with delighted relatives and friends, eating her food.

I remember many elaborate dishes that my mother used to make for us, but especially our childhood's "comfort food," extremely simple, but delicious. Two pasta dishes were our favorites. One was a dish she invented for my sister in order to trick her into eating, which we named "pink panties." To make it, first, she boiled a big beet and let it cool, then she finely grated it and used it as a base to make a sauce, adding heavy cream, grated Parmesan cheese, and salt to taste. She served it with fettuccini, and the final result was a pink creamy pasta, kind of a Barbie pink color, and my sister was crazy about it. The other, sort of her own style of mac and cheese, was a similar rich, creamy sauce but made with sweet corn kernels sautéed with butter, heavy cream, again lots of good Parmesan cheese, a little bit of sugar, and salt to taste. She served it with macaroni or penne. Personally, I loved that mixed sweet and salty flavor, and I remember I always asked for extra cheese.

I have to confess that while my mother was alive, I never cooked anything, not even a simple fried egg. I wasn't interested in learning how to cook at all. When she sadly passed away, I realized that to be able to survive, it was mandatory for me to learn to cook, so I did it. I began to try out new flavors and collect an extensive variety of spices

and many other different products, in order to develop my own taste and signature seasoning, as my mother had. From that moment until now, I have never stopped cooking, and that's something else I have to thank my mother for.

In this new stage of my life, as an immigrant living in New York, away from my family, I believe it's very important to embrace the American culture, while trying to keep my own, and Thanksgiving Day was the perfect occasion to connect them. Here, I happen to live with my best friend, and his family is also Lebanese, so I decided to honor our common heritage and cook the traditional American meal for this holiday, a roasted turkey, but I would cook it with a twist, taking advantage of my friend's fully equipped Middle Eastern pantry, and inspired by an article about immigrants from *The New York Times* that we discussed in an English class at the public library.

I wanted to cook my first whole turkey from scratch, but I was very nervous about it because there would be 10 people for dinner, and I was not used to cooking for more than four people at the same time. However, I repeated to myself several times: "Don't worry, you got this, Miguel." The night before Thanksgiving, I decided to brine the turkey in a combination of broth, white wine, beer, salt, and date paste for a little sweetness. The next morning, I patted the turkey dry with paper towels and stuffed it with Medjool dates (which I love), pitted kalamata olives, quartered lemons and onions, a little bit of sumac (a tangy, lemony Middle Eastern seasoning), and a bunch of fresh thyme and rosemary. Then I prepared the traditional butter mixture but with a Lebanese ghee (clarified butter), minced garlic, za'atar (a prepared condiment made with dried oregano, thyme, sesame, and other herbs) and of course, salt and pepper. Then I

smear some of this herb butter underneath the turkey's skin and rub the rest to coat the outside skin. I cooked the turkey for three and a half hours, and the last 30 minutes, I basted the bird with its own drippings and juices. I had reserved the turkey giblets to use them as a base for the gravy. I have to say that the turkey looked divine. I checked the temperature and it was perfect, and I also let it properly rest, but I was still feeling pretty anxious.

Finally, the moment of truth had arrived. My friend's brother started to cut and slice the turkey, and I could tell it was moist and well done, as I expected. I was so excited! I received great compliments from all of the guests, my friend, and his family. I couldn't believe seeing them trying to find the dates inside the turkey. The dates became a hidden treasure, and everybody fought to find one, which was hilarious. The evening ended up amazingly well, without any turkey leftovers.

I will never forget my first time cooking a turkey, and I will always remember and love my mom and her amazing food. Every time I miss her or feel a little sad about something, I try to replicate her comfort food dishes, and that always helps me feel better. It is my way to remain close to her, whenever I cook. I feel she's with me, and that's every day.



Miguel Alberto Canelon Rauseo immigrated to the United States from Caracas, Venezuela in July 2018. A lawyer, he considers himself an introverted person, and he believes writing has been his way to express and communicate his feelings. He states that for as long as he can remember, one of his life goals has been to speak fluent English. He studies at the New York Public Library's Seward Park Branch with Lead Instructor Terry Sheehan.

The Days When the Sun Came Out

Roosevelt Pugh

When I was just a little boy growing up in Manhattan with my mom, I would always wake up at the same time, without looking at a clock on the wall. My mom didn't call me in the morning because she knew I got up so well. She cooked at the same time every day, before I got up. The food was so good, it tickled my nose, and I would peek out to see her in the kitchen. It felt like a ray of light had entered my mind. My mom knew that I would look out at the same time, like something had happened within my heart. My lips would drop down my jaw, and I knew I would have to get ready for school.

My mom made that good old cornbread that would fill the stomach up, with all those eggs, that sweet sugar cane, and that good old-time milk that the milkman left at the front door so my mom didn't have to go out to get it. I could just run to the door to get it for her. There were collard greens with some hog fat inside the pot, and when it simmered, the smell would go right up my nostrils, and when that smell went right up my nostrils, something happened to me. I would tell my mom I was already full, and I had not eaten her cooking at all.

Mom could see that ray of light come on my face. She wouldn't say anything at all, but I knew why she looked at me. I could imagine what she was thinking: I am so proud that I make my son feel so good when we sit at the table. He gets up for school, and puts on his clothes, and tells me, "I'm ready to head out for school, Mom. See you when I get home from school, Mom."



Roosevelt Pugh is proud to say that he was born and raised in Harlem and lives in the Bronx. He is a student at the New York Public Library's Adult Learning Center in Harlem, with teacher Elke Stappert and tutor Laurie Hockman. Previously published in *LR11*, with an essay titled "A Time When I Didn't Feel Free," Roosevelt Pugh enjoys writing stories that mix true events with his dreams and imagination.

Serenity's Graduation Day

Arabia Richburg

I was getting ready for my daughter's graduation on June 22. I didn't know what she was going to wear. I was thinking a dress with some shoes. Serenity told me she wanted to wear jeans, sneakers, and a nice shirt that day.

I said, "How about a nice dress and some nice shoes?"

She said, "That sounds good, but, Mommy, what about stockings under my dress?"

I laughed and said, "No, Baby, no stockings. You don't need that under your dress. You are going to be hot. Anyway, how are we doing your hair?"

She said she wanted box braids. So that is what we agreed on. The day before the graduation, I would take her to get her hair done and her nails and feet done.

I went to Macy's and found a nice blue dress for her graduation. It had blue roses on it. Then I bought another dress for her to wear after the graduation because I was thinking about taking her out to BBQ or to Coney Island. I hoped to have money left over after this shopping to buy her shoes and get her hair done.

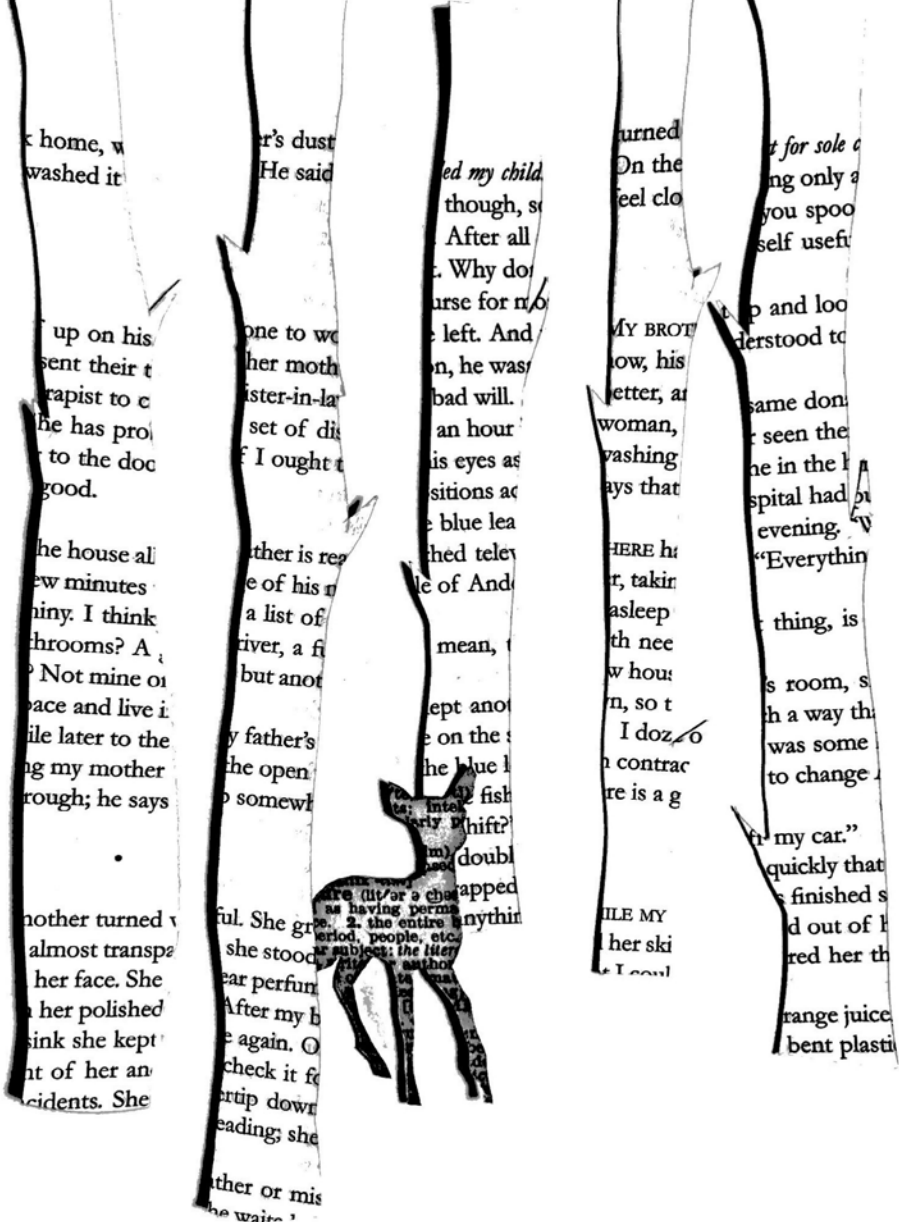
The graduation was nice, and the girls looked so pretty with their dresses on. They were smiling and happy, and so was I. The kids walked down the aisle, some smiling and some not. Even though it was a little hot, and the chairs were making my butt hurt, I still sat there and waited until they called my baby's name.

I was screaming “Oh, she did it!” Before the kids got their diplomas, they did a nice show. They danced and sang. I was feeling some type of way. I was happy crying because Serenity and I worked so hard on her schoolwork. I felt I should have graduated, all the yelling I did with her.

After that, the kids went outside to take pictures with their friends. Some kids were crying because they were leaving their old friends and going to a new school. I have some pictures, but not a lot because Serenity has too many friends. When we left the school, we went home to relax for a while. And then I took Serenity to Coney Island for some fun.



Arabia Richburg's hometown is Brooklyn, where she currently attends school. She writes, “I love being a mother. I am happy that I moved up to the Pre-HSE class. The Bedford Learning Center helped me improve my reading and writing. It makes me feel better that I learned without anybody judging me. Now I can help my daughter with her homework.” Arabia Richburg’s tutor is Diane Collins, Matthew Greene is the literacy advisor, and Susan Knott is the site supervisor.



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I Hope This Letter Will Give You Comfort

Sharnett Reece

My Dear Rex,

I write this letter to you, hoping it will give you comfort. Rex: please don't be mad at me. I had to leave because I need to make a better life for us. I know we talked a lot when I first left Jamaica, and things keep changing the longer I've been away. I have to work a lot, and I don't always have time to FaceTime with you like I used to. As time went by, our communication got shorter. That doesn't change anything for me because I have dreams about us being reunited.

You're the first dog I ever had. The day you came into my life was the day I became a different person as far as animals are concerned. I found a love I never knew existed.

You're a ruler! Dogs surrender to you. You're protective of other animals, and you aren't afraid to let them know who's boss. You and I adopted a lot of dogs over the years. Even our neighbor's dogs left their home to live with us. LOL.

Some of my favorite memories of you are when you'd walk with me to the bus stop every morning, and in the evening when I came home, you'd wait to see me step out of the vehicle. You'd blast off to meet me, and then your huge feet would be on my chest. That's if I didn't catch you first, or if I didn't have something to put in your mouth. Also, having a tug-of-war with you, and watching you sit on top of our neighbor's house while you were looking out, as if you were making sure everything was okay.

And, of course, I loved our little disagreements, too. How about the times you and Mom would argue because you always bark when the news starts?

Rex, there's something about you that's extra special. You're stubborn and strong. I loved listening to people in the neighborhood talk about you. You've changed the lives of everyone who's met you. I've watched humans who didn't know that they could love dogs end up loving you. You've got attitude, Rex, and that's what people love about you.

I need you to know that I ask about you every chance I get. You're imprinted on my heart, and I can't wait to come home to you.

Hugs and Kisses,
Sharnett



Sharnett Reece, age 39, comes from Saint Elizabeth, Jamaica. Her first language was an English-French patois. She studies English with Patricia Lynden at the New York Public Library's Wakefield Branch, where Eric Rosenbaum is the hub manager. Sharnett Reece worked as a medical secretary in Jamaica. Her goal is to become a housekeeping manager in a resort.

I Always Wanted a Dog

Eliana Herrera

When my son was a child, he always wanted to have a dog, but he had a respiratory illness that did not allow him to have pets. In my country, Colombia, there are many dogs in the street. Whenever he saw dogs, he wanted to give them bread. He bought it in the bakery, and he also gave them water, but he always cried because he wanted to have a dog at home.

One day, a television program had a contest for dogs. My son decided to tell his story, so he wrote a letter describing his dog and sent it to the contest.

A cousin gave me a plastic dog with wheels, and my mother told me that since I was special, they had given me Titi, my new pet, so that I could take care of him. My dog has wheels instead of paws; he does not have fur, but he has stains of color. He wags his tail like others, and I can bathe him, and he does not complain.

He made a drawing, and I cut up a coat to give the dog fur. The story moved the people at the television program so much that he won the contest. He went on the program, very proudly, with his dog. Each child had to pass some obstacles with his pet, and my son and Titi passed all very precisely. As the award was a dog, he decided to donate it to a child who could have it.

Sometimes, we must use our imagination to make the people we love happy.



Born in Bogota, Colombia, **Eliana Herrera** wrote this essay as a student of Douglas Montgomery's at CUNY's City Tech. She is now studying in Jay Klokke's class at the same school. She likes to learn about different cultures and would love to travel around the world to discover interesting and unimaginable places. She is proud to publish this story because her son still has the same love for animals as when he was a child, a love that she shares.

Saturday's Cat

Rumiko Sameshima

One Saturday morning, the weather was windy and cold. When I opened the door to my backyard, a black cat sat in front of me. The cat was grooming its arms and paws on the step. Then the cat saw me. My eyes met the cat's.

The cat had yellow eyes, small scratches on its nose, a long tail, and a beautiful black coat like velvet. The cat was bathed in sunlight and looked like an angel. I took to the cat instantly!

I tried to speak to the cat because I felt something from it, but the cat didn't ask me anything. I used English and Japanese, but they were not working. Of course, I know that cats don't speak our languages. However, the cat purred to me instead of speaking.

I held out my index finger to the cat. I knew how to greet cats in their community, so I did it. The cat sniffed my finger and touched me with its nose. It was cold just like the weather. Later, the cat came into my room. Why the cat did that, I still don't get. The cat walked around my room while looking for something. Suddenly the cat ran away.

The next Saturday, the cat came to the same door again. At that time, I decided to give a name to the cat. I was thinking about some people's opinions of black cats. In my opinion, many people have bad images of black cats because of witches. However, I like black cats. Besides, the cat made me happy, so I called the cat "Luck," short for Lucky Saturday's Cat.

Actually, when I met Luck, I didn't have any friends yet in this city. I had just moved here. I was lonely. I felt I had a new friend. I opened my door. Then, he entered in my room and nuzzled my feet.

Luck was smart. A few days after, he learned when I got up and when I got home. He called me from outside with a really cute voice.

He visited my room about once every three days. We usually played with some toys. I felt happy being able to spend time together.

Sometimes he came to my room at night. I made his house from cardboard. Also, I gave him some fluffy towels. He stayed overnight in there. He purred with need when he fell asleep like a kitten. It was so cute.

After a while, I went back to my country for one month. Since then, I have not seen him. I can't throw away his house and towels yet. I wonder if he is still alive or got a new family or is still a stray cat. I think he has had many homes and many names. So I believe he lives somewhere, not too far, and that is the best place for him.

Nowadays, two kittens come to my backyard. One sits next to me when I spend time in my yard. The other one purrs to me. Presumably, they know Luck, and he told them to go to my backyard to check in on me. Today, I will spend time in my backyard again.



Rumiko Sameshima, age 30, studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Learning Center. Elaine Sohn is her instructor, Matthew Greene the literacy advisor, and Susan Knott the site supervisor. Originally from Kyoto, Japan, Rumiko Sameshima arrived in the United States in 2017. She writes, "I like to cook and eat many different countries' cuisines, and I also like to see other countries' festivals. I like this city's winter because I love to skate on one of the many skating rinks in the city."

A Turtle in the Middle of the Road

Jenny Foo

I remember a sunny weekend when I was driving home, and I was waiting for the traffic light. I didn't realize what had happened or why every car had stopped. I waited. The green light changed several times. What was going on? It seemed like every other driver was calm and patient because no one was honking at all. Time passed. I put my car in park to secure the car from moving before I started to look around. Suddenly, I saw a gigantic turtle walking and crawling on the road. It was old. It had a dark brown and green shell, edged with cracked pieces near its legs. Its tiny head, protruding from its clumsy, dense muscle, seemed so weak and moved in slow motion. We were all silent and patient.

Where did that turtle come from? I thought. Maybe someone dropped it on the road or maybe it came from the woods, but I had no clue at all. The turtle took 10 minutes to climb onto the safe median between the intersections. Some drivers started to get annoyed, losing patience. Finally, I saw a man get out of his car, walk toward the turtle, pick it up, and put it on the grass near the curb. I was convinced every human being that day still had their own kind of sympathy, protecting the turtle from getting killed. It wasn't just a turtle, but a symbol for humanity.

Jenny Foo writes, "I'm from Malaysia. I have been in the United States for 30 years. English helps me communicate with people easily. English is a universal language, and it helps you to pursue a professional career." Jenny Foo studies in Veronica Jordan-Sardi's CLIP class at the College of Staten Island, where Donna Grant is the program director and Blerina Likollari is the assistant director.

Coquí

Luz M. Jusino

The most memorable sound of my childhood was the coquí sound. The coquí is a miniature green frog that sounds high notes, “coquí, coquí, coquí.” It camouflages itself with green leaves, so it’s very hard to see.

For the Puerto Rican, the coquí is a symbol of our island. No matter where we are, the people of my country feel nostalgic when we hear the beautiful sound of the coquí. Many poets and musicians have been inspired to write poems and songs about the coquí. Craftsmen make souvenirs with the Puerto Rican flag and the coquí.

Since I was born and raised in Puerto Rico, I love how the coquí sounds. It’s like a lullaby to soothe us every evening at sunset. When I came to this country, I felt nostalgic for the wonderful sound of the coquí. So I asked my family to record its sound for me. For years, I kept the tape, just to hear it.



Luz M. Jusino was born in Yauco, Puerto Rico and came to New York in 1987. She is the mother of an adult daughter and, at present, works as a special education teacher’s assistant. About Patricia Lynden’s class at the New York Public Library’s Wakefield Branch, she writes, “It gave me confidence, it encouraged me to get more involved with my studies, and it helped me look forward to my future. I want to get my college degree and my master’s degree.”

Cinnamon Camphor Trees

Yixiang Ren

Before I moved from China to the United States, I lived with my family in a small village near the town of Ma Wei, Fujian, on a mountain with tall cinnamon camphor trees. Every branch and twig had many thick, shiny leaves. In the morning as I woke up, I could hear birds quarreling and singing in high pitch in the trees' canopies. Through the window, I could see black and white swallows flying in the blue sky, high above the trees. The clear, fresh air full of the trees' aroma hit me with vitality. Cinnamon camphor trees surrounded our two-floor house, built with stone and mud. When I walked to school over the mountain, along the road, also built with stone and mud, I couldn't see the end of the road. The road had the trees on both sides. They were straight and tall, like soldiers who stood there to protect me from anything that might hurt me.

My favorite place to sit was the mountain top because I felt the wind and saw the sky, people, buildings, birds, and trees. When sunrise began, the trees were soaking in the red light against the golden sky. Sunset was different from sunrise because it meant the night was coming. The world turned red and black. Then I could look at the sky with shiny stars. Sadness or anger would always leave me. Since I came to live in the United States, I have not seen such stars or cinnamon camphor trees, or at least I haven't found them yet. I keep looking around and up. Sometime in the future, my life here will become my new memories.



Yixiang Ren writes, "I am a 19-year-old man. I was born in China. My first language is Chinese, and English is my second language. I arrived in United States in 2009. I want to thank my teacher, Polina Belimova. Because of her, I am learning to fix mistakes in my essays and write a good essay. These skills will help me to get better in college." Yixiang Ren studies English in a CLIP class at the College of Staten Island.

Ocean: The Place Where I Can Be Myself

Angie Stitt

Everybody needs a place where they can be themselves. My bittersweet refuge is a beach.

I love the beach because there, I can let my imagination flow in the air. I play my dreams as if they were a movie. Time stops. It is just the water, the sand, and me.

The crystal water plays with the tonalities of the immense open sky and the light of the sun, so intense and so radiant. This water purifies my soul of all the pain that one day I could have. My body welcomes the air. The warmth of the sand touches my back, and I feel protected as if it were my father's hug.

Every month, we used to go to the beach with my family, and my father told us stories about how heroic and dangerous his work as a bodyguard was. We believed half of what he said and laughed at the other half.

When my father was shot at his work, the beach became a place where my mom and I lived through the pain. There, we embraced the loss and savored the memories of happy moments when our family was whole. The beach became a place where I can connect with my father, who taught me to be persistent, brave, and patient; it's the place where he taught me to love people for what they are and not for what they have.

On any beach in the world, I connect with my past through my memories, with my future through my dreams, and with my present

through the instant measurement of my vulnerability, my strength, life and death against the ancient vastness of the sand, the waves, the sky, and the wind.

Angie Stitt writes, “I am 19 years old. I come from Barranquilla, Colombia, and my first language is Spanish. I arrived in the United States in March 2018. I admire the truth. I believe in equality. I can’t stand injustice.” Angie Stitt studies in Polina Belimova’s CLIP class at the College of Staten Island, where Donna Grant is the program director.

My Favorite Place

Xuewen Li

My favorite place is the top of mountains. I was born in a small village located on a famous plateau in China. There are many mountains around our village. One of them is 4,500 meters high compared to the horizon line, so I have liked climbing mountains since I was young.

When I climb a mountain, I really enjoy the scene coming to my eyes—unknown wildflowers, wild animals, and colorful leaves. Everything seems novel and makes me feel marvelous. When I finally arrive at the top of a mountain, I always embrace nature with my open arms. The wind blows in my face, and I listen to the sounds of nature, which is a fantastic feeling for me.

I can also look out over the beautiful landscape around the mountain when I reach the top. There are always a lot more views than on the ground.

In addition, I can enjoy different scenery in different seasons, like being saturated with splendid colors in spring or marveling at the mountain ridge in summer. I have been charmed by the harvest scene in autumn and awed by the endless white world in winter.

I still remember the impressive moment when I climbed to the top of Whiteface Mountain, in Upstate New York, on August 2, 2018. A breathtaking spectacle spread itself out before my eyes. I saw the whole of Lake Placid. Some white sailboats were sailing on the lake, and the surface of the lake was reflecting golden sunshine. How

peaceful and glamorous it was! My wife, daughter, and I all drank in the beauty of this scene.

That is why the top of mountains is my favorite place.



Xuewen Li, known as Berty Li, was born in a mountain village in Yunnan Province, China. He has come to New York as a visiting scholar in economics at Columbia University. He has a wife and a three-year-old daughter, and looks forward to seeing his daughter grow up happy and healthy. He attends ESOL classes at the Prospect Park YMCA's New Americans Initiative. The program director is Nabila Khan and Berty Li's teacher is Donna Powers.

Garden of My Dreams

Dorisela Hernandez

The story “A Small Garden,” written by Yulian Ou, reminded me of my own childhood in Mexico. To have my own special garden was one of my biggest dreams when I was a child. I was lucky because I already knew where my special garden was and had even played in it. It was my godfather’s garden.

I still remember cutting lemons and yellow cherries from his beautiful green and leafy trees in his garden. He never got mad at me. My siblings and I used to call him “Godfather.” He was just my middle sibling’s godfather, but we loved him as if he was part of our family. In his way, he always kept an eye on us because our mother had to work two shifts every day. My siblings and I were by ourselves most of the time. We were so poor at that time.

One day, I heard that Godfather was thinking of selling his house because his children were living on the other side of the country, and he wanted to live closer to them. Even though we struggled financially when I was a child, my dream that one day I would have the chance to buy my godfather’s house was growing. I was hoping that he never found anyone to buy it. Since that time, I always asked, “Would you sell me your house, Godfather?” He laughed whenever I said that. “Oh, my dear Doris, when are you going to have the money? It is a lot of money, and you are just a child.” I told him that one day, he would see—because I loved his fruit trees, his backyard, and most of all, I had a lot of good memories of it. He just smiled and sent me to play with the kids.

Many years passed. I grew up, and life took me to New York City, to work really hard. One day, I was just getting home from work, when suddenly my mother called and told me, “Mr. Julian wants to

talk to you. Call him please.” My heart started beating so fast, I felt it in my soul; my mind started to fly, and I could feel the smell of fresh-squeezed lemons, the juicy yellow cherries in my mouth, and the wet ground from the yard on my feet. It was the day!

It was the day I was waiting for so long, so I called him. Godfather was ready to sell. He was really sick. When I learned this, it was so painful for me. I wanted the house, but I did not want my godfather to be alone and sick. He needed the money to get treatment; and his family wasn’t close to him. Despite this sad situation, he gave me one condition to sell me his house. I had to be there in person because he didn’t trust any members of my family to close the deal in my name. Even though I might never have had the opportunity to come back to New York City, I accepted the deal. I flew back to Mexico for one of my biggest dreams.

Now I have my special garden. I still love my lemon tree and yellow cherries. My mind is full of the good things that I have there. My dream as a child became real.

After Godfather and I closed our deal, he stayed for a while in the house. Then suddenly, he left. Even now, we do not know anything more about him.



Dorisela Hernandez comes from Mexico. She has been living in New York City for 17 years, and she has two children. She works as a Spanish-language volunteer in a community program in the Bronx. She is studying English in the SPELL program at Hunter College, where her teacher is Ruby Taylor MacBride. Brandon Leshner is the program coordinator.

Immigrant Nature

Nusaibah Alsofari

A mountain!
A huge mountain
full of sunflowers, roses, and trees.
Nothing could break it
until a strong wind came
and spread stones all over the forest.
Someone broke it down the middle,
broke my family,
my family members.
The war came,
and spread us all over the world.

A sky!
A beautiful sky
with a lot of stars.
I thought no one could take them,
but the day came
when the stars flew with airplanes
so far away
to different places.
The sky cried with rain,
heavy rain,
until the sky couldn't,
couldn't find the stars.
For seven years,
without the stars.

Like the leaves when they fall
travel to different places,
to that predominant unbearable,
to let you meet in one place.
You feel it is a barren world
to meet leaves from other trees.
You hesitate
for a long time
until one tree gathers you all
to have the same flag.



Nusaibah Alsofari is a 21-year-old Yemeni who moved to the United States because of the war, which separated her family throughout the world. She hopes one day they will be together again. She likes to swim, run under the rain, and play with kids. Her dream is to hear that the world, especially Yemen, is free of war. Now a student in Veronica Jordan-Sardi's CLIP class at the College of Staten Island, she considers being published in *The Literacy Review* a milestone in her experience as an American.

Reflection

Now that he was dead it was just a square window hurtling with her joints of time; since no one but her of gatekeeper, contemplating the contained. The things left in the room they were now shrine to impossibilities, ad so rarely touched when he was in with the edge of her bare foot, but fell in half and then crumbled into ranged all his socks and all his clothes. Over time, she discarded and I assorted piles of Russell, which school. She opened the door to find it had become as a living, breathing came home two days later to find She didn't dare ask what had happened hadn't wanted to clear her brother's own.

ents were still paying hospital bills incrementally; her mother's "absconded pencil" took six months for plates was cheaper than running the pencil. It took six months for her mother than running the dishwasher at the supermarket.

en helping unload provisions for so had joined the line after the her, and she felt embarrassed grand toilet paper. He took a few at wait time but, seeing nothing,

one's knocked out with that a

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Caravan of Dreams

Jennifer Alonzo

...with inappropriate affect; her older sister
our, worldweary, reckless with the boys
re Ruth could even stand, Clarisse v
er sweater-encased body into a prop
ade chicken tetrazzini to the floor. "C
c bowl clattered around the circum
the Jesus," Clarisse's mother told h
as gave her daughter a bunch of
ices to wipe the smeared Alfredo a
me with a mop. Even then, they qui
ersation, and Ruth knew they were
a no one who visited Russell in the
n born sickly, her brother, spitting
of his ankle while performing no
mping on a trampoline. At schoo
ter combinations he would neve
cartoon-voiced Dr. Malone, had le
a routine appointment, only to
sh Hospital. Jewish sent Russe
n to Cleveland Clinic, where
urnfully in the front seat, t
down and roost on the m
adwest, as it turned out, her
long as we can," her father
ter a simple walk up the s
much longer we have with h
me with a vicious sudden

To Madison, Who Asked Why I Write

Marília Valengo

Today, I write mainly to breathe. It wasn't always like this, or maybe it was, but only now I realize the importance, for me, of writing. After some time, even things that one doesn't choose end up being part of one's life. Therefore, today, I would say I write to keep myself alive. I recognize how bold this statement sounds. I don't like to admit the seriousness of this subject. It sounds a little desperate, making a confession that strong. I've never thought of myself as someone radically committed to a "life or death" idea, but I guess I've gotten to a point where I need, once and for all, to rely on something. That is writing. All this nonsense makes me think that I also write to understand life; not only life, but existence.

Yet, saying I just want to understand is very vague; I don't really recognize the deep meaning behind it. I am not searching for words just to translate whatever I am feeling or seeing. It's more like modeling, like an engineer does. The more I think about words, the less I see them divided between sound and meaning. To me, words are pieces from a Lego box, available to any child who wants to play and build whatever they desire. I like being this child, writing things and creating possibilities.

I also write to control my own story. It's my narrative; I'm the agent behind the facts. It's ironic when, at some point, I realize that as much as I try to keep things organized, I always end up at a new starting point, knowing nothing. Sometimes, I feel like I'm becoming

crazy. On the other hand, without words, I would never stay sane. It's so contradictory. If only I was a little bit more succinct. The thing is, nothing moves me more than blank pieces of paper, a little notebook with pens and pencils. When I read a good sentence, when I learn a new figure of speech, when I see writing so good it makes my mind stop working, I feel this love invade me. It's like I am facing the primordial, the basic goodness of us all. I just want to do the same.

Here in New York, I have been writing specifically to not lose track of who I really am. As an immigrant, I find it more and more complicated to locate myself while I roll from one culture to another, shaking the moss off my identity's surface whenever a new aspect suddenly appears. I have also been writing to reconceptualize what culture, belonging, longing, and loving are.

If I had to choose just one answer, though, I would say I write mainly because I love words. I love words until the point that they are not necessary. I love words because even better than them is silence, but without the first I would never be able to know the second. So I write to maybe one day run out my need to say things.



Born in João Pessoa, Brazil, **Marília Valengo** also lived in Rio de Janeiro and San Francisco, before coming to Brooklyn in 2016. She is a student in the advanced writing class at University Settlement, where Lucian Leung is the director of the Adult Literacy Program. Marília Valengo's essay, "Love Conquers All," was published in *LR16*. She wrote this latest essay in response to a question posed by Gallatin student teacher Madison Kelts.

A Conversation

Farjana Yeasmin

Me: How are you, My Childhood?

My Childhood: I am awesome. Where have you been?

Me: I am an adult now. I got married. I have two kids. I miss you a lot.

My Childhood: Why do you miss me?

Me: Because I miss that time. That time was very enjoyable. I had no responsibility. I always played and hung out with my friends.

My Childhood: Do you still feel as naughty as before?

Me: I am an adult now. I do not bother anybody. I have a little boy who is naughty. Sometimes I feel very annoyed with him.

My Childhood: Do you still write letters like before?

Me: I would like to write letters, but I don't have time. I miss the time when I could do whatever I wanted to. When I try to write something now, my son and daughter come to me to ask for food. So I can't write any letters now. I don't have time.

My Childhood: Do you still like mango pickles and candy, like before?

Me: No, I have learned that candy damages my teeth. So I do not eat it. But I love mango pickles. My husband and my kids eat a lot of candy. After seeing it again, I want to take a small bite.

My Childhood: Do you cry like before?

Me: No, I don't cry like before. I am an adult now. I can hide my tears. I know how to handle myself in any situation.

My Childhood: When I had a birthday party invitation from my friend, I could not sleep the whole night. I kept on thinking about it. I was thinking about what I should buy. I wondered how big the cake would be—small or big? How would it taste? Would it be pretty? Do you still enjoy birthday parties like before?

Me: I can't enjoy birthday parties any longer. When I see kids playing at birthday parties, I wish I could be young again and play like that. Meanwhile, I am missing you and will continue missing you because you are my best friend in my whole life, and I would love to talk with you forever!



A native of Chandpur, Bangladesh, **Farjana Yeasmin** studied liberal arts in college. She arrived in the United States in 2007. Now 31 years old, she lives in Brooklyn with her two children, ages three and nine. Farjana Yeasmin's first language is Bengali, and she is now learning English with instructor Elaine Sohn at the Brooklyn Public Library's Bedford Learning Center. The literacy advisor is Matthew Greene, and the site supervisor is Susan Knott.

Home

Yasemin Gulyanar

A home is not just what's inside—it's the feeling, the sounds, the smells, and the people that complete a home.

My dream home is watching, from my small kitchen window, snow falling outside, while I prepare dinner. I am listening to music on my iPhone. I hear the familiar knock at the door. My husband comes home with his shopping bags. I hug him. I say, "Welcome back home. Clean your hands and get ready to eat." We eat our meals and talk about our day, the snow silently falls outside.

Our home is small. We don't have a lot of furniture. But we work all day, and when we finally go back home, we are greeted by the peace of mind that we made it home. The sofa, the cups from which we drink tea, the small windows of our living room, our table at which we eat, are all aspects of home.

All these things are meaningful. If we don't live in a home, the home isn't a home; it's just a building, a place, a house. A home has a soul, and it takes power from and gives power to its inhabitants.

For me, a home is a being that possesses all the good and all the not-so-good of its occupants, making it a meaningful place.



Yasemin Gulyanar writes, "I came to the United States from Turkey with my husband in 2016. We have a small but loving home. I work for the Brooklyn Public Library and also study English at the Central Library's ESOL Program." Yasemin Gulyanar's teacher is Lauren John, the student advisor is Lora Rosado, and Haniff Touissant is the program coordinator.

My First Job

Teresa Roachford

My first job was not so pleasant because my employer and her family thought I didn't know how to take care of someone elderly. They thought I needed to listen only to them, but I knew I needed to listen to my client. It was very difficult, and it was sad for me.

Back home in Panama, I helped everyone: my neighbors, my aunts, my cousins. I always worked. It felt nice to help someone in need. There was no payment but "thank you," and sometimes food.

When I came to America and started working, it was new to me. The first time I saw a paycheck, I felt good. But it is different here. Back home, everyone makes you feel loved, but there is no money. Here in America, they pay you, but there is less love.



Teresa Roachford writes, "I came from Panama to New York. I attend the Flatbush Learning Center because I want to upgrade my life and become a home care attendant, so I can help someone in need." At the Brooklyn Public Library's Flatbush Learning Center, Timothy Berrigan is the literacy advisor, and Gladys Ortiz is the site supervisor.

Passion or Obsession?

Maddalena Maltese

Flags. Waving on the roofs of skyscrapers. Attached to windows or hoisted in gardens. Shaken by the wind by the front door or entangled in a tree in the park. Flags on Wall Street, on Fifth Avenue, at the post office, in the school, behind the desk in the office. Flags painted on the face or on the asphalt.

Huge, miniature, ostentatious, frayed by the wind, rolled up inside coffins, embraced in tears. These red and white cotton rows, these 50 golden stars that glisten on the blue, follow you everywhere. They are a surprise where you do not expect them. They catch your eyes and make your head turn. They move your soul when you see them on the monuments, and your rational mind marvels looking at them in the churches. They are omnipresent.

Are flags a passion or an obsession for Americans? Are they a symbol of patriotism or a pinch of fanaticism? A flag embraces the heroic and secret pages of the history of a people. Its colors represent its values; in that fabric is written the identity of the country and the sufferings that have shaped it. It feels like a duty to remember it at every step and in every place. Even inside churches, even alongside the altars that celebrate the heavenly homeland more than the human one. Was it my cultural clash with the United States or simply meeting people proud of their roots, much more than I was proud of mine? Are the flags becoming the colorful companions of my being a traveler or, on the contrary, a benevolent persecution?

Arriving at the airport in Rome, when I was preparing to take off for New York, I was struck by seeing dozens of flags in line, alongside the highway lanes. They were not just Italian. Every country in the

world in those few kilometers could find its colors, its symbols, its shapes, the fragrances of home, even though these flags are faded by the sun and consumed by the winds. I imagined these emblems as a welcoming greeting for everybody and a special wish for me as I was preparing to live in the most multicultural city on the planet. The Italian flag disappeared among all, and when it was repeated more than once, I had the impression that it replaced the emptiness of others, their resistance defeated by the weather.

The same colored landscapes did not welcome me to New York when I landed. There were no flags from the whole world. The red, the white, and the blue immediately enveloped, dazzled, and fascinated me, making me almost forget the colors that define my origins, my country, my nationality. Is there no place in this new world for my or others' roots?

However, after a few days in America, I understood the destiny of the flags: They were no longer waving fabrics; they became faces, stories, and lives. For me, Japan has the colors of Naomi, my first classmate in an English course. Egypt has the traits of Aza, while Russia has the faces of Alina and Sergey. Meili, in the red and yellow of China, made me touch the blood of Tiananmen Square and the golden dawn that every desire of freedom brings with it. The yellow, the blue, and the red of Colombia are not as bright as the eyes of Jennifer and Maria Clara after the referendum that put an end to the guerrilla war. And setting foot in the Ellis Island museum, I realized that the stars and stripes are witnesses of millions of stories that have made their colors even more vivid.

Do I miss the Italian flag? Sometimes. I would like to not always see it as a banner of pizzerias, where green, white, and red are associated only with basil, mozzarella, and tomato; for my people, these colors mean hope, faith, and patriotism. In those colors are the chromaticity and the fragrance of my home, but there is also the story of the millions of Italians who have chosen to mix the red, white, and blue of the United States flag with the colors of their homeland.



Maddalena Maltese, a journalist from Rome, Italy, currently studies writing at the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center of the English-Speaking Union. Her teacher is Angela Wilkins, and Karl Hart is the program coordinator. Maddalena Maltese published another essay, “The Red Throne,” in *LR16*.

Lucky Name

Mahta Doustkhah Vajari

I'm Mahta, from Iran. I came to New York a few months ago. Mahta in Persian means great and shiny like the moon! My name story that I want to tell you is not about my stay in New York.

Years ago, I went to Kuala Lumpur to pursue my specialty course in ophthalmology (eye diseases). Over there, the people called me Mata instead of Mahta, with an “h” sound. However, it was not a big deal. I knew the pronunciation of “h” can be difficult in some languages, so I did not try to correct them, especially because my English pronunciation was not so good. I felt self-conscious and afraid they might mock my accent.

A few days after starting my job in the hospital, I realized that I often heard my name from the pager, which announced patients for the eye clinic. During my first days working there, when I heard the page, I went to the waiting hall to find the source of the sound. Nobody looked for me, which seemed strange. Then I tried to ignore hearing my name announced so often, since it didn't seem to be calling for me.

One day, a patient came to my office and said, “Hi, Doc. Are you ‘Dr. Mata’ or ‘Mata Doctor?’” I was totally confused, so I just smiled at him, but I couldn't understand what he was telling me. Then he explained to me that in the Malay language “mata” means “eye” and “Mata Doctor” means “ophthalmologist,” or eye doctor. So at that moment, I realized what the pager was announcing. It was calling patients who were going to the eye clinic. I also realized why most of the patients who came to see me repeated my name and gave me an unusually friendly and warm greeting. Apparently, because of my name's meaning in their language, my patients assumed it was fate

and great luck to be examined by me. Some of them believed I was born to be an eye doctor!

Years later, thinking about this memory still makes me happy. To my surprise, my patients' positive feelings for me continue to this day. I hope all my future patients will be as happy and enthusiastic when they hear my name as my Malaysian patients were!



Mahta Doustkhah Vajari comes from Tehran, Iran. Persian is her first language. She arrived in New York in 2018 to do research on the disease glaucoma, and she is currently working on a hospital glaucoma research fellowship. She studies English at the New York Public Library's Tompkins Square Adult Learning Center, with Lead Instructor Kathryn Bonn.

My Pain

Tito Cruz

How the hell you gonna tell me you understand how I feel
My pain is deep down inside homie this shit is real

My heart is bleeding inside from the things I see
Homies looked for me before now they don't need me

If there was beef I was the first one to bust my gat
Homies come get me cause they knew I was always strap

I did things for people they wouldn't do for me
For my friends I would make anybody bleed

A true soldier for life started off with a knife
Quick to knock a cat out if you looked at me twice

I did with my life just what I wanted to do
I thought homies felt for me the way I felt for them too

Obviously I was wrong good thing I was strong
Real dudes in this life don't last too long

Been real that's what I was really about
Holdin down my fort the best way I knew how

Livin in the fast lane looking out for mad cats
When I got hit none of them even had my back

I was left alone in the field
My wounds would never heal
The pain I have in my heart homie this shit is real

Just think about it as if it happened to you
If you had a crew like mine that was crazy deep too

If you shoot for homies but they wouldn't shoot for you
Tell me what would you do tell me what would you do



Born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, **Tito Cruz** spent his early years traveling between the island and Bushwick, Brooklyn. As a child, he studied bass, earning several spots in the All-City Orchestra and entrance to the Gifted and Talented program of Erasmus Hall High School. Today, he continues to produce and perform music. He hopes one day to begin his own label. He continues to write through the Open Doors program, founded by Jennilie Brewster, where his teacher is Jenessa Abrams.

The Window of My Soul

Andrea Landaeta

Here I am, looking back on my life, remembering who I am and where I come from. I was born in a wonderful place, to a family that was humble, hardworking, and grounded, in a place where, with effort, you could surpass yourself and achieve what you proposed in life. I come from a small city, rich in natural beauty—a magical, unique place, an oasis that you would never want to leave, with narrow streets and low ceilings that keep the heat of home.

Each sunset was a gift that nourished the soul: The landscapes, colors, and flavors will remain in my memory. I must mention the holiday season, my favorite time to share with family and get closer to friends, to forget some stumbling from the past, and to start again with a heart full of gratitude and free of rancor, with the palate eager to try more delicious delicacies. Joy was breathed everywhere, and the smell of fresh paint advertised that the date was approaching. The truth is that all the seasons of the year, without exception, were an excuse to thank, to feel increasingly connected to our roots, to feel our magical place was irreplaceable and somehow indestructible.

Progressively, that light began to fade; worry and anguish took over the colors of the sunset, the air was no longer breathing, and the mountains did not have the same colors. Perhaps my eyes were no longer the windows that my soul wanted. The dream of staying there was frustrated, wounds were opening that were very difficult to heal, and it was then that I decided I needed to get some distance.

The farewell began on May 3, 2017. A suitcase full of feelings and a heart divided into a thousand pieces were my witnesses. I decided to leave in search of tranquility and peace, in search of a place that would be my new refuge, far from that chaos in which one could breathe such anguish, fear, and despair.

How difficult it was to leave everything, the family, the house, the university degrees, the years of experience, places, and favorite foods, to leave those mountains that surround the city and enveloped my soul, to stop feeling the embraces of my mother, which were able to cure even the worst cold.

Someday I will return, and I will see you, beautiful as I always knew you, and I will have the happiness of aging with you. I love you, Venezuela.



Andrea Landaeta writes: "I was born in Merida, Venezuela, in 1984. I am an architect, who practiced my profession for five years. I immigrated to the United States to evade the social crisis that my native country is experiencing; I came with the hope of reorienting my life in New York. Distance and nostalgia motivated me to write this, my first article, with the support of my professors at Community Impact of Columbia University." Kent Katner is Community Impact's ESOL program manager.

The Dream That Changed My Life

Leidy Bravo

Who could think that dreams can be warnings? Well, now I believe that some dreams have a purpose. One August morning, I had a dream that would change my life. I was sleeping comfortably in my bed, but in my dream, I was drowning. I heard scary and sinister screams coming from nowhere, saying my name. I woke up sweating, and I started to have panicky thoughts about my family in Ecuador, but because it was early in the morning, I tried to ignore my sad, weird thoughts. I remember looking at the cable box and noticing it was 6:30 a.m. That morning, I mistakenly thought my dream was just like any other bad dream, but in reality, this dream was an omen.

Ecuador is a beautiful country, but it is not a safe place. In my city, Guayaquil, thieves steal everything at any time of the day. There are many criminals on the street. People living in Guayaquil cannot even walk on the streets, quietly talking with their friends and family on their cellphones because that would be a dangerous act. There is also a lot of government corruption and the national police accept bribes from everyone, so you cannot trust them to help you. While my immediate family now lives in New York, some of my family in Ecuador dream of coming to the United States, and some have even applied for visas, but they are still living fearfully in Ecuador because it is very difficult to get documents to travel to the United States. This is why I worry about them often.

On the day I had the ominous dream, I went to Queens Center to buy a pair of red and white sneakers for my son. When I arrived at home, I opened the front door of my family's apartment, and I heard my mom sobbing in a way that terrified me. I immediately thought about my family and the dream, and I knew that something awful had happened. "What happened?" I asked my mother, while she was

talking on the phone. I tried to listen in on her conversation, but I could not understand what was happening. Shaking, she hung up the phone and told me that someone had shot my cousin Junior in the head. Junior had been working as a security guard at the medical clinic and had just started his regular workday. The shooter had been, for some unknown reason, waiting for Junior. When Junior arrived, the man stood up, fired his gun at him, then quickly ran off. While the clinic doctors were waiting for the ambulance to take Junior to the hospital, they were desperately trying to save his life. A few hours later, my aunt, my cousins, and my family came together to pray for a long time. We put a picture of Junior on a table, and a white candle on either side of the picture. That moment was indescribable. I had never experienced such a terrible pain in my life.

That same night, Kerly, my mother's sister, who lives in Ecuador, called, and in a broken and trembling voice, told me that Junior was dead. Shocked, I hung up the phone. I remembered how I felt in my dream, and I started crying and trembling. It was like I had already felt the death of someone in my family before it happened. I couldn't believe this was true. At 24 years old, my cousin, who was like my brother, was too young to die. Angrily, I thought about the shooter: *Why did he kill my cousin?* I was also angry at my country because I knew nothing would happen to the man who took the life of my sweet cousin who was full of dreams. I had many questions, but I knew I would never find answers. As I suspected, the shooter was never captured, even though it was a big news story. There were no cameras in the medical clinic, and even though the police would have been too scared to accept a bribe, they still did not arrest anyone. All night, I thought about my cousin. I remembered when we were kids and we

played poker. He also used to tell all our cousins horror stories about witches that would make us so scared we couldn't sleep. The best part was that he would scream at the end of the story, so that we would all jump out of our skin, and then we would laugh hard and run around. It was hard for me to accept what happened to him.

The next day, my mom, my brother, and I traveled with heavy hearts to Ecuador. Many people attended Junior's funeral: Junior's friends, his family, our friends, and neighbors. There were red, yellow, and white flowers everywhere. During the funeral, while I looked at Junior's "sleeping" face in the mirror on his coffin, I thought about my nightmare, realizing that it was a warning. Two months before the murder, I had visited Ecuador, but I didn't see Junior, and I felt guilty. On the other hand, I felt something different during that dream. It was very strange; I couldn't explain it.

Before I had the nightmare, I never thought that dreams were important, but what I learned from this experience is that dreams are not always just dreams. Many months have passed since Junior's death, and I am still missing him as much as the first day that he left this world. I used to think people who said they had dreams that were omens or predictions were crazy, but now I'm not so sure. This experience has opened my mind to things I cannot explain. I really hope I never have this kind of dream again, but if I do, I will pay careful attention.



Leidy Bravo was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador, and came to the United States in 2010. She is a 23-year-old single mom to a three-year-old boy, Dylan, and one day she would like to be a police officer. She never had the opportunity to write an essay in Spanish when she was studying in Ecuador, and she has just learned to write essays since studying English. She studies with teacher Jennifer Ault in a CLIP class at Queensborough Community College.

Caravan of Dreams

Jennifer Alonzo

All countries have problems. Worldwide, it is so difficult: wars, bad economies, corrupt governments, unemployment, governments making their people illiterate, even weather problems. This makes the people of many countries want to immigrate to other places. Making a decision to immigrate is hard because you leave your life, your family, and sometimes your children.

Some people can return, but others do not have the same luck. We immigrate for several reasons—for studying, for work, for marriage, for following our family, or for the simple reason of following a dream. Many people don't have the option of deciding. They have to do it because of the consequences they otherwise face.

In this moment, Honduras, my country, is in the world news. Many compatriots are walking to the United States border because they want to walk into this country. They are tired of the misery in which they live. Unfortunately, my country is going through serious problems due to bad government. Many people think about the immigrants without knowing what is really happening in my beloved country. Many call them criminals. But is it criminal to want to be free, to wish for a good life, to want your children to grow up in different circumstances?

Can you believe that it is easy to live in a place that never has medications in the hospital, where parents cannot pay for education for their children, where you cannot find a job because you are from a different political party, where you cannot buy food because it is so expensive, and where you cannot walk safely in the street because you are afraid that somebody wants to rob you and the police won't do anything to help you? The poorest get the worst part because they

don't have the education to decide important things or to find a good job, and they can't live safely in their houses.

Dreams are all that my compatriots have to follow all the way to the United States. El Salvador and Guatemala have joined the caravan. I don't know the situations in our brothers' and sisters' countries, but it is my conclusion that it is the same as in my country. All the people are going in order to better their lives. Thanks to the Mexican people because they are supporting and helping the immigrants while they are on the way.

My heart is breaking to see all these people with their children, sleeping on the street, walking a lot in hot temperatures, or on rainy days. I put myself in their place, and I feel powerless that I cannot do anything to help. I only wish that they can find the best for each other. I hope that the politicians can do something to help them, and that they can understand that all these people have many reasons for their actions. I identify with them because I am a dreamer, too. Maybe my situation coming here was different, but I know how they feel about leaving all behind for a better life. I hope that all the immigrants can continue, and that they can come where the caravan of their dreams allows them. God bless America.



Jennifer Alonzo is a native of Honduras. In 2016, she was celebrating her engineering degree by vacationing in New York City, when her boyfriend proposed to her in Central Park. She and her husband have lived here ever since. She studies in University Settlement's advanced writing class, where Lucian Leung directs the Adult Literacy Program. Jennifer Alonzo published another essay, "Bitter Coffee," in *LR16*.

... of Catholic teaching in rural and urban areas, judgment of heresy, the application of canonical punishment, etc. —**in-quis-i-tion-al**, *adj.*
quis-i-tive (In kwiz/ə tiv), *adj.* 1. given to inquiry or research; curious. 2. unduly curious; inquiring. —*n.* 3. an inquisitive person. —**in-quis-i-tive-ly**, *adv.* —**in-quis-i-tive-ness**, *n.*
quis-i-tor (In kwiz/ə tər), *n.* 1. one who makes inquiry. 2. a questioner.
quis-i-to-ri-al (In kwiz/ə tər/i əl), *adj.* pertaining to an inquisitor or inquisitors, or to inquisition.

re (In rē/). *Latin.* in the matter of.
road (In/rōd/). *n.* 1. forcible or serious enforcement. 2. attachment. 2.
rush (In/rūš)
 ... 1. inches.

sane (In sän)
 ... characteristic
 ... part for the u
 ... utterly sane
sane-ness, *n.*

sane-ty (In sän/ə ti)
 ... of being
scribe (In s
 ... to write or
 ... to mark (a su
 ... to address or
 ... formally. 4.
 ... (ure) within a
 ... the boundary
 ... ssible. —**in-**

scription
 ... scribed. 2. a
 ... ok.

scri-able
 ... of being scr
 ... tion. 2. imp
 ... tly. —**in-sc**
y, *adv.*

sect (In/sēk)
 ... class Insecta,
 ... thropods chi
 ... d into the
 ... n. 2. any ar
 ... to the Ins
 ... in/sect-like/
sec-ti-cide
 ... preparation
 ... cid/al, *adj.*

sec-ti-vore
 ... vorous anima
 ... alian order th
 ... d World bed
sec-ti-vor
 ... feeding on insects, as beetles, moths, dragon
 ... gs, etc.

sem-i-nate (In sēm/a nāt/), *v.t.*, -nated, -nat-
 ... g. 1. to inject seed into. 2. to impregnate.
 ... to sow as seed in something; implant. —**in-**
m/i-na-tion, *n.*

sen-sate (In sēn/sāt, -sīt), *adj.* 1. not en-
 ... with sensation. 2. unfeeling. 3. without
 ... understanding, or judgment. —**in-sen-**
-te-ly, *adv.*

sep-a-ra-ble (In sēp/a rə bəl), *adj.* 1. in-
 ... nable of being separated, parted, or disjoined.
 ... n. (usually pl.) 2. something inseparable. 3. an
 ... separable companion or friend. —**in-sep/a-**
-bly, *adv.*

sert (In sērt/; *v.* In/sērt/), *v.t.* 1. to put or
 ...

... or surface. 7. (often pl.) *Colloq.* the inward
 ... of the body. 8. the inward nature. —*adj.*
 ... terior; internal. 10. acting, employed, do
 ... originating within a building or place. 1
 ... rived from the inner circle of those concern
 ... and having private knowledge of a case.

in-sid-er (In/si/dər), *n.* 1. one who is
 ... some place, society, etc. 2. *Colloq.* one v
 ... within a limited circle of persons who unde
 ... the actual facts in a case.

in-sid-i-ous (In sīd/i əs), *adj.* 1. intend
 ... entrap or beguile. 2. stealthily treach
 ... 3. operating or proceeding inconspicuous
 ... with more effect. —**in-sid-i-ously**, *adv.*

ad or give
 ... al discern
 ... , sing. in
 ... marks of
 ... rks or si
 ... ont), *adj.*
 ... too small
 ... 36, influen
 ... 5. meanin
 ... without s
 ... —**in/sig**

-ated, -
 ... 2. to ins
 ... to mind.
 ... methods.
 ... ein/u-at/
 ... -sin/u-a/
 ... an), *n.* 1.
 ... ing not p
 ... subtle or
 ... t of insinu
 ... tter of st
 ... 7. an ing

hout disti
 ... les. 2. w
 ... —**in-si-pi**
 ... r, *adv.*
 ... phatic, fi
 ... desire, de

1. earn
 ... ntaining.
 ... 2. com
 ... nce, in-si

ired, -ed
 ... role of a s
 ... dly rude
 ... /so-lent-

in-sol-vent (In söl/vənt), *Law.* —*adj.* 1.
 ... to satisfy creditors or discharge liabilities.
 ... taining to bankrupt persons or bankruptcy
 ... 3. one who is insolvent. —**in-sol-ven-cy**,
in-som-ni-a (In sōm/nī ə), *n.* inability to
 ... esp. when chronic; sleeplessness.

in-so-much (In/sō mūch/), *adv.* 1. to a
 ... extent (that); so (that). 2. inasmuch (as).
in-sou-ci-ant (In sōn/sī ant/), *adj.* free
 ... concern; carefree. —**in-sou-** ice, *n.*

in-spect (In spēkt/), *v.t.* 1. to view close
 ... critically. 2. to examine formally or off
 ... —**in-spec-tion** (In spēk/shən), *n.*

in-spec-tor (In spēk/tər), *n.* 1. one w

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They Still Call Her Mom

Mohammad Rashidi

We returned to Afghanistan, to our village the Taliban controlled. All the schools for girls and boys were closed. Every girl was at home, busy doing housework, and the boys were busy playing soccer in the streets. My mother, who was the daughter of a senator from our province, understood our people's problems, so when she saw the situation, she started to cry and said to my father, "I can't understand how these children will have a future without education. I have to do something. I have to teach these children." My father agreed because he was an educated man, so he supported my mother's idea and said, "We have a lot of space in our house for a school."

My mother and father spoke to the parents in our village, my mother spoke to mothers, and my father went to the masjid, the mosque, and spoke to the fathers. All the parents in the village did want us to start a school in our home. Even though everyone was nervous about the Taliban's response, they were ready to take the risk because they saw how their children were wasting their lives. They felt it was a good time to try. "If the Taliban's response is negative, we will all speak to the Taliban," an old man from our village said.

My mother, father, older sister, and cousin became the teachers and taught math, religion, history, writing, and reading. I was 12 years old, and one of the students, too. But because I had lived in Pakistan, I had studied English, so I taught the students the little English I knew. During the first month, almost 300 girls and boys came to study. At lunchtime, boys could play soccer and girls could play volleyball in the garden, instead of the streets. Everyone was happy with our school, even though everyone was still worried about the Taliban. Would they close our school or arrest my mother and father?

One day, a Taliban member sent a letter to my father—not to my mother because they wouldn’t speak to a woman or write a letter to a woman. “We know you have a school in your home. We will not close your school if you do not teach anything negative about the Taliban to your students.” My mother decided to respond. She wrote, “I don’t teach our students anything negative about the Taliban. Your sister and brother attend our school. You can ask them what we teach, and if you can’t think about the other students, please think about your brother and sister’s education.” The Taliban didn’t answer her, which we thought was a good sign. For one year, we taught the students at our tuition-free school. Eventually, UNICEF started to support our school and also started another school in a village close to ours.

After the Taliban finally left Afghanistan, a new government began. Schools for girls and boys were allowed to open all over the country. All the young people my family had taught for more than two years went to the newly opened high school outside our village. And, even today, when these young women and men visit our home, they still call my mother “Mom.”



Mohammad Rashidi, a CLIP student at City Tech, is 28 years old. He was born in Baghlan, Afghanistan, and moved to New York City two years ago. His first language is Pashto, and he also speaks Farsi, Urdu, and English. He studied law and politics in Afghanistan and likes to read biographies of political leaders. He thanks his professor, Caryn Davis, for helping him learn to write academic English and for help with this story.

Natasha's Lessons

Elena Murugova

“Obstacles do not block the path; they are the path.”

Zen proverb

My husband and I moved to the United States two years ago. I will not describe all the difficulties we have overcome and are still overcoming. All immigrants have them. When you can rely only on yourself, you try to be confident and get on with your life. In this situation, the memory of close people who have already gone to a better place, who set an example of extraordinary endurance and vitality, helps us a lot. I am going to tell you about such a person.

Modern medicine has been doing much to eradicate diseases, but, unfortunately, there are many awful incurable illnesses. When a person has been informed that they have an incurable disease, their behavior changes. Some people resign themselves and stop doing things. Others become embittered and unbearable, so that their relatives begin to avoid them. The rest start to fight the disease, using all possible and inconceivable methods of treatment. There are not so many people who can accept the illness and continue their lives as if nothing had happened. My close friend Natasha could. She was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a neurodegenerative disorder that affects movement. You have tremors, your movements slow down, and your limbs become rigid. Natasha's way of overcoming her muscular disability demonstrated to us an example of dignity, fortitude, optimism, and an astonishing zest for life.

Natasha worked as a journalist for many years. In spite of the difficulties associated with the disease, she continued to work at home as editor in chief of two newspapers. When her hands could

no longer hold a pen, she learned how to type on a computer. At night, I taught Natasha to work with documents in Word. She studied hard. When her speech could barely be understood, she used a voice computer program. It was so sad and painful to see the woman who had recently been healthy become so weak. In the midst of it all, she still took care of her grandchild, giving him a lot of attention and love, trying to be both a parent and a grandparent. She prepared him to enter university. Her grandchild became a journalist, too.

Being a famous journalist, Natasha traveled a lot. She loved buying and wearing fashionable clothes, but all her plans were ruined by the disease. When she had to be locked indoors, she tried to make herself more attractive. Every day, she would put on a new dress, necklace, and rings, as if she was going to her office. I think she understood her situation, but she was eager to live. We were often invited to parties at Natasha's house. Those evenings were very remarkable and curious; she always created something fun and exciting. We listened to music, read poetry, and played games. We told fortunes every year on Christmas Eve. We read tea leaves, candles, cards, and more. Natasha liked to predict our future. But very soon, her hands and her feet failed to operate. It was happening like in Haydn's "Farewell" symphony, where the instruments leave the orchestra one after another. But Natasha began to invent things that helped her to move. She stretched a rope along her apartment. She used sliding mats and silk bed linen because she could not turn around. When she could no longer function, she decided to have a risky brain surgery. It improved her condition substantively, but unfortunately, only for a short time. Her health degenerated rapidly.

I feel lucky to have met Natasha. Close communication with her gave me a significant experience of human possibility, which helped me in Russia and now in the United States. Natasha did not give up. She showed all of us how we should live: Take all small troubles easily; accept a person's nature entirely, with its strengths and weaknesses; do not feel despondent; be flexible and ready to meet all difficulties head on; endure disappointments with fortitude and patience; and never, ever give up. Thank you, my dear Natasha.



Born in Moscow, Russia, **Elena Murugova** arrived in the United States with her husband in 2016. She holds degrees in electromechanical engineering and psychology. She has tested an artificial heart, worked in alternative energy research, and applied psychology at a Russian Insurance company. She likes reading, traveling, meeting new people, writing, classical music, gardening, and animals. At the New York Public Library's Seward Park Branch, she studies with Lead Instructor Ivana Ferguson.

Faith in the Shape of a Woman

Wederli Espaillat

I will never forget everything my family and I have lived. There were a lot of things happening, but my amazing mother, Yohanni, found a way to see God's love in every bad situation. She learned that from her mother, Mercedes, who, with an amazing heart and strong faith, raised all her children beautifully.

My mother used to help her great-grandmother by working at her small grocery store, selling chicken and salad. My mother is an amazing person who has worked very hard for her children, always present in every situation and moment for the family. She has also helped many others, not just her family, in so many admirable ways.

I will never forget when I was about eight years old and things were very difficult. At that time, my mother was working very hard all day. I hardly saw her. She had to feed four children on her own. Then one day, a woman came, asking for help.

The woman was starving and had no shoes on, and her feet were badly hurt and bleeding. Even though we were in a very bad situation, my mother gave the lady her only pair of sandals. After my mother gave away her sandals, she walked back and forth all day with no shoes on her feet, through dirt, gravel, and rocks, with a beautiful and happy smile, all because she wanted the poor lady to have something on her feet.

After a while of watching my mother walk around, I told her to take a pair of shoes from my closet, but my feet were much smaller than hers. She said not to worry, but I insisted. I told her, "You can walk on tiptoes." She smiled at me and repeated not to worry about it.

Then I asked her, "Why did you give your only pair of shoes to that lady?" And she said, "Because you give what you have in your heart, and all I have is gratitude towards God. I have strong faith in

Him that everything will be okay for us, and that lady's situation is sadder than ours."

That time, I learned a valuable lesson: Always be thankful and do not forget to help every person in need that you can. Give what you have in your heart, but make sure God is there first. Lastly, think for a second that one day, that person in need could be you or a loved one.

I want to thank and honor my amazing mother for that lesson. While she is still alive, I want to show her now how important she is to me and how grateful I am for all her sacrifices. All that I am, I owe to her. I talked to her about writing this story, and I once again saw the beautiful smile she wore when she gave away her sandals.



Wederli Espailat comes from the Dominican Republic. She has been living in New York City for eight years. In her country, she worked as a model. Now, she studies with Jay Klokke at City Tech. She dreams of becoming a radiologist or an artist. She says color is her way of showing how she sees the world—very colorful, even when it's dark. Her advice for the world is, "Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't be afraid to become, to move forward and do what your heart desires."

How I Became a Community Organizer

Luz Rodriguez

When I was growing up, we lived in a town with the biggest sugar cane factory in the Dominican Republic. My brothers, German, Bienvenido, and Feliz, worked there for many years. My father, Don Pedro, worked in the factory, too. Every year, workers had to struggle for fair wages, better working conditions, and housing maintenance. In those struggles, the workers and the union took many different actions. They had meetings to plan every action. Sometimes they decided to strike or to negotiate with their bosses. Sometimes young people were arrested or killed.

Those were my experiences as a young woman. But my biggest influence came from my father, Don Pedro. He was one of the two people who inspired me to be a community organizer. He loved political discussions and speeches. When I was young, he saw something special in me. He always invited me to listen with him to all those people. I always remember my father's elevated way of thinking, and his passion for teaching me about speeches from great men and women, like John F. Kennedy, who said, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

The second person who has inspired me has been my little daughter, Nathalie. When I came to New York, I was pregnant with her. I didn't know how to navigate the system where I'd just moved. Then my baby was born premature, and I had one of the biggest challenges in my life: to make sure my little girl had the best care I could get for her. I learned a lot. Trial and error was daily. Nathalie was so sick that every doctor wanted to do different procedures on

her, and I had to discuss with her doctors, ask questions, and learn to say yes or no to them.

All those lessons made me a better decision-maker.

One day, when Nathalie was about eight years old, she had a doctor appointment at Long Island College Hospital. In the waiting room, we saw an Hispanic woman come in with her son on her hip. I felt her pain. I couldn't take my eyes off them, because she had a six-year-old boy who was disabled like my daughter Nathalie. Nathalie had a special stroller custom-made for her. I was surprised that he didn't have one, too. His mother was carrying him on her hip. They didn't have any other person who could help them; I imagined how hard it was for her tiny body.

I approached her and asked why she was carrying her boy like that. Didn't she have a special stroller for him? Didn't she know that he had a right to have a special stroller? Didn't she ask his pediatrician to prescribe a stroller? I reminded her that she could apply for diapers, a customized stroller, and special milk. At this moment, I felt so much pain because her situation reminded me of own, when I struggled to place my daughter in a private school for special children after another special kid at her old school had hit her on her beautiful face. I went to a Manhattan organization, called Advocates for Children, and they helped me.

Because of that situation, I was encouraged to get involved. There are so many people in New York in need of help with their situation at home, at work, and in their family. I started visiting a community organization close to home, and there, I got involved in an education action group. In this group, I realized that many people like me care

for other people, for the environment, and for civic engagement and leadership. I went to workshops, courses, meetings, and rallies, and that prepared me with organizing skills. I stopped being afraid to talk in public and learned how to run a meeting. I learned a lot about the city government, which built confidence and trust in myself about how to be an organizer.

As a community organizer, you can have accomplishments and challenges. There are satisfactions like meeting with other like-minded people who take matters in their own hands. We don't stay at home crying about things that could be changed. We wake up; we know our rights. A community organizer gets to meet wonderful community leaders around the country. But it is not always a winning situation; sometimes we can fail. It can depend on a specific person or politician who can mess things up. I remember when Eliot Spitzer promised to pass a regulation so that all New Yorkers (both legal and undocumented) could have a driver's license. Then—boom! He failed because of a controversial personal matter, and our work failed, too. But no matter what happens on the road, you continue to walk. You continue to get involved because there are other issues that need to be fixed.

That's what I learned from my father, Don Pedro, and my daughter, Nathalie, and that's what I teach my family and my friends.



Luz Rodriguez came to the United States over 20 years ago from the Dominican Republic. In her native country, she was a lawyer; in New York, she has worked for years as a community organizer. Currently, she and two friends are incorporating LatinoAmerican Center of Community Action. The many needs of the community around her inspire her to help people be healthy and take care of themselves. She is a student at City Tech, where her instructor is Jay Klokker.

The Man on the Moon

Kamila Jarosz

On Thursday, September 3, 2015, I got a chance to interact with living history, meet a real hero, and see the world—and the worlds beyond—in a whole new way. The hero of the tale is Dr. Harrison Schmitt, one of the four surviving human beings to have walked the surface of the moon. Dr. Schmitt took part in the Apollo 17 mission that lasted from December 7 to 19, 1972. He walked on the moon for three days and brought back with him 244 pounds of materials for scientific research.

The lecture took place at the Center of Culture and Sports in Chaciny, Poland, where I was working while attending school. My first impression of Dr. Schmitt was not of any kind of hero, but rather of an 80-year-old, white-haired grandfather, the kind of ordinary man you might meet in a shop or pass on a street corner. But once he began his lecture, bringing me and all my classmates into one of the greatest adventures in the history of humankind, he was no longer just an old man: He was my guide to all the wonderful things that life has to offer, and that most people never even imagine.

He started by showing us a couple of short films about his journey to the “Silver Globe.” He spoke about what it felt like to walk on a surface where the gravitational pull is much weaker than Earth’s. It required an Alpine skiing technique to move about, which, as demonstrated, looked like the hopping of a big bunny rabbit.

Dr. Schmitt provided lots of interesting facts and figures, for example, a 133-pound person on earth weighs 22 pounds on the

moon, and a person who can jump only 12 inches here can soar 79 inches on the moon. His descriptions of the moon itself were fascinating. It's not gray like we think; it's orange colored, owing to all the volcanic eruptions over billions of years. And, oddly enough, the whole place smells like burnt gunpowder. Dr. Schmitt delivered all these observations with humor and humility.

It was all fascinating stuff. But, to me, at age 23 and still trying to figure out who I was and where I was going in life, the best part was being in the presence of someone who had the vision and courage to follow his dream and experience something very special. For those few hours of listening to Dr. Schmitt's lecture and then getting to speak to him for a few minutes, I felt a little like I was participating in a great adventure, too.

I'm well past the point of having dreams of being an astronaut and visiting outer space. But there are plenty of other adventures out there to be experienced, and after a day spent with Harrison Schmitt, I'm ready to give them a try.



Kamila Jarosz hails from Kielce County, Poland. She came to the United States in April 2017 and lives with her cousins. She feels lucky to have an optimal living situation—a nice apartment of her own, and no rent. Kamila Jarosz babysits full time, and enjoys riding her bike, watching old movies, and thinking about all the places she'll go one day. She studies writing in Mark Mehler's class at the Jackson Heights Library's Adult Learning Center, in Queens. Tsansiu Chow is the site advisor.

Be Brave

Olga Samofalova

Dear Mini-Me,

I write this letter to you in a New York subway. I'm my 33-year-old self and mainly still you, only with small wrinkles under my eyes and gray hair, a little bit wiser and calmer. Finally, I managed to find a time machine and send this letter to you, young lady. I know, I know—so many questions; it sounds like a fairytale. But believe it, please; for me as well, it is a shock.

Are you curious why I am writing to you now, when you are finishing your eighth grade? I do not plan to give you useless advice and influence your decisions. Modifying the past can have significant consequences for the future. I just want to encourage you to relax and think big. We are perfect at envisioning our life.

I know you can hardly imagine your happy future, as you live in a 300-square-foot apartment with your family on the outskirts of Kyiv, without enough money for food or clothes. I am begging you not to stop dreaming. Everything will come true. Thanks to your lust for life and fearless spirit, even without an expensive education and connections, you will grow into a big shot, working with celebrities from TV and magazines.

Oh! Do you remember the boy you were in love with in sixth grade, the one who didn't pay any attention to you? You will meet him in a nightclub and realize how stupid and stubborn he was. No doubt your heart will be broken, and not just once, but your iconic love affairs will give you only pleasant memories for cold winter nights.

And please listen to your intuition more, never regret anything, learn English, be brave, and, yes, never complain. Once you have a chance to leave everything in Ukraine and start from scratch in New York, do it! The new experience in your life, no matter how difficult, will be worth it!

Thanks for being you, Mini-Me. You rock.

With love,
Me

P.S. You're going to meet your husband in an elevator at age 19. He will be as cool as you.



Olga Samofalova grew up in Kyiv, Ukraine, where she earned a master's degree in philology and also gained experience in journalism. She runs her own public relations agency, working with labels like Universal and Warner Music Group, as well as acclaimed musicians. She moved to New York City in 2018 with her husband and 12-year-old daughter. At the New York Public Library's Seward Park Branch, she studies English with Lead Instructor Ivana Ferguson.

Taken to America by Snickers

Marzhan Aitimbetova

I had my first taste of America at 11 years old, with a bite of the Snickers chocolate bar that my dad brought back from his trip to Moscow. That year, our country became independent from the Soviet Union, and little things from abroad, like Snickers, would make everyone go “Wow!” I ate the chocolate bar enthusiastically. With the image of American life from the advertisement of Snickers, I was feeling a miraculous connection with the United States.

My dad used to joke around with me that I should become a doctor, so I could cure him as he got older. A couple of years later, he died in an accident. With the memory of my dad and that bite of Snickers, I graduated from college, dreaming about life in America. However, my mom put out the fire in me with her mother love. She didn’t want to send away her only daughter among four kids. So I stopped dreaming of the United States, but I would joke with my mom that if she tried to keep me, I would go to the capital city; if she visited me in the capital city, I would depart to America; and if she went to America with me, I would fly to the moon.

My jokes were realized. Everything occurred exactly as I described. I first left for the capital city; then suddenly, I was here in the United States. I believe this is my final stop; I won’t fly to the moon just yet. I’m right in the country of origin of Snickers! Most importantly, I’m taking exams in nursing at CUNY, just like the conversation between my dad and me. I also joked around with my friends that I want to get my medical degree in my forties. This desire

grew in me when I read about an American 70-year-old woman who graduated from medical school to reach her dream. I'm curious to see what my seventies will be like.

Thank God my father brought me that little chocolate bar that started my dreams!

I love you, Dad, and I miss you.



Marzhan Aitimbetova was raised in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Her native language is Kazakh and she speaks Russian. She arrived in the United States in 2015. She studies at the Institute for Immigrant Concerns, where her English teacher is Sylvia Danyu Mao, the education director is Mark Brik, and the executive director is Donna Kelsh. Marzhan Aitimbetova states, "I love the United States, and I hope I will become a perfect health-care worker."

RD WONG

In the eyes of
the day was shap-
of his most com-

Vice President M
tered the fragile unity.

Addressing the officials as they
met this month in Warsaw, Mr.
denounced the United

and the Europeans were only
save.

Privately, Mr. Pompeo briefly
erupted. Aides said he com-
plained Mr. Pence had under-
mined diplomacy — which one

voiced his anger, keeping rela-
tions with the White House stable.

Almost a year into his job, Mr.
Pompeo, 55, has managed to pull
off what few other Trump-era sen-
ior cabinet members have accom-

Now he face
This week, M
company Mr. T
meeting in Ha
to keep an eff
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The Transformation

Lirian Melchior

Last night, I had a dream. I dreamed I was a bird! A little bird, free, flying high, and knowing the world. I ate crumbs, took showers in puddles, and sang happily. The dream felt very nice—the sensation that I was really flying, and that the world was small for me. I had a freedom, a tranquility, a delicious sensation that I could travel to places faster than ever before.

When I woke up, I saw that the transformation was real! My body was small, I didn't feel my hands, and my bed was a little nest. What was really happening? Was my family here? My home? My clothes? I understood that I had transformed some time ago, and I was a little bird that dreamed I was human, dreaming I was a little bird!

I flew to my home, and everyone had become accustomed to life without me. My husband and my daughters were following their daily routines. I tried to call, but my voice was a lilting song. How to make them understand that I was there? That I had not abandoned them? I wanted to help them with breakfast, with clothes, shoes. I followed them to school. I wanted "Good morning!" kisses. But they did not see me anymore. I flew . . . flew high . . . flew to fall . . . flew sad . . . This is freedom—to be alone? Could I not stay nearer and be recognized by my family?

I want to come back to being a human, I thought. "I want to come back to being human," I screamed. My body was paralyzed now. I could not move; my voice was just grunts.

The alarm rang . . . I woke up. I was back in my bed! My daughter appeared, complaining; my husband was sleeping. I could no longer fly. But I was not alone anymore.



Lirian Melchior came with her family from Brazil to New York in August 2018. She studies English with Elke Stappert at the New York Public Library's Washington Heights Branch. She is a professor of geography and believes that traveling is the best thing in her life because getting to know different places brings knowledge and makes a person richer. She is in love with her family and believes that being able to live through different experiences with them is her greatest happiness.

Miracle

Inoka Weerakkody

It happened seven years ago, and it was the most painful moment in my life. I thought I was going to die. I cried. I screamed. The next moment, I felt relaxed, and I heard somebody crying. As soon as I saw her beautiful face, my pain was gone, and my heart filled with love and joy. It was the happiest day when I became a mother.



Inoka Weerakkody writes, “I am 37 years old. I was born in Sri Lanka and have been in the United States since 2010. I live with my husband and two daughters, and we are a happy family. I appreciate my teacher, Faina Kreydina, and the other teachers at the Queens Library’s Peninsula Adult Learning Center, who helped me learn how to speak English and made me confident with the language. My goals are getting American citizenship, improving my knowledge of English, and getting a good job.”

When a Flame Lights Your Life

Jairo Sneider Galvis Pabón

Halloween is a wonderful time for some, especially for children, who are eager to dress up as their favorite characters and collect as much candy as possible. For me, this famous holiday means something different.

Halloween reminds me of my tragic Halloween in my home country, Colombia, in 2011. I was in my third challenging semester of nursing school. It was probably 7:00 p.m., and the streets were full of happy children running around with orange plastic pumpkins and concerned adults trying to keep up with the sea of orange. I recall my mom telling me, “I am leaving right now with your brother for the night church service.” She yelled from the first floor like she usually did, and I heard the sound of the door closing after them. I had a lot of homework and papers that I had to work on, so I decided to leave the house because back then, we did not have Internet at my house. I hurriedly grabbed all my papers and my pen drive. Since it was a really hot night, I opened one of the second-floor windows, so the wind would do its magic and help a little bit. I went down the stairs and asked my uncle if he needed something because he was not able to move freely due to his unbearable arthritis. Then I waved goodbye to him and left the house.

As usual, I went to an Internet café that was a block away from my house. I was lost in thought, doing my homework, when suddenly, an acquaintance of mine came to me screaming her soul out. “Your house is burning! Get up, and hurry!” My mind was as blank as a sheet. I heard what she was saying over and over again, but my mind was unable to process those words. It took me a minute or two to synchronize myself, before I could even leave the place. I ran as fast

as I could, and there was in front of me an angry fire, as aggressive as a hungry dragon, engulfing the second floor of my house; big flames detonating the windows, and a sinister sound coming from inside that roared at me, *You will have nothing but ashes*. I felt sick to my stomach. My strength went away, until a fast thought invaded my mind: My uncle was inside, and he could not move. My legs were moving even before I realized it. I burst inside the house, shouting my uncle's name, but somebody had evacuated him already. Knowing that, my mind had a brief moment of peace. Subsequently, I went to the second floor, where some of my neighbors were fiercely trying to fight the fire with buckets of water, trying to extinguish the dragon. After some time, the fire was gone, and the only thing left was a cremated reminder of my possessions.

Everything that I had, everything that I had worked for, was gone in the blink of an eye. I remember going outside and meeting my mom, who had a shocked expression on her face while she was staring at the house. Even though I was awfully sad, I pretended to stay calm and steady, like a surgeon in the middle of a surgery. I tried not to look hurt at all because my mom was sobbing and crying.

We were standing on the street, still wondering how the fire had started, but we could not find a logical answer. Suddenly, one of the kids who were playing outside came to us and told us, "I cannot tell you who, but a kid was playing with sparklers and thought that it would be funny to throw one of them into the window on the second floor." My mom, my younger brother, and I were speechless. We met each other's eyes with a blended expression of anger and concern. Immediately after, we started to ask questions, trying to find out who

was responsible for the fire, but sadly, until this day, we do not know who was responsible for such a destructive joke. The firefighters came half an hour later, and they inspected the damage, made a written report, and left.

After that unforgettable night, I owned only the clothes I was wearing and those that were in the washing machine on the first floor. I felt overwhelmed, frustrated, and helpless. It was shocking to realize how fast everything could be reduced to gray and black pieces of nothing, hope-draining ashes. I thought about quitting college because without a computer, books, uniforms, or the rest of my supplies, I was lost. Did I give up? you may ask. Well, I did not, but not because of me. I kept moving forward, thanks to the blind and powerful faith, support, and love of my mom, the rest of the family, neighbors, and friends. They helped me more than I could ever imagine. Three and a half years after that unforgettable night, I received my nursing degree, prouder than ever, with an immeasurable pride in my heart. One of the most horrible days of my life pushed me to become a better version of myself, a version who knows what togetherness means and how sometimes you need a flame to light your life, literally.



Jairo Sneider Galvis Pabón, age 27, is a native of Colombia. He arrived in the United States in May 2017 and describes himself as a charismatic person who enjoys the company of others and loves getting to know new cultures and languages. He has chosen to pursue nursing as his path because helping people is what he enjoys most in life. He takes classes at BMCC's Adult Literacy Program, where his instructor is Lester Lambert.

The Day of Leaving Taiwan

Kaiyun Liang

“Daughter, you need to wake up now, or you will miss your flight.” My father woke me up carefully. That day was July 18, 2018, and the weather was perfect. It was a cloudy day, and I thought it was good for taking a flight. I am the only child in my family. My mother has lived in New York since 2016. The day of leaving Taiwan, my father accompanied me from home to the airport.

When I knew I was going to the United States, I was so excited because I had not seen my mother for two years. On the other hand, I knew the next person I would miss so much was my father. Many people may ask me, “Why didn’t your father come to America?” It’s because my father has to take care of his father and mother, and my mother and I agreed with his decision.

Because the airport is far away from my city, we had to take a lot of different kinds of transportation. The first one was the bus, the second one was the Mass Rapid Transit. When we arrived at the High Speed Rail station, which was the third one, we took a rest. My father was excited because he had never taken the High Speed Rail before. After two hours, we arrived in another city, and then at the airport.

I still remember what he told me when I had to leave. He said, “Take good care of your mother and yourself; you are not a little girl anymore. Don’t worry about everything here, and don’t forget that I love you.” I gave him a big, long-time hug, and said, “I love you, too. Forever.” I felt that I was the happiest person in the world.

I am a sentimental person, but not on the day I left Taiwan, not in front of the family, at least. I didn't want to let my father feel that I was sad about separating from him, so I kept smiling, and waved. At that time, I realized that I missed him already.

When I sat in my airplane seat, I looked at the sky outside the window. I could feel that my eyes were wet, but my face was smiling. I thought, *Today is a beautiful day, and I will never forget it.*



Kaiyun Liang, age 22, was born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and speaks Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English. She left Taiwan for the United States so recently that she remembers it as if it was yesterday. Not everything has been easy for her here, but she is getting used to the American way of life. She has made a lot of friends with students of many different cultures in BMCC's CLIP class. Her teacher is Louise Stracke, and the site advisor is Jose Flores.

Stereotypes

Roman Shmelev

October 2014. It was my second trip to the United States, and I still didn't know English. It had never been a problem for me to travel without knowing the local language, however. In my experience, most people in the world are friendly and will help you. You just have to smile and use hand gestures and Google Translate. Yes, most people are friendly, but not all. Unfortunately, there are a lot of places in the world where violence is normal and a lot of places with a bad reputation. And all of us know that the probability of violence substantially increases at night.

When my cheap flight from Chicago landed at LaGuardia Airport after a five-hour delay, at 11:00 p.m., I wanted to get to Manhattan as soon as possible. It was my penultimate day in the United States. After five flights in nine days, I needed a good rest before leaving for Russia. I know, you are thinking, *What's the problem? Hey, man, take a cab to your hotel!* Well, I wasn't going to spend the same amount of money on a 24-hour accommodation and a 30-minute ride.

I began to look for buses to Manhattan. There were no buses close to the airport. Not a single one! I had no choice but to take a bus to the Bronx so I could transfer to a Manhattan-bound train. I didn't want to go to the Bronx! I had heard and read so many things about the Bronx. And I had more than \$1,000 in cash in my bag. Yes, I am Russian, and Russians don't trust bank cards. If a card doesn't work, what will you do in a foreign country? Everybody knows—cash works always and everywhere.

When I got off the bus in the Bronx, I had no idea where to find a subway station. The bus driver had tried to explain it to me, but I didn't understand anything. I was afraid to use the GPS on my phone, because I was afraid of drawing attention to myself. There were a lot of people on the street, but they were young men in hoodies, and they

were not white. I read on the Internet that that is the most dangerous population in New York City.

Okay. I decided to find a white man to ask about the subway station. But there were no white people . . . Oh! Suddenly I saw a white senior woman with a shopping cart. I went quickly to her, but she yelled when I tried to explain my problem. I stopped talking, because people began to pay attention to me, and I didn't want their attention. I crossed the road and began my second attempt to find a white man.

All of a sudden, I spotted a white man ahead. I was so happy to see him! I started to run to him, and cried: "Hey, man, please stop!" When he saw me, he began to walk away quickly, and a few seconds later, he started running! Later, in Russia, I thought about why he did that. Maybe it was because, at the time, I was shaved bald and had a big beard. Or maybe it's not a good idea to pursue a man in darkness.

While I was trying to find another white man, a group of young black men blocked my way. They began to speak with me. They spoke a lot and laughed loudly, but I did not understand a single word. I wondered how I could save my life. Maybe you're thinking, *What a stupid thing to think about*, but I had read so much about the Bronx on the Internet.

My "new friends" didn't hurry to rob me. They continued to speak with me and laugh loudly. Finally, I made up my mind to ask them where the subway station was. Wow! They understood me, and they suggested that I should follow them. But where would we go? I didn't know. Maybe they would lead me to a dark corner and . . . I didn't know. I was afraid of them, but I was more afraid to stay in the Bronx the entire night. I followed them, and two blocks later, I saw the subway station. It was so close. Yes, I was rescued! . . . Wait, what was happening? They were following me into the subway station. Did

they want to rob me in the station because there were no people or police? I was afraid again.

We approached the turnstiles. To buy a MetroCard, I needed money, but it was stashed in my bag. Maybe they hadn't robbed me because they thought I had no money, and if they saw the money, they would change their minds. I pretended to search for the money in my bag, hoping they would go away. My "search" went on for about one or two minutes, until I saw a MetroCard in front of my face. One of them passed it to me while his friends laughed. I instinctively took the card but did not know what to do with it. I was shocked. The one who passed it to me smiled. He invited me to a turnstile, took the card from my hand, swiped it, and gave a cry: "Go!" It was the first word I understood that night in the Bronx. I walked quickly through. I turned around one more time. All of them smiled, and some waved at me.

For the first time during that night, I realized that they were all very good guys, and I had behaved like an idiot that day. I realized that, if I had known English, I would have understood from the start these guys only wanted to help me. I realized that there are a lot of people in the Bronx and other neighborhoods of our planet who don't want anything but to help you. And the awareness of this fact makes me much more friendly. Friendliness generates friendliness.

It's the 21st century! Throw away your stereotypes!



A native of Lipetsk, Russia, **Roman Shmelev** is a political refugee who arrived in the United States in 2018. He is an avid traveler who has visited more than 50 countries. He is interested in theoretical physics and running marathons, and his favorite president is Abraham Lincoln. A student at the New York Public Library's Seward Park Branch, his instructor is Ivana Ferguson. He dreams of one day graduating from New York University.

When I First Came to America

Franklin Phipps

When I first came to America, I did not like it. I cried every night for my grandmother. I wanted to go back home to St. Kitt's, in the West Indies, to live. I got here in 1983, in the spring. The weather was only a little chilly, but I was coming from a tropical island, and the winter in the city was completely different. The first time I saw snow was on Christmas day, 1983. It looked like powder and was so white. I went outside the house to touch it and to walk in it. I was 13 years old. It was amazing to see the snow.

But I didn't like the holidays in America. My family in America was small and my family in St. Kitt's was very big. Holidays in St. Kitt's were fun, especially Christmas, with friends and family in the small village. All the family were cooking and baking, and the jobs gave bonuses at Christmas time, so everyone was happy that they had money in their pockets.

I thought that America was dirty. I came to New York City to live in the borough of the Bronx. The buses were very old and noisy, with a lot of black smoke coming from the exhaust, and the trains were also old and dirty and full of graffiti.

When I first came to New York City, I went to Bronx I.S. 144, Michelangelo Junior High School. The classroom structure was difficult. It was a brand-new experience. The kids in school made fun of me and taunted me, the way I spoke and dressed, my language and culture, so it was very hard. I wore slacks and dress shirts with lots of bright colors and patterns. The clothes everyone else was wearing were sneakers, jeans, and T-shirts. The rhythm of my speech was different, twists and turns and different words. But I did like the school lunch. There were hamburgers and chicken and pizza. I liked it a lot. It was a lot of food to eat. Sometimes I came to school early in

the morning to have breakfast, cereal and fruit with milk, and bagels and cream cheese.

As time went along, my life became better. I adjusted to different things, like the food, the fashion, and the culture, the streets and the music. I became fascinated with all of the tall buildings, the cars, bridges, tunnels, highways, so many highways and streets, and how people didn't get lost on the road and on the subways. I liked all the different food—pizza, hot dogs, Italian ice, everything in the supermarkets, the fruit stands, the fish market, everything. And the different music—the different rhythm and beat of the city.

But I still miss home, my small tropical island, St. Kitt's, my small village in the Caribbean, Dieppe Bay, where everybody knows one another. I miss the people I knew when I was a little boy, the mountains, the ocean, the beach, the picnics, the holidays, especially Carnival time. I try to go back as much as I can.



Franklin Phipps was born on the Caribbean island of St. Kitt's and moved to New York as a young teenager in 1983. Though he has come to appreciate the city, he has never lost his love of island life and will never enjoy the cold weather and shoveling snow on a December morning. He still lives in the Bronx and studies at the New York Public Library's Harlem Branch, with teacher Elke Stappert and volunteer tutor Laurie Hockman.

My First Job

Rufino Porfirio

My first job in the United States was cutting tobacco in the field. Men and women worked together, helping each other on the lines. Learning this work was the most interesting thing I had ever done.

The fields around Greenville, in the state of North Carolina, are beautiful. Every morning, as we went to work, we saw deer crossing the road on the highway. It was no problem for the deer to see humans and cars. The trees and woods provided everywhere to hide. I worked in the fields about three months. Sometimes, I prepared lunch in the early morning that I ate at break time. Some of my coworkers were sweet, but challenging. They taught me almost everything on the job. One lady, who had a son about my age, treated me like her adopted son. These coworkers were from Chiapas, one of the poorest states in the nation of Mexico. I was the only one from Guerrero, in the southwestern area.

Another family had four daughters and a son, John. He was the youngest one in the field, a high school student. He always invited me to go to church with his parents in the afternoon. Just once, I went to church with the families. John was so excited to see me there. In my mind, I still had to figure out the words of the religious people, and then I had to shake hands with John's friends and everyone else. Somehow, someone convinced me to go to Christian churches. I am not a fan of the religious kind, but I went just because whoever I met in those three months went there often to pray with the pastor.

The house we lived in at the camp was scary sometimes because no other people were close to where we lived. The only conversations I had were with a friend who was 85 years old. His experience in the field was nothing I could compare with mine. He worked fast and loved to talk. The old man cared much about me all the time. My

attitude was great, he said. My senior friend and I would miss each other, as I came to a great decision. This time, being able to go forward was about money. Finally, I got some money and paid someone to bring me to Baltimore.

Baltimore was not my last stop. I spent only six months there. I got a job nearby, in Washington, D.C., at a candy company. My coworkers there loved me because I was good as an employee, they said. After all my destinations, I came to New York City, the capital of finance, different languages, and people from all over the globe. I started working at a restaurant in the beginning and didn't think to learn English. There was a guy at work from Mexico's capital city. He always pushed me to start learning English.

People who speak English find a job easily, and get better paid, he said. At some point, I changed my mind to maybe. Five years later, I quit the full-time job, as with time, my experience became strong enough. Later on, I took a new flexible job schedule, and I started taking some English classes. The end results of my hard work were fantastic. In the future, my plan is to be a greater writer, with better skills in English, and to be able to write books based on myself, and others, too.



Rufino Porfirio is 31 years old and hails from Guerrero, Mexico, close to Acapulco. He arrived in the United States in 2007 and now lives in Corona, Queens. He loves reading and playing basketball. He says he wants to get better at writing so he can write a book about politics one day. He studies at the Queens Library's Elmhurst Adult Learning Center. His writing instructor is James McMenamin, and the center manager is Michelle Johnston.

My Car is My Prized Possession

Kirk Grey

I will never forget getting my first car. It was like Christmas that January morning. It was as if we had taken home a newborn. I did not sleep that night, so I could watch the car, ensuring it would not be stolen. My wife's and children's faces shone with amazement as we got in the car and experienced the smell of our brand-new vehicle.

Our life was changed. We are now able to stay in bed at least an hour longer. This is a great blessing to the boys, especially in winter time when the morning is dark and cold. The days of standing countless hours, waiting on trains and buses that are often delayed, are over. We no longer travel on public transportation unless our vehicle is down. We now determine what time we leave from one location to another. Possessing a car makes traveling comfortable, regardless of the time or weather. Even though it comes with a cost, the cost is not comparable to the peace and joy it brings to our lives.

We are much closer as a family since we can travel on our own. We hold conversations as a family that would not be wise to have on public transportation. I am also able to bring my wife and children to and from school and work. Before, we would only attend a few sporting events with the boys, not by choice but because of the time it would take on public transportation. We now take regular trips to relatives in different states, not like before, when we went only on special holidays. Now we even show up for surprise visits. Now that we are not traveling on public transportation, we do not contract the

yearly flu virus for which public transportation is a major breeding ground. So we as a family do not have to make those often long visits to the hospital, waiting to see the doctor, subjected to the scent that comes with being at the hospital. Therefore, my car is so dear to me, my prized possession.

Originally from Kingston, Jamaica, **Kirk Grey** now lives in Brooklyn. He studies at the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Library, where the site manager is Winsome Pryce-Cortes, and the literacy advisors are Felice Belle and Christina Best. When asked to write something about himself that he would like *LR* readers to know, Kirk Grey wrote, "I am a firm believer in Jesus Christ, and I am a father of two boys. My greatest desire is to educate myself."

Back to School

Curtis Lewis

Back home in Trinidad, I was one of seven children of a single mom. When we were struggling financially, I decided to drop out of school, at age 13, to work. I wanted to help my family. I did odd jobs, and then I worked in construction. It wasn't easy, but I made it.

Fast forward to New York. I still work in construction, but I started adult reading and writing classes at the library, attending at night. Learning more skills in reading and writing helps so much with everything I do each day—reading signs, directions at work, texting, and general communication. My vocabulary has improved, too.

When I'm putting the words together, it gives me joy to know how far I have come. I usually feel tired walking to school after work, but I keep coming. I want the knowledge, the shining light that's there. It gives me the energy to get to class. The diversity of the people who come to the class makes it exciting, and we encourage each other and learn together with different views and different topics. The class is like an atlas. As soon as I sit down, the tiredness leaves and the time passes so fast. I see the improvement in both reading and writing.

At home, I talk to my two young daughters about what they learned in school. When they ask me questions, I want to be able to answer. This encourages me to learn more. I don't want my kids to struggle. Learning is one of the main stepping stones for me and my family to be successful in life, and I am glad for this opportunity. And learning gives me so much joy.



Curtis Lewis is 49 years old. A native of Trinidad and Tobago, he moved to New York City in 2008. He is married with two children, and he works in construction. He enjoys cooking and playing pool and soccer. He is an avid coffee drinker and a huge Yankees fan. At the New York Public Library's Tompkins Square Branch, he studies with Lead Instructor Terry Sheehan.

Everlasting Red

Xue Lin

I had a friend named Social Dysfunction. She convinced me that since I was a quiet girl, I was inferior, which meant I should never speak to anyone. One day, on my way home from elementary school, I was crying because my grandfather was sick and in the hospital. A girl from my school walked up to me because she saw I was sad. I ignored her, but she didn't go away. When we arrived at my home, my mother invited her inside to eat snacks with us. They talked. I was silent. That night, my mother sat on my bed and said, "You aren't alone now, Xue. You have a friend." I didn't know why I felt tears in my eyes. The next day at school, the girl introduced me to her other girlfriends. They talked and talked. They didn't seem to mind that I didn't. Every day, we walked home, linking our arms together. I was always in the middle. But I felt guilty because I still hadn't really accepted them.

My teacher invited me to read an essay I had written in front of our fourth grade class. Fear quickly surrounded me. The next day, I locked myself in my bedroom. When I returned to school, the girls told me they had seen my name on the blackboard, which meant I had to present my essay. They were happy for me but quickly noticed that my eyes looked blank. "We can help you practice," they said. "We understand you because we're friends, right?" Their words felt like seeds in my heart that started to grow. *Should I accept them?* I asked myself. Every day, they came to my home after school, and I

practiced reading my essay. I started with one word, and I expanded to one sentence, then to paragraphs. No matter what I said, they always smiled like the sunshine when they listened to me.

The day of my presentation arrived. I stood on the stage with my head lowered, breathing rapidly. I could feel everyone watching me. One voice in my head told me, *Get off the stage. You don't belong here.* Another voice told me, *You have friends. They have tried to help you, so read your essay to them.* These two voices fought each other until I was almost crying, but luckily I heard my teacher introduce me. I peeked at the audience. I saw my friends wearing red clothes, my favorite color. They all smiled up at me, and at that moment I knew which voice would win. I presented my essay to my friends, and when I finished, as I heard the applause, tears fell from my heart.



Xue Lin, who is 20 years old, emigrated from China with her mother and father in October 2017. In the first semester of her CLIP class at City Tech, she was silent for many months. Now, she is confident and speaks to everyone. She was encouraged by her instructor Caryn Davis's words: "Don't worry about passing your assessment tests; pay attention to your improvement."

A Christmas at a Nursing Home

Andres Molina

I spent a Christmas at a nursing home,
It was the worst time of my life.
Not being able to call my mom,
Not being able to move or cry.
My illness was getting the better of me,
The spirit of Christmas I was able to see,
Telling me, "Chill, everything is gonna be all right."
I said, "Leave me alone, this is not even your fight."
He said that my body was very strong,
That I would recover in no time.
I closed my eyes and prayed to the Lord,
To give me the strength to stay alive.
He faded away, leaving me alone,
While I wondered what the hell I had done wrong.
I had just fought the fight of my life,
And nobody was even around to give me a high five.
It is said that God gives the hardest fights
To his strongest and most faithful warriors.
And when they battle and see the light,
They get blessed and become stallions.

But under the darkness, there was still hope,
I regained my strength, and I made an oath:
“I will always serve
And help those in need,
I will always care
And help them succeed.”



Andres “Jay” Molina left the Dominican Republic in his late teens for New York’s Lower East Side. A former baseball player and truck driver, he is now working towards a career in social healing and cares deeply about helping people who are living with disabilities. His poem “9/11” was published in *LR16*, and he currently writes through the Open Doors program, founded by Jennilie Brewster, where his instructor is Jenessa Abrams.

The Miraculous Feeling of Writing

Yulian Ou

My teacher said, “Writing is from your heart; putting your heart on paper is about so much more than writing.” These words quietly touched my soul and have been an inspiration for my writing. It was like a light bulb flashing in my mind, which sparkled to help me find a way to reflect my feelings, and which makes writing feel miraculous.

When I was first in the SPELL class, my writing skill was zero. When I had to do writing in class, it made me feel afraid, because I worried that no one would understand, and my English grammar was not good enough to write. If my writing had too many mistakes and was mixed up, I would be so embarrassed. While I was struggling, my teacher’s words kept ringing in my ears, “Let go of rules; forget about punctuation, spelling, and correct form; just focus on writing about your ideas first.”

I got so much strength and courage from my teacher for my writing. It really impacted my writing, and I realized that writing represents all my thinking. It is not only for learning English, but it is how to connect to my heart. From writing, I learned to organize, analyze, and review my essay, and most importantly, I found my confidence; I learned to self-motivate to keep a writing journal.

My writing is a witness to my growth from when I had no writing skill. I love writing. It is such a valuable movement, a tiny, sharp pencil vivaciously moving on a piece of blank paper. It produces a mystical power that helps me imagine, think, develop, and explore;

it also touches my emotions, which is a miraculous feeling for me.

I believe writing is an essential effort to become a stronger person. So I strongly recommend that you practice writing. Create your power by writing and discover a miraculous feeling from it.



Yulian Ou was born in China during the Cultural Revolution. She immigrated to the United States with her family. In the beginning, English was an obstacle to her American dream, and she felt lost and like someone unable to hear or speak. The Hunter College SPELL Program has helped her to improve her English, and she thanks her teacher, Ruby Taylor MacBride, for motivating her to continue writing. An essay by Yulian Ou, “My Grandmother’s Vase,” was published in *LR16*.

The Poem

(A Delightful Frustration)

Murielle Mobengo

There was a poem.
Suspended in the universal ether
Floating in nothingness above
There was a poem.

The poem was loud and complicated
The poem was buzzing and fuzzy
The poem was far from being truncated
The poem stood in its august majesty

Infatuated with invisibility
As formless and superior
As an idea can be.

The poem was self-sufficient
The poem was filled with sibilant obscurity
The poem was fricative and fraudulent
The poem was singing for nobody

The poem was dancing for itself
Playful in eternity
The poem was all-knowing and pelf
The poem was incredibly nifty

The poem was ignoring the poetess
Tied to earthliness, and heavy
The poetess lost in everythingness
Unpoetic and weary.

Swollen with reasoning pride
As informed and superior
As a mind can be.

And yet empty
Forsaken by Beauty.

Would they ever meet?

The poetess longing for the poem
The poetess hoping it'd come
The poetess losing her phoneme
The poetess was cleaning her tongue

(Lest His Majesty consent
To descent).

The poetess never ascended
To the poem's ethereal smoothness
She believes the poem stayed uncorrupted
Away from human artistic pettiness

Still,
On a fickle morning
Fickle as the poem who never came to be
She could smell the scent of something rhyming
Vaguely on the verge
Of possessing
Her whole
Over again.



Murielle Mobengo was born in Bordeaux, France, and is married with two children. She wrote this poem while studying in the advanced writing class at University Settlement, where Lucian Leung is the director of the Adult Literacy Program. Once undecided between studying for a doctorate in philosophy and writing poetry, she has chosen poetry—despite its “frustration.” She has been accepted into the MFA program in poetry at The New School.

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About Gallatin

THE GALLATIN SCHOOL OF INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY is an innovative school within New York University that began in 1970 and grew out of the educational reform movements of the late 1960s. As a small college within a highly regarded research institution, Gallatin provides the best of both worlds for its 1,500 undergraduates and 200 graduate students. In close consultation with faculty academic advisers, students create their own curriculum and unique plan for learning, combining Gallatin's own interdisciplinary courses with more traditional courses in various schools of NYU; self-directed education through independent studies; and experiential learning through internships at numerous institutions, businesses, and arts organizations.

The Writing Program includes about 35 courses each semester; a Writing Center staffed by undergraduate Peer Writing Assistants; several event series; and *Confluence*, an online platform for student writing, art, and research; *The Gallatin Review*, an annual student literary and visual arts magazine; and Civic Engagement Projects—the Literacy Project, Great World Texts, and High School Writing Mentors.

The Literacy Project dates from 2001 and is comprised of an Adult Literacy for Social Change course, which combines the study of the adult literacy/ESOL field with volunteer work at several partner organizations; a weekly writing class at University Settlement; the annual, all-day *Literacy Review* Workshops in Teaching Writing to Adults; and publications of writing by adults, including the annual *Literacy Review*, biannual volumes from the University Settlement class, and (with the NYU Prison Education Program) volumes by students at Wallkill Correctional Facility.

Great World Texts, which began in 2008, is a collaboration between Gallatin Writing Program faculty and undergraduate mentors with teachers and students at several New York City public high schools. Faculty and students study a canonical or “contemporary classic” work and create writing projects related to it.

High School Writing Mentors sends two students every semester to several New York City public high schools to guide students in writing.

Look for *The Literacy Review*, Volume 17, online at the Gallatin Writing Program website: gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing.html

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, and/or a free copy of *The Literacy Review*, email June Foley, senior director of the Writing Program: jaf3@nyu.edu

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