The Literacy Review

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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Note: The front cover shows maps from some of the countries in which LR12 writers were born. The back cover shows New York City maps. Maps throughout the book show areas with LR12 sites. The last section, on love, shows what some consider the heart of New York City, Central Park.
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INTRODUCTION
"THE REAL POINT": TWO TEACHERS REFLECT

10  Jay Klokker & Elaine Sohn
Elaine Sohn and Jay Klokker have been colleagues since 1999 when Elaine joined Jay at the Adult Learning Center at CUNY’s New York City College of Technology in downtown Brooklyn. They collaborated then—through their students—and continued to collaborate even after Elaine left “City Tech” to become Site Advisor at the Aguilar Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. The pen pal project has been an almost annual undertaking for many years, and they shared their experiences in a Literacy Review workshop, “How to Set Up a Pen Pal Project,” in September 2013. Jay currently teaches the Advanced Level ESOL Class at City Tech, and Elaine now teaches both ABE and ESOL students at Aguilar.

ELAINE SOHN 11/23/2013 10:56 a.m.

Hey, Jay (I’m pretending to be a 20-something!)
Did you see that email from June? She and the editors invited us to write the intro to this year’s LR. Maybe we could write about our pen pal project. Remember all the fun our students had writing back and forth? They not only kept in touch with each other last spring, they asked to continue in the fall. And then six of them offered to join us at the Literacy Review workshop to talk about their experience.

Recently, I’ve been rereading some of their exchanges.

An opening letter: “. . . I’m really happy because I am going to know another person. I enjoy talking with new people to exchange opinions and dreams and experiences in our lives . . . . This is another way to learn about different customs and . . . more English!! Isn’t this the real point?”

That was typical. There were jokes: “I don’t know . . . maybe my wife is the lucky one to be married to me, a Mexican guy.” Professional discussions: “My main research interest involves the discovery of biomarkers for neurodegenerative diseases, especially Alzheimer’s.” Travel assistance: “We are going to see Niagara Falls next weekend. Have you been there?” Not to mention how-to-enjoy-NYC advice: “Today is my day off and I am sitting on a bench in Central Park writing you this letter. It is very peaceful. You have to try it.”

Jay—Can you believe how much information they share and how much advice they offer?

Elaine

JAY KLOKKER 11/27/2013 11:31 a.m.

Yes, Elaine, these exchanges have been great. In fact, didn’t they inspire us to write back and forth for this introduction? Responding to someone puts us into our “write mind.” That happens with my students. Even those who never penned a
“snail mail” letter kept asking, “Is there a letter for me today?” A personal connection makes writing so much more meaningful. Those who might otherwise say “I hate to write,” gladly put words on the page. The pen pal exchanges build a “community of writers.” That phrase, from the writing teacher Peter Elbow, describes a classroom with many different opportunities for students to share writing. In mine, they do this with partners and small groups, on the class website at nicenet.net, or when I read their stories aloud. This helps them think like writers. I read a story to the class, then ask questions: “What was your favorite part?” “What will stick with you tomorrow?” “What would be a good title?” (Hunting for a title is a fun way to focus on the main idea.)

One parting thought: I often talk to my students about my own writing. I let them know that I often stare at the blank page and feel stupid, that I make mistakes, that I need to rewrite and rewrite. As one of my students wrote: “Sometimes writing is like climbing a mountain that gets higher as you climb.” Oh boy, do I know that feeling!

Later,
Jay

ELAINE SOHN 12/11/2013 2:14 p.m.

Jay, In my classroom, I like to walk around while the students are writing and ask pertinent questions: “I love your opening sentence. But who are you talking about in the second paragraph?” or “Do you have an outline for your story?” or “I love the description of the mother. Can you work on a clearer picture of the father?” I ignore small errors. It’s like listening to a speaker with an accent. If I can tell what they are saying, I’m not concerned about grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

Got to wrap this up now. It’s snowing like the dickens out there, and the library is closing early.

Your pen pal,
Elaine

JAY KLOKKER 12/12/2013 9:25 a.m.

Elaine, All of us who put written words together, whether to tell a story or share a recipe, go through many of the same steps. We are, to use an idiom that inspired my class, all in the same boat. When you and I circulate around the classroom, we are not delivering the perfect story formula, we are coaching and giving advice when needed. I often ask, “Do you mind if I take a look at what you’ve written so far?” A roomful of scritch-scratching pencils sets a meditative, productive tone, and it’s good to give “first aid” to those who feel frustrated. When stuck writers talk about what they are trying to say, I often hear the story taking off. “Write that down!” I tell them. And if we are in the computer lab I will sit with a student and say, “You dictate; I’ll be your secretary.”
Jay, Funny you say that! At our Adult Learning Centers, many students cannot put down their thoughts easily, so we (their teachers and tutors), do what you do. Students feel so free to talk when someone else is writing for them. And the stories we hear are amazing! One story a student told me was about celebrating his first Thanksgiving here in New York. He was using some recipes from the hotel kitchen where he worked, and he was preparing a truly American meal on his own! He was so excited and proud to read it back. Writing can take on such different faces, can’t it? More tomorrow!

Elaine, Writing certainly does take on different faces, but as teachers we are always looking for common features. That’s why I keep returning to some of my favorite writing prompts: “A Day I Will Never Forget,” “A Story I Heard When I Was Young,” or “A Story I Would Like to Tell My Grandchildren.” Do you have any favorite prompts?

Yup, Jay! I really like: “The Most Important Things My Parents Taught Me,” “I Get Mad When…” and “Would You Believe…?” And “firsts” are always good: “My First Snow” comes to mind this month; “The First Time I Went to the Movies,” “My First View of NY,” etc.

More later, Jay. Got to run to a baby shower! (Yes, my first baby shower in many years. . .)

Elaine, there’s one thing we haven’t talked about—deadlines. They really force a writer to pull things together. Speaking of which: We have to send in this introduction tomorrow. Do you have any last thoughts you’d like to share?

Jay, No, enough with the introduction! Let’s get on with the stories!
Stories by Korean Graduate Students at NYU Steinhardt

14  Saeromi Heo  JOURNEY TO NEW YORK CITY WITH A HOMELESS JINDO

17  Jihoon Lee  WHAT ON EARTH IS THE SUBJECT?
Special Feature:
WRITING BY KOREAN-BORN GRADUATE STUDENTS IN NYU STEINHARDT’S TESOL PROGRAM

Saeromi Heo and Jihoon Lee, who were born and raised in Seoul, Korea, are working toward graduate degrees in English education at NYU Steinhardt’s Multilingual and Multicultural Studies Program. Inspired by their respective journeys to the U.S., each wrote memorable reflections upon their experiences as newcomers and shared them with Adjunct Instructor Cille Longshaw. The editors of LRJ2 believe reading them will be a treat for writers, teachers, and tutors.

Though the two essays’ subjects differ, both are thoughtful, charming and poignant glimpses into the lives of two people who are not native speakers of English and may soon be ESOL teachers in New York City.
I've come a very long way. My home is 6,863 miles away. I flew 14 hours to get here. I brought a stray dog, Bori, with me. My family's most beloved dog, Wolfy, who was 10 years old, had died 18 hours before I left. He was unconscious for five days after getting a bad ear infection. The vet said he did not know what had gone wrong (he did seem like he had no idea); he sounded as upset and guilty as I did. A receptionist said the vet got sick staying up all night next to the dog. We all were sad, tired, and lost. That night, my father took the dog's body home and laid him on his cushy dog bed. With the removal of the bandage that had been wrapped around his ear, the dog looked as if he was sleeping a very calm, peaceful sleep. My parents and I were packing my stuff, weighing the heaviest luggage over and over again so I wouldn't get in trouble when checking in. The dog was in his bed; he wouldn't wake up. He didn't even blink while we were making noise, packing and unpacking, checking the list to pack, talking to each other like we were going on a camping trip the next morning. It was the kind of night that I cannot forget until I turn 80. A dead dog and big luggage with sweaters, a passport, towels, and seaweed.

I could barely sleep on the plane to New York City. I tried watching a movie, and cried, and looked outside the window, and cried again. I couldn't believe I was leaving home where my dog was lying dead. I couldn't believe it all happened in one week just before I left. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to see the dog buried on my father's mountain. I wanted to be punished by staying home, enduring the silence among my family members. No one else blamed me, but I blamed myself. I had made the decision for him to have surgery and had handed the dog to the vet. There must have been reasons why things suddenly fell apart. I was still, in my mind, holding his paw. I could not let the dog go.

Wolfy did not accompany me to New York that day, but there was another dog with me on the plane, a dog that I picked up on the street the previous summer. A friend of a friend called me to foster the dog because it was late June, and summer is a high time for dog-meat traders. They would gladly pick up the dog and sell it to one of the dog-meat restaurants. The dog was tied to a pole
near the road, unattended. She was a Jindo, a very common dog breed in Korea. There was nothing very special about her. No one knew the owner. No one knew where she was from. A food-stand lady fed her water and some snacks, but the dog wouldn’t eat. Her almond-shaped eyes were full of worries and her ears were pricked way back, submissively. She would wag her bushy, curled tail a little when someone approached. She knew she was in trouble. I named the dog Bori after the color of her coat. Bori means barley in Korean and until the mid-20th century, poor people relied on the crop during the annual famine season, waiting for rice to be ready for harvest. Though Bori was named something people eat and that was the last thing I wanted to happen to the dog, still, the name meant hope, a little hope only someone who waited for something for so long and wanted so badly can understand.

She was staying on the rooftop of my house, which burns like a stove during the hot summer days. But that was as much as my family could cooperate since the dog was shedding like there’s no tomorrow. I tried to take care of the heat by getting her a marble panel to sit or lie on. Meanwhile, my family was looking for a new home for her, which was never easy. South Korea, especially Seoul, is an incredibly packed metropolis and most of the population resides in apartment complexes. People much prefer smaller dogs.

I posted Bori’s story and her photo on my blog and more than 2,000 visited the blog in a day(!) via my twitter account, and a lot of people helped by retweeting the link to the posting over 300 times. Still, no one would adopt her. There was absolutely no one who wanted to adopt this sad dog. I had to take her with me. I had to take her with me and get her adopted in a strange country. There was no other way.

On the plane I woke up from a shallow sleep. Two hours left to land. I started getting ready. I had Bori, a dog weighing 15 pounds; a luggage bag containing 50 pounds of clothes and books and food; one shoulder bag with more clothes; and another bag carrying important documents like my passport and I-20 (document with information for a student visa). I had never been to the U.S. before. I had one friend here, but he could not host my dog and me. I knew nobody else. I had booked two nights at a pet-friendly hotel but that was it. I had nowhere to go, and I had to start apartment hunting as soon as I unpacked. I had to move efficiently. I had to be strong. I took out the Korean mobile sim card from my iPhone and put in an American one to activate American phone service. It was hard to move because the seat was narrow and I was wearing too many layers. It was too dark to see
the tiny sim card. I dropped it on the floor. It was hot and dim in the plane. I was sweating a lot. I needed a working phone to call home and contact the realtors. I would be lost without this phone connecting me with the rest of the world. I was sweeping the floor with my hands, talking to myself: *Don’t screw anything up. Don’t start anything. Please please don’t do anything stupid. Now I’m completely alone with a helpless dog in a foreign land.* Eventually, I found the sim card.

A friend who had worked with me in Korea came to pick me up at JFK, but he had to wait for me for almost an hour because it was physically impossible for me to move with all my bags and a cage with the dog in it. I weigh a little more than 100 pounds and my height is 5 feet, three inches. I just couldn’t move. I had to get through extra security checks because I was with a dog. Security guards were calling me here and there; I first had to go to desk number four and then on to 11. My face turned red and sweat streamed down my face. People were waiting behind me. “Honey,” a big Latino guard said, as he approached me and put the big luggage on the dog carrier. “Thank you, sir.” I couldn’t even look up. I was exhausted. Now I could move forward but I had to walk very slowly, pushing the dog carrier, since it was too heavy to be securely balanced and of course it was hard to see what direction to follow. I could smell dog poop. Bori was frightened and shivering in the carrier. It felt like it took a thousand years to get out of the airport.

The sky was gray and the wind was icy cold when I first met New York out of JFK. My friend told me the temperature had suddenly dropped that afternoon. The Big Apple was not welcoming at all. I didn’t say hello either.

The next day I met Yuna, an ESOL teacher at the American Language Institute, and she hosted me and the dog for a week. I finally found a studio apartment and moved in. Six months later, Bori was adopted by a loving family in Baltimore. Despite my going through so much trouble for the dog that I could write a book about it, I am glad that I brought her with me. I hope she won’t remember me because she’s so happy, although I will remember her for a long time.

*Saeromi Heo writes: “I usually go by Romi. Born and raised in Seoul, Korea. I am a 30-year-old female grad student. I have almost finished my last semester in English education at NYU, and I plan to teach in the city. I love animals, books, friends and parties. I have often thought I’m weird because I sometimes get myself into trouble, by doing things such as bringing a living dog to the U.S., but now I know it’s who I am and I kinda like myself.”*
What on Earth Is the Subject?

To the speakers of some languages, it may be difficult to understand the situation when you can't find the subject (as in subject, verb, object) of the words you are speaking. As a native Korean speaker, I think the biggest difficulty in speaking English is to choose a subject that works best in conversation. It may sound silly, but you cannot imagine how tired I am of trying to determine a subject every time I speak English, which means I take more time to draw English words out of my mouth.

Korean grammar books say that subjects are easily omitted when the interlocutors have a mutual understanding of the subjects of the utterances they are making. For example, two Korean people are having a conversation. One person asks, “Ate lunch?” in a rising tone of voice, then the other replies, “I ate. Ate?” in a rising voice again.

As I have thought more about languages, the link between language and thinking is even tighter in my mind. Nobody could ever find an absolute answer to whether language dominates thinking or vice versa. I am brought to this chained question whenever I feel lost and helpless on failing to deliver my Korean feelings into English.

To be specific, the Korean word “아깝다 (akkappta)” doesn’t exist in English. Although it could be translated in slightly different ways, the biggest difficulty lies in the fact that the subject of 아깝다 varies with the context. However, it is a different matter from the above-mentioned situation in which a subject can be deleted when the interlocutors are aware of what is being talked about in a given context. Rather, it sounds awkward if you try attaching a subject to saying 아깝다. If I had to make a generalization about how this expression is used, it would be when you say, “I’m sorry about that” in English.

For example, the expression “아깝다” is used in the following real-life dialogues:
Person A: I got only one question wrong on the exam.
Person B: 아깝다. (I'm sorry that the opportunity for you to have gotten a perfect score has gone.)
Person A: I will not be able to join you tonight.
Person B: 아깝다. (I'm sorry that the opportunity for you to have spent time with me has gone.)
Person A: My five-buck frappuccino totally spilled over right after I got it from the cashier's hand. But it was my fault so I didn't get a new one.
Person B: 아까웠겠다. (I'm sorry that you might have felt the money or coffee was wasted.)

In America, I encountered many occasions where 아깝다 was the only word I wanted to say, but I couldn’t find English words other than, “Oh, I am sorry to hear that,” with an intentionally frowning face, to fill the gap between the language and my feeling. After a lot of thought about that, I was led to a conclusion that Koreans and Americans take different stances toward others' bad luck: Americans put the bad luck between two persons who are facing each other, maintaining the distance between them. Meanwhile, Koreans put bad luck before two people who are standing side by side, to reduce the distance between them, as if they were in the same perspective.

Sociolinguistically, I found that this Korean word doesn’t come with a subject on purpose. No Korean would say “아깝다” with a subject. Why? This shows how Koreans express their sympathy in order to empathize with their interlocutor. Koreans don’t usually designate a person with a pronoun “you” as the subject, though it is more acceptable as an object. If “you” is used as the subject, it should be when the speaker wants to point out that the agent of the action being talked about is that person. Otherwise, saying “you” as the subject makes you and your interlocutor feel distant.

Therefore, when you have experienced something unpleasant, Koreans are more likely to avoid designating “you” as the person having the bad luck. If I say, “I am sorry to hear that” translated directly into Korean, my Korean interlocutor could feel differentiated in a way that suggests it is I who had the bad luck while the other person did not.

How could the chain between language and thinking be even tighter than this? It was an aha-moment when I realized why I felt somewhat guilty on saying, “I am sorry about that” to my American friends. Although I did “I-fronting” because it was unavoidable, it made me feel I’d created a distance between me and my friends. I wanted to show my double mind.
Drawing upon experiences such as these, I’ve concluded that I feel like these two languages of my concern are two items of clothing with the same color and design but with different textures, which can be felt only by the person wearing the clothing while others can’t recognize the difference. This feeling of texture seems to be a privilege allowed only to additional language learners. That is probably why I enjoy the unfamiliar texture of English, although I sometimes feel uncomfortable.
PEOPLE GOT VERY EXCITED AND MADE A LOT OF NOISE

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It was the summer of 1990, and I was living in an apartment building in Jackson Heights, Queens. Everything looked good to me. I had started to meet new neighbors and make new friends because I had moved there not long before. I remember at that time there was an important event going on in Europe. It was the soccer World Cup, and everybody was following it.

One Saturday evening, the most important game finally arrived. It was Colombia vs. Germany. A lot of people were outside of my building watching the game because the super had put a TV in the window facing the street. People got very excited, and they made a lot of noise. They were celebrating, and of course, drinking beer.

Suddenly, I turned my eyes to the left, and I saw a woman sitting down next to me. She was holding a plastic bag in her right hand. I remember that she said, “Hello.” But I couldn’t answer because my communication in English was very limited at that time. She continued talking to me and asking so many questions: “What’s happening here? Why are a lot of people on the street?” Finally, she realized that it was a soccer game.

After a little while, I asked her if she drank beer. She started to laugh, “No, I don’t drink. I just pick up the empty cans.” The game was getting interesting, and the people continued drinking. At the end of the evening, the lady put more than 100 empty cans in her bag. I don’t remember seeing anybody happier than this woman on that day.

As time passed, we became friends and grew very connected to each other, this elderly woman and I. For many years, I found in this person a kind friend with a lot of good qualities. It was easy to learn from somebody I respected and who was sincere. She had lived a lonely life because she didn’t have any family. In time, she decided to move into a nursing home to wait for a better life.

June Walker, I will never forget you. I am going to keep in my memory the day that I met you, thanks to all those simple empty cans.

Orlando Alvarez writes: “I come from Neiva, Huila, a small town located in the south of Colombia. I have lived in the U.S. for 25 years. Currently, I’m attending ESOL classes at the Consortium for Worker Education, and I want to thank my teacher, Jackie Bain, who encourages many students in this program.”
When I visited New York for the first time, I immediately fell in love with this town. Now I’m living here, and I still love New York, even more than before.

What I love most is New Yorkers.

They have a reputation for being rude. But they aren’t ruder than people living in Los Angeles, Sydney or Rome. Sometimes they can be rude with tourists, but I have experienced the same attitude all over the world because it isn’t so easy living in towns crowded by millions of tourists.

I have met very nice people here.

I could tell you about J., a very special lady I met at New York Public Library. She invited my family to enjoy Thanksgiving with her family as soon as she understood that we didn’t have relatives or friends in town, even though she didn’t know me well. I would also like to mention the homeless man who refused to accept my last two dollars after he realized that my husband had lost his job. There’s also Mrs. A., my fancy neighbor living in the penthouse with her thousand hats, who was waiting for me every evening in the lobby for 42 days just to know if the biopsy results had arrived. She hugged me.

But the top place in my heart is reserved for Ann. She is a gentle, delicate 82-year-old lady I used to meet every day in Central Park. She would feed the birds while we talked about our favorite books. One shining, cool spring morning she said goodbye because her grandson was taking her to a nursing home in Florida. I’ve never received any news from Ann, although she has my address, but her last words to me were: “Take care, sweetie, and please think of this old New Yorker, sometimes.”

That’s why I want to be a part of this special town.
That’s why I feel like a New Yorker.

Alessandra Di Bello, age 57, was born in Leghorn, Italy. She writes: “I’m happily married to a nice Italian-American man. We moved from Italy to New York City in 1991, but we lived abroad until January 2013. I really hope to stay here for the rest of my life.” Alessandra Di Bello studies at the St. Agnes Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. Robin Poley is her instructor.
For good luck said one.
For love said another.
For a just world threw the last one.
I roll up my pants. My dinner is ready.
KUMIKO ITO

George Washington Bridge

Cold dusk on the bridge
Brilliant diamond New York
In my bus window

Born in Japan, Kumiko Ito came to the United States in 2011. She writes, “I like cooking, playing golf, and online shopping.” She studies at the St. Agnes Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. Robin Poley is her instructor.
It was a very cold night on December 25, 1995 when my brother asked me if I wanted to go for a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge. Hearing those words made me happy. My brother knew how excited I would be since I had just arrived from Mexico a few days before. My mother had told him how much I had always wanted to visit the Brooklyn Bridge. I had heard lots of good stories about the bridge from family members who already lived here. I had also seen it in movies. I replied, “Yes!” with lots of excitement.

The walk began on the Brooklyn side. As we were walking over the bridge, we started to take pictures of the amazing sights and lights. As we kept walking, he started pouring his heart out to me about how hard it was for him to leave us behind for three years. He also told me the story of how he got his first job, and the struggles he had to go through the first years because he could not speak the language. He spoke about how hard it was for him to even learn how to ride the subway without getting lost because he could not speak or read English. He felt horrible coming to a foreign country, leaving his wife and kids behind, without knowing how hard it was going to be to learn another language.

When we reached Manhattan I realized how much I missed talking to my older brother. I will never forget that night that brought me closer to my brother. It was the best walk I ever took.
It was one of those ordinary weekdays . . . maybe Monday, or was it Wednesday? But it was morning, time to go work for most of those who had filled the 4 train. She was one of them standing in the crowded train. She seemed to be looking down, like some of the others when a train is crowded, especially one who doesn't want to make eye contact with anyone else. But if you had paid attention a little bit, you would have actually seen that she was staring with her dead eyes into emptiness . . . She was in her early thirties and somewhat attractive. If you had noticed, you might have realized that she had a look of grief. If you had looked carefully, you might also have caught the tear slowly rolling down the side of her face.
If you had looked, you also probably would have seen the young man who was watching her from a little ways away, trying not to be obvious. His eyes were walking over the woman's fragile body. First to the small of her mouth, then down to her chest. After that, they went down further. . . It seemed his eyes had found the most pleasant part: They focused on the woman's well-shaped curves. His eyes walked over them again and again.
At that time, a deep and sharp hurt was going from the woman's heart to her throat; her throat became like a big tie. She swallowed with difficulty, and she couldn't keep the hurt inside. It reached her eyes and exploded from there as two tears. . . She wiped them away quickly without being noticed.
If anyone had glanced at her, they would have easily seen this. But no one did . . . It was an ordinary day, morning. People were going to work on the 4 train.

After winning a green card lottery in Turkey, Kezban Gebetas has lived in the U.S. for two years and eight months. A journalist in Turkey, she currently works as a waitress and writes for fun. "Writing short stories, poems, or a diary in English gives me a chance to explain myself, in my voice," she says. "Anything might inspire me to write, especially sad things." She studies at the International Center of Catholic Charities Community Services. Her teacher, Elaine Roberts, is the director of the Immigrant Support Program.
This is a story about my life. I live in the Bronx, but I study at a school in Manhattan. Every day I take the train. It has many people. One day I sat next to an old woman. She spoke Spanish with me. I didn't understand, but I just faked it and nodded my head. I think she talked for 30 minutes. When she finished talking, she asked me, “Why don't you speak with me?” I told her I have never spoken Spanish. She looked at me surprised and said, “Sorry.” I told her many people think I speak Spanish, but I speak Arabic. When I came to the United States I didn't think my face looked Spanish. This was a surprise for me. Now I have this problem every day. Now I need to learn English and Spanish.

Originally from Egypt, Nora Youssef has lived in New York City for six years. She is married and the mother of two children, with whom she likes to go to the park. She studies ESOL at the Department of Education’s Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center. She likes her school and her teacher, Jessica Jordan. Diana Raissis is the instructional facilitator at the site.
Do you want to meet some interesting characters on the A train? Then follow me as I take you underground. Underground where? Underground where trains roar and disappear in dark tunnels, underground which many people call home. Every day, underground, people and neighbors are connected. We are here on the A train. Your first mission is to find a seat before it disappears in the flash of an eye. No luck? It’s okay. With experience, you will get better at it. Now pay close attention. You see that man to your right with the large coat and heavy bags? He sleeps on this train. Now here come the performing kids. Watch out! If you like the show, you give them money. If not, then just keep to yourself. There goes that religious lady again, warning people about the end of the world. Just ignore it, but be prepared to be pushed and squished as more people enter the train. Two more stops before we get off.

Look, the man over there is dressed like Santa Claus in the middle of the summer. I told you that you would meet interesting people. Do you hear that? It’s a seat fight; it happens all the time. This is our stop. I can’t believe all this just happened on the A train. We have been on the train for only 20 minutes. It must be a lot for you to take in, but for us natives it’s just another day on the A train.

Aissatou Barry grew up in Guinea, West Africa. He currently studies at the Brooklyn Public Library’s Bedford Learning Center. He writes, “I celebrated my 50th birthday last week, and I feel like I’m beginning a new life.” He thanks his teacher, Gaynell Mascoll, in particular, for helping him reach his goals. The Educational Advisor at the Bedford Learning Center is Haniff Toussaint.
It seemed to be a day like any other, and I was warm and eager to enjoy the rest of the afternoon with my two children. But suddenly it took a turn for the worse. It became a day when I feared losing my two greatest treasures, my children. We were in the playground of a park near our home, when my two-year-old daughter was pushed by a bigger boy. I told her to move from the slide to the swings, but the boy followed and pushed her again. I told the boy’s mother to watch her son. She and three other women, along with one man, came up to me and my children. They shouted bad words about Mexicans. They punched me, knocked me to the ground, kicked me, and hit my children. I ended up in the hospital, beaten and bruised. My husband said he would never forget the phone call he received at work, telling him what had happened to his family.

We were attacked by what some may call people, but in reality they were nothing like people—instead, mean, intolerant, racist and with no remorse. They would’ve liked to take my life and all that is important to me. We would like to assume that when you go to a park, you go to laugh and have fun with your family, but on this day, all my family and I experienced was tragedy and pain, and till this day it has failed to leave my mind completely.

New York is a unique and beautiful place in all senses. In a place like New York, we must be united, and tolerant of one another. In a place like New York, where people from all around the world come to make a better life for themselves and their family, we need continued education and respect. Let’s teach the value of life to those who love and live day to day. Let’s expect to give without reward, and give more love to those who do not know of it. Let’s not be intolerant, and instead learn patience; let us be multicultural, not racist. Let us not be ignorant, but educated.
Dear New York,

I am so happy to write this letter because it concerns you and me. I want you to tell you that a long time ago in my lovely Guatemala City, I heard a lot of stories about you, New York City.

I was only a little girl, but even so, I remember the first time that I heard about you. It was around 1983, on a Saturday. My friends and I went out to play, as we usually did. When all of us were finished playing hide and seek, we were exhausted, so we sat down and moved on to our next activity. We used to tell each other fiction and nonfiction stories.

At that time, our friend Charly had already come back from the U.S. to our country, which made us feel ecstatic. We were eager to hear his stories, so he started telling us how happy he was living in New York City.

He described wonderful things to us, about how exciting it was living there. He told us that everything was different compared to our country, starting from how big and nice the houses were, the spectacular buildings, the clean streets, the big and beautiful schools—but most important for him was all the food, clothes, and toys that he could have. That sounded like WOW, WOW, WOW to me!

And when I heard that my friend Charly played with snow and built snowmen, it really affected me because I knew about snow only through TV. Since that moment, I’ve been interested in you, New York.

The years passed. I still kept hearing different stories from friends and neighbors who knew about you, all of them considering how exciting it was to meet you, and sharing a lot of experiences about you.

I wondered: Would it be possible to meet you some day and see by myself all the things that I heard about you? Let me tell you that I have managed to meet you. It was very hard, but it was worth it.

My first impression was, Oh my God, oh my God! New York is more beautiful than I imagined. You touched me with your incomparable beauty—so unique—your huge
bridges and your skyscrapers that are so incredible. The city that never sleeps, full of love and opportunities for all people who want to meet you and desire a better future with you.

That is all you: the city in which Jehovah, my God, let me meet you, the city that opened its doors to give me the moments and chances in my life.

All that is left to tell you is thank you. Thank you for all that you have given me.

Sincerely,

Yanira

Yanira Pantoja, a native of Guatemala, is in her 30s. She has lived in New York for more than 10 years. She is a mother, and her ESOL teacher, Brittany Ober, describes her as a very studious and kind person. Yanira studies at the Bronx Library Center of the New York Public Library. She enjoys tutoring other classmates in English.
Act One—Getting Lucky: It was six years ago, the spring of 2007. I was very happy to see New York City with my own eyes. All my friends and relatives in Kyrgyzstan were very glad because I went to achieve my dream since childhood—to study. My uncle, who had lived in New York City for 10 years, was supposed to meet me.

On March 16, 2007, the plane landed in New York. The weather was sunny but cool. The first things I wanted to see were Manhattan and Columbia University. I took a taxi, and I went to see New York. Every question the taxi driver asked, I answered with a loud “Yes.” He stopped at 6th Avenue and 42nd Street. The first thing that I saw when I left the car, strangely enough, was not a building. It was “Kwik Meal,” a cart that sold “gyro” food. The seller was friendly. Somehow we talked, made friends, and exchanged names. He was called Adil. We didn’t understand each other generally but spoke with gestures. I had a brochure about Columbia University. I asked where it was. He showed me on the map, told me something, and showed five fingers. I didn’t understand at that time. I wanted to reach the University. I asked him to look after my baggage, and I left it there.

Here was the long-awaited moment at Columbia University. I was struck by everything that I saw. I tried to consider it all carefully and remember everything. I happened to meet a girl who spoke Russian. She soon acquainted me with the University. I didn’t notice that time passed, but then I remembered about the seller of “gyro” and about my baggage. When I reached the place where the cart had been, it was gone, and the baggage also. Then I realized that the five fingers were meant to warn me that his work came to an end at 5 o’clock. I didn’t know what to do. For more than an hour, I sat there. Then I remembered about my uncle and I called him.

Act Two—Disappointment: I called, but no one picked up the phone. I called back. The answer was short: “I’m now not in New York; I’m going to Europe. When I return, I will call you back.” I was disappointed, and I didn’t know what to do. On the street, it was dark. I didn’t know where to spend the night without baggage, without a house. I went down to the subway. I marked to myself my location. I spent the first night in the subway.

The next morning, I went to the place where the cart stood. On the way there,
suddenly from the crowd a Kyrgyz voice reached me. A young, beautiful girl was speaking by phone in my native language. I sat down nearby. She didn't suspect that I understood what she said as she talked to her mother. Having seen me watching her, she gave me a look of contempt and asked in English, “Can I help you?” At first I didn't understand, being surprised with her beauty. Just one word came out of my mouth, “Hi,” in my language. She didn't pay attention to me at that time. She simply gave me a book with a business card inside. Then she left. I got my baggage from Adil.

I was without hope for my uncle, without money in my pocket, without friends, and I had met only one girl. But I wasn't afraid to call her, to ask her to help me. She gave me a phone number from which I found work as a dishwasher at a café in Brighton. The salary was small, the money insufficient. I began living in a small room in a basement. I worked about six months, and I kept thinking of studying. To study, it was necessary to know colloquial English, at least. I had very weak English, but I learned words everywhere: in the workplace, in my room, on the street. I tried to remember everything, and I translated everything that I saw. I wrote words on small pieces of paper, and I pasted them on the walls. Once my manager got very angry because those pieces of paper appeared on his office walls. Still, everything was good.

Then one day when I had almost finished work, it was cold and raining, and near the door a homeless man asked me for help. He was lightly dressed, and he shivered from cold. I had to close the café that night. I let him in and gave him a cup of tea. Soon he asked that I allow him to spend the night inside the café. He said that he would lie down on the floor. I couldn't refuse. Then I closed the door and went home. The next morning there were sanitation inspectors (who checked sanitation) the manager (who swore) and the homeless man (who stood and listened.) This day was my last in this café. I was fired. The homeless man apologized. Work for me was important. But I forgave him.

Act Three—Robbery!: That day, I went on a job search. In one of the streets I was surrounded by a group of young teenagers and threatened with a knife. They took from me a small handbag in which was money and the address of my employers. Suddenly I heard the sound of a police car, and all the teenagers ran away. At once I felt accused because the police officers shouted to me, “Raise your hands!” After a moment, having checked documents, they released me. I asked, “How to reach to Brighton?” using all my English. They laughed at my accent. One of them described how to get there. I understood nothing, simply nodded and went in the wrong direction. At once they stopped me, asked me to get into the
car and took me to Brighton Beach. I am very grateful to them. After that, I began to work hard to learn English.

Act Four—Success: The next day I met compatriots from my country. They found me work and invited me to live with them free of charge. I couldn't refuse. After I was in New York for almost a year, learning English and working, the time came for me to apply to university. On the first attempt, they accepted me. I started to study in the law school. After two years of study, I started looking for a place where I could do an internship. There were many refusals, but I didn't give up. After 52 attempts, I was accepted. I worked for free for five hours a day. After a year, the director of the firm gave me a letter of recommendation and awarded me $3000. In a week, I was employed at a very prestigious company in Manhattan. There I met the girl who gave me the business card and the book as a gift.

Now, everything is good. The seller of “gyro” and I see each other often. I have dinner there. The homeless man, I saw in the MTA, working. In this life, I understand that nothing is impossible. Keep trying, work hard, and have patience. Also, hope to get lucky.

Iliaz Sydykov immigrated from the Kyrgyz Republic a year ago. He writes: “This story is about my brother’s life. During my own first months here, I traveled to the nearest cities to see the U.S. I had some problems with my English, so sometimes I missed my bus stop or got on the wrong bus. So I became a student who wanted to learn English very much. Now I’m a student in Jay Klokker’s class at the New York City College of Technology. Thanks to Jay and my classmates!”
NOW YOU MUST LEARN EVERYTHING FROM SCRATCH
Imagine this situation: You are in the middle of an intersection, and a heavy truck runs a red light; at the hospital, doctors assure you about your ability to walk after multiple treatments, various procedures, and endless physical therapy. The rehabilitation process sounds easy. First, you won't be able to walk; then you can walk on crutches; then, without, clumsily and unsteadily. At last, one day, only a slight limp will be a sad reminder of the accident. How long will it take? Everything depends on your perseverance, willpower, belief in yourself, and, last but not least, your optimism and positive attitude.

This is what happens to every immigrant: it doesn't matter how respected and important you were in your home country, how many degrees you hold, how good your previous job was, how many friends you had, and how much you meant to your family. The truck didn't stop, and now you must learn everything from scratch: how to speak, how to read, how to behave, how to find a job and new friends. For anyone, it could take forever. Partly, it is a matter of a person's flexibility and adaptability.

It has been said that life is a sequence of white and black stripes, like a zebra. I prefer to be less judgmental and allow my life to be more colorful, like a rainbow. I found a lot of hidden treasures by travelling on my “crutches.” When people speak with each other, more than 80 percent of information is non-verbal. In the beginning, I didn't understand a lot of words, only the main idea. I became more aware of the tone, tempo, gestures, facial expressions, and body language of speakers. Time passed and my vocabulary improved, but now I still pick up a lot of hidden information behind the words. This struggle with a language has made me intuitive and observant. My listening skills have improved; moreover, I started to hear different sounds that I couldn't distinguish before. Like all immigrants, who have a challenging path, I was becoming more patient, more tolerant of other people. I think many immigrants help others willingly and with enthusiasm because they have understanding and sympathy, painfully gained by their own experience.

Immigrants appreciate new friends or a new job as they would have done if they hadn't been immigrants. Furthermore, some insignificant things can make only an immigrant smile. I was happy to understand brief fragments of talk from
strangers who were passing me on the street, especially when it happened the first time. It was not buzzing noise anymore for me; there were real words with real meaning. It is like you were deaf for two years, and one morning you woke up and could hear everything again.

After a couple of years you may experience a light bulb flash occasionally. You realize how naive you were, how many dogmas and strange rules you followed in the past. Your value system is changing dramatically because you have a different perspective. It is similar to having a filthy apartment full of dust and old trash, and only now can you make up your mind about what really matters. Without a doubt, having left their homeland immigrants tend to be more polite and educated, tolerant, and open-minded. They are interested in various cultures and attracted to the unknown. After a lot of disappointments and frustrations, with a strong “can-do” attitude, belief in themselves, and a good work ethic, some of them are not only able to walk without crutches, but even dance.

Maryna Naksen was born in Kharkov, Ukraine, and has been in the U.S. since July 2010. She writes: “Being a native Russian and Ukrainian speaker, I had to learn English to integrate into the fabric of American society. Despite this language’s being quite different from Slavic languages, a situation in which such complex languages as Japanese or Chinese had to be learned would have presented a much more challenging task.” Maryna Naksen studies English with Tanzilya Oren at the English-Speaking Union of the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center.
ANNA MARIA ARMENTA

In the Middle of Two Worlds

There is a saying in Mexico that after many years of not visiting your native country, you are *ni Juana, ni Jean*—neither Juana nor Jean, neither Mexican nor something else. The book *Foreigner* by Nahid Rachlin touched me very deeply because it made me more reflective and serious about my own values in life as an immigrant from Mexico to New York City.

All my thoughts were spinning in my head when I realized that all these years I had been trying to adopt another language, other customs and traditions to fit into a new country because I no longer fit into my own. Even my accent had changed. When I called my family in Mexico my brother said, “You talk and think differently. You aren’t the same person.” This was years ago when I paid five dollars to speak for just 15 minutes. I couldn’t afford to speak with them as much as I would have liked. My relationship with my family became cold. I thought: *I’m a stranger to my family. I haven’t seen them for so long and hardly know them anymore.*

It’s the same feeling that the character Feri in Rachlin’s book experienced. An immigrant from Iran, she returns to her native country after many years. Her feelings are mixed up. She feels like part of her body is empty, and she isn’t able to feel the warmth of her family when she greets them in person for the first time in many years. Her family ties are far away in both time and place.

The immigrant experience can make you feel like you don’t have an identity. Each country is so different from the other, and you don’t fit into either. The book *Foreigner* taught me that it takes time to accept yourself as a bicultural person. You have to face your fears, your worries, your confusions, and your emotions to feel sure of yourself. You won’t lose your roots because you now speak another language. You must feel proud of what you have learned in both countries, and you have to transmit these feelings to your kids, though this transition is hard to accept.
Nowadays, with today’s technology you can communicate with your family no matter how far you are from them. However, I think that physical touch is still important. So don’t wait too much time to visit your loved ones. Hug them as much as you can.

Ana Maria Armenta, age 40, comes from Mexico. She is currently a student of Ellen Quish in the Advanced ESOL class at CUNY’s La Guardia Community College. She enjoys reading books because she can travel far away and learn more about other cultures without paying for a plane ticket. One of her works was also published in LR11.
A Freezing Shower in the Winter

I arrived in New York City in March 2011 from Bangladesh. It was very cold, not like Bangladesh. It was my first time here, and when I got to JFK Airport, I thought that it was the biggest airport in the world. I was very worried about how to leave the airport, and how to get to where I was staying. I was very confused about everything.

I asked someone to please help me get out of the airport. He gave me directions, and I followed these successfully. I hired a taxi, and I asked the driver to go to the address I had written down. I was feeling a little better.

After reaching the address, I told my roommate, who had come to New York before me, that I wanted to take a shower. He showed me to the bathroom. I entered the bathroom and turned on the tap.

It was winter, and outside it was very, very cold. The water in the shower was as cold as ice. How could I keep taking showers in the winter in New York City? After I finished my shower, I asked my friend how it was possible to take a shower in New York City in the winter. He laughed and laughed and laughed. Then he showed me how to get hot water from the other tap.

Now, when I take a shower, I too laugh, remembering my first freezing shower in the freezing winter in New York City.

Md Azizur Rahman, age 52, was born in Bangladesh. He has lived in the U.S. for almost three years, working as the branch manager of Grameen America, a nonprofit microfinance company. The mission of Grameen America is to alleviate poverty by granting loans and credit for entrepreneurial endeavors, and to provide financial education to the working poor. Azizur Rahman is a student at the Parkchester Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library, where his ESOL teacher is Joy Haas. She says he never misses class.
A Trip to the Dentist

I went to the dentist for my yearly check-up. During my checkup, the dentist suggested implanting some teeth. He explained the procedure to me and how much it would cost.

I really don’t like to visit the dentist, especially when he intends to implant screws into my jawbone. I quietly asked if I could be seduced. There was silence for a while, and then the dentist responded that he was not going to seduce me with the general anesthesia. His answer was not to my satisfaction. I wanted some sedation to put me to sleep. Finally, I realized that I had said “seduce” instead of “sedate.”
A Misunderstanding

Last year, I was visited by my cousin from the Dominican Republic. It was her first time here in New York City. We went to different places together, such as Times Square, Central Park and the Palisades Mall. We also visited some friends and family. We went to those places by car.

One day, my cousin told me that she wanted to go to the subway. After we walked for five minutes, we arrived at a Subway sandwich shop, and I asked her what she wanted to eat.

She said, “No, Yenny, I was not talking about this subway. I was talking about the subway that goes underground.”

We started to laugh, and I said, “Oh, the train! Okay, let’s go to the subway.”
SILMAN SOUMARE

The Suits Give Me Double Feelings

Any time I open my closet, I see the old suits that I bought from my home country more than a decade ago. They give me double feelings: First, that time’s not moving; and second, that a decade is after all a long time ago.

The suits look unchanged and always in fashion. But when I finally try them, I realize they are very different now, especially their size, and that makes me realize that time is going very fast.

I still love them because they remind me of lots of things on that long road I created and traveled in my life.

Most of those suits are ensembles of trousers and a jacket. Some of them, a few of them, in fact, are ensembles of three pieces: trousers, vest, and jacket. Most of their colors are somber: black, grey or marine (deep) blue.

I was wearing them on a daily basis back then, not for partying or for the show, not for fun, simply as a job uniform at the time. I was serving as a general manager in a company full time. So I had to present myself well.

I remember always buying my suits in the same way: not at stores but cheaper, or supposedly so, through people who brought them to me at my office or at home. There I had all the latitude to bargain the prices significantly because they were rarely willing to return with their merchandise, and mostly they were going to give them up for close to the real cost. Besides that, since I had to pay cash I could easily play the empty pocket game with them. The rules remain the same here too, on the rare occasions I buy suits on the spot.

If I wear them now, I always try them after work because my main job now actually requires a uniform. So after work, I’m tempted to wear one of them, but I rarely make it because most of them are short now or too tight. But that makes me push myself to explore what is a novelty for me, purchasing new but
Meanwhile, the couple of times I do wear my old suits, I feel very proud of myself and very nostalgic for the ancient times when I wore them every day.

Silman Soumare comes from Senegal, West Africa. His favorite hobby is to surf the internet. His favorite food is a native food: rice with fish, tomato, and some vegetables—a little spicy! He would like to open a business. He would also like to write a book. He wants to be a dream interpreter. He studies at the New York Public Library’s Harlem Adult Learning Center, with teacher Elke Stappert and tutors Anne Conroy and Laurie Hockman.
NOELIA DUARTE

Traveling, My Dream

When I was a child, I played with chairs and made my own rocket to fly to the moon. Sometimes my little brother, Renato, and I made airplanes to travel around the world, or cars to race each other. My brother figured out early that he wanted to be a mechanical engineer and a professional driver. He followed his dream, but I did not figure out my life dream. Growing up, I had to choose a career. I picked one I really liked, but it was not my passion. I finished my degree and decided to specialize in a particular area of my career. My parents always told me, “When you finish your master’s degree, you can do whatever you want.”

When I was in college, I always traveled around Paraguay in my car, sometimes with my friends. Before I met my husband, I would say to myself, *I will never get married because I love to travel, and with a family of my own I won’t be able to travel anymore.* But then I met a man who was studying to become a pilot, and everything changed. He became my husband.

After I married, I figured out my dream is traveling. Since I was a child, I have loved traveling. Now, at 25 years old, I need to improve my English because I want to take flying lessons. In all countries around the world, English is required for aviation. I plan to go back to college and work toward a new career. Getting to know a new place is something special. It is like a sparkle. You learn history and the stories you heard before make sense. For example, I read the book *Angels and Demons*, by Dan Brown. I did not understand one part of a chapter, but when I was in Castle Saint Angelo in Italy, every word in the book made sense.

Noelia Duarte is a 25-year-old woman from Paraguay. In the U.S. for six months, she came here knowing not one word of English. In six months of very hard work, she has moved into an Intermediate 3/4 ESOL class at BMCC’s Adult Basic Education Program, where she is constantly in the process of learning and progressing. Her teacher is Julie Weinstein. Noelia Duarte previously worked in accounting in Paraguay, but is now interested in pursuing a college degree in some aspect of art.
It was just after Hurricane Sandy and we had run out of almost all the food at home. My husband had already gone to the supermarket three times and had come back with nothing. I searched our refrigerator and kitchen and found one carrot, several stalks of celery, a few nuts in a bottle, a little pork, several leftover T-bones from a steak, and some dried mushrooms. I started to have the beginning of an idea and told my husband not to worry; I might make something special today.

I set out to prepare the bone soup on the stove. I cut everything into pieces and meanwhile thought about how it would taste. I had had a similar soup often when my grandma was still alive. It had been amazing to me because it always had different stuff inside it, and I enjoyed the soup she cooked every time.

When the soup was cooked, the house was full of the smell of the bone soup, together with some vegetables, especially the smell of celery and mushrooms. My husband said he couldn't wait to eat it. He seldom ate vegetable soup before, but he had a big bowl of soup this day. He told me it was really nutritious; he never had so many vegetables in a meal; and it was incredible that I could make a meal when we had almost no food at home. I told him I got this talent from my grandmother. Actually, while cooking I had thought repeatedly about what my grandma would have done if she had been here.

After the meal, instead of watching a movie, I began to tell my husband a story about my grandma. The feeling was as if I had opened a book about the modern history of China. My grandma was born at the dawn of the 20th century in a small village. She experienced several very special periods in Chinese history.

The year that my mom was nine years old, my grandma heard some rumors from returning villagers from the city, Xi'an, where my grandpa was running a business, that my grandpa had a concubine (a mistress or “second wife”—this was before the 1950 law forbidding polygamy). She didn't believe it as my grandpa was very nice to her and always brought her gifts back. But when she went to the temple, it was confirmed as true. She settled my grandpa's parents, and with my mom calmly went to the railway station, though she was illiterate and had never left the village before.

When she got to Xi'an, my grandma met the woman, who was a student. My grandma accepted everything peacefully and decided to stay in the city for my mom's education. My grandma had three sons later on; the student, who was pretty but had bad health, had four children with my grandpa. My grandma sometimes
helped take care of her babies. It was a sort of harmony. But the two families lived in different homes.

My grandpa died in a traffic accident around 1960. At that time, China was suffering from the Three Years of Natural Disasters, but many economists argued against the name as they thought humans should take 70 percent of the responsibility. Millions of people died from starvation, and it became the highest death rate from natural disasters in human history.

The natural disaster was a fact, but the big problem was that it followed right after the absurd movement of the Great Leap Forward, which started at the end of 1957. In the Great Leap Forward the whole nation, including farmers, who gave up planting crops, joined the march to smelt steel to speed up the process of industrialization and catch up with the developed countries. People even destroyed their utensils, such as their cooking pots, for the steel.

So the barns of families and states were almost empty, especially in the countryside of some areas, when the natural disasters occurred. However, it was a little better in the city, and each person had four liang (200 grams) of rice each day, which was available in the national grain shop by coupon. The government advocated using every kind of vegetable to substitute for grain. Finally, when there were not enough vegetables, either, people started to look for anything that was edible, such as the stems of plants, wild vegetables, tree leaves, tree flowers, and sweet potato leaves. Most of the time people thought about food when they woke up. People used “Have you eaten?” to greet each other instead of saying “Hello” because eating was such a big deal at the time. Mostly, the people who had experienced that period treasured food very much. They would hardly throw any food away, even if it was not fresh anymore.

My grandma took on a very important role in the family during this period, even though my mom had already married my father. Many people got swollen bellies due to too many vegetables or improper food. But my grandma was very knowledgeable about what was edible and what would cause health problems. She was a good chef and often gave the family a big surprise—like the bone soup I made for my husband and me after Hurricane Sandy, many years later, in New York City.

Tammie Tai writes, “I’m from Xi’an, China, an ancient city in the northwest, which was the capital of 12 dynasties. I was a financial manager for 10 years in China. I have lived in New York City with my native New Yorker husband for almost three years. In 2014, I will graduate from CUNY’s BMCC with a degree in accounting. In my spare time, I study writing at University Settlement Society, where Michael Hunter is the director of the Adult Literacy Program.”
MY MOTHER NEVER TOLD ME TO RELAX

Writing about Tradition
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I'm a girl, but my mother taught me as a boy. Be brave, be strong, no crying and everything should get better and better. My mother thinks if a girl can learn a variety of specialties it is beneficial for her personality, her growth, and her self-cultivation. So for as long as I can remember, I was always on my way to a different school every weekend; otherwise, I was practicing what I had learned at home. During my childhood, if someone asked me, “What do you like to do?” I would imagine a little girl practicing with her mother who sat by her and taught her. I didn't know what I really liked, because I did only what my mother expected.

When my mother realized that a certain specialty didn't fit me, she would change the class and find another new one for me. Thus, we had been trying dancing class, keyboard class, drawing class, and calligraphy class since my third or fourth birthday. When my mother found that it seemed like nothing fit me, she didn't change the classes anymore. That's why I was learning calligraphy for 12 years. When I reached school age, my nightmare began. Not only did I continue the calligraphy class, but I also had extra math classes and extra English classes out of school. You could never imagine that my book bag was bigger than my upper body.

I was always in a hurry learning anything. My mother always required me to do my best; but in fact, there never was a best for my mother. Generally, the situation was that I tried to reach for a star, but then another totally new star started shining toward me. I knew she thought about me every single minute to wish that my next minute would be better. My mother told me, “Keep trying. Hard work is the whole meaning of your life.” I almost sold my soul to my mother, until I read a short story that made me start to vacillate in believing what my mother told me.

A long time ago, a farmer wanted to relocate to another village. He had no car, no train; his feet were all he had. But the two ways to the village were either across a river or over a mountain. Swimming or climbing was a difficult choice. He saw a tree and made a wood canoe to cross the river. He was happy that he was so smart. He decided to carry it in case there was another river, but it was so heavy. He almost wanted to throw it away several times, but he never did. When he got to the village, there were no rivers he needed to cross. However, he took three
times as long to arrive as he would have if he weren’t carrying the canoe.

Life is a trip, and we cannot predict what will happen to us. Whoever or whatever we meet, we can’t control it or change it, so we should relax. My mother never told me to relax. Life is already so hard; why do we still push ourselves urgently? We fear we can’t achieve the goals of our own or someone else. But should life really be lived so hard? When we are faced with a problem, whether we try our best or not, we’ll probably do fine. We need not wind our minds tightly; perhaps a relatively high wind can get us to the top, or we might fly away, but so what? If we’re unable to rest every day, is this the life we want? So we should relax; there is no need to put pressure on every minute in our lives. We should relax and face the different problems and tests. Just move on, do what we want to do, and enjoy it.

Jia Wei Xu, born in Shanghai, China, came to the U.S. nine months ago. She graduated from university in Shanghai, majoring in finance. She believes in the Chinese proverb “Chance favors the one with a prepared mind.” Recently a student in the advanced writing class at University Settlement Society, she wants to go to the college, find a better job, and integrate into New York City better. The Director of University Settlement’s Adult Literacy Program is Michael Hunter.
Let me first describe my daughter Lisa’s household: her husband (Ron) and her five children (Atara, the eldest girl; Shira & Elana, twin girls; Devora, the next daughter; and Avi, the youngest and her son). All are attending Jewish parochial schools.

Now it’s half an hour before the Sabbath begins. My daughter is yelling: “Devora, turn off the television already! Avi!, you still didn’t take a shower? Shira, close the computer. I swear I’ll cut the wires off! Atara, put the games away!” Atara replies, “Why me? I didn’t play!”

A half-hour later, when my daughter calls, “Time to light the candles,” the children and I come, all dressed for the Sabbath, to hear the blessing of the candles. My son-in-law has left for the synagogue for the evening prayer. It’s amazing what effect the Sabbath has—it’s like magic. The house becomes so serene, everyone calm, smiling, and talkative.

My son-in-law is finally back. We enter the dining room, where the table is beautifully set, with the kiddush cup for wine and two challahs with a special cover.

My son-in-law says the blessing over wine, handing out to everyone a small cup of wine. We go wash our hands, then he says the blessing over the two challahs—everyone gets a piece of this special bread. Now the meal is served: first gefilte fish, then chicken soup, roast chicken, noodle pudding, potato pudding, vegetables, salad, and for dessert my home-baked apple strudel.

After the meal, each of the children gets up to speak—to translate the weekly Torah position that they learned during the week. It’s so emotional for me to watch these innocent faces taking it so seriously. Even my daughter remarks, “I guess my tuition money is not a total waste.”

We say grace after the meal. My daughter calls: “Time to clear the table. No one disappears!”
I wish my husband, Othmari, was still here. He would have been so proud of his family—the family that he built. After he spent so many years in a concentration camp, I guess this is the light at the end of the tunnel.

Erika Bauer, age 82, has three children, 11 grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. She writes: “I was born in Graz, Austria. I came to the United States in 1954 and have lived in Manhattan ever since. I was a seamstress for Saks Fifth Avenue for many years.” At the St. Agnes Learning Center of the New York Public Library, Erika Bauer’s teacher is Sid Araujo, the site advisor.
Are you upset or content?
Are you sad or happy?
Are you feeling good or bad?
You ask me how I am?

I’ll say alhamdo li Allah (thanks to God).
I’m thankful always.
I’m thankful for everything.
Whatever happens—alhamdo li Allah.

Soufiane Cherif El Farissy writes: “I’m 20 years old, born in Casablanca, Morocco. I moved to Brooklyn in 2013, and I’m currently a student at Youth Connections (which is part of Project Reach Youth.) I dedicate this poem to my parents, my teacher Billy Wharton, and every single Muslim in the world. Peace.”
NORMA LETICIA GUTIERREZ

Día De Los Muertos

In Honduras, Día de los Muertos is a day of reflection. All families go together to the cemetery to visit dead relatives. Garlands made out of flowers are taken to them. A candle is lit in their name. This candle is lit for those we miss a lot. We clean their graves. As we clean, we remember why these people were very special to us; and, in some way, we try to keep them alive in our hearts. This celebration is very simple but also very intimate for the family members. Other people also go to church to pray for our loved ones. Those who go to pray do so not only for those who are not with us, but also for the family members who are still alive.
**Feng Shui**

_Feng shui_ is a Chinese word that doesn't exist in English, and you cannot just simply translate it into English as “wind and water”, its literal meaning. In China and some other Asian countries, _feng shui_ is a system of harmonizing human existence with the surrounding environment or nature, and the concept might be new for people who live in Western countries.

There are always some things that cannot be translated. In ancient China, the emperors worshiped dragons and _feng shui_. They thought their power came from God, and they were the representatives of God on earth. The rulers usually began to build their tombs right after they ascended to the throne, and they would send _feng shui_ masters to look for suitable places in order to ensure their regime would last forever. The masters would check the shape of the mountains, hills, valleys, and water formations. The site that had the dragon's energy or breath was considered an auspicious place to build the tomb.

Nowadays, we use different colors when we decorate our house, and color is one of the easiest ways to create good _feng shui_ in your home. There are five _feng shui_ elements—fire, earth, metal, water, and wood. The fire element refers to passion and energy; its correspondent colors are red, strong yellow, orange, purple and pink. If you use these colors in your home office, it will bring supporting energy to your career and help you obtain recognition or success. The earth element means nourishment and stability, and its colors are light yellow, sandy/earthy and light brown. By using earth element colors in your home, you will create a strong, stable and harmonious atmosphere. The metal element represents clarity and precision, and its colors are gray and white. The metal items should be placed in the west, northwest and north corner of your house. The water element brings ease and abundance, and its colors are blue and black. Traditionally, the farthest left corner in the house is considered the wealth spot, and if you put a water element there, such as a small fountain or aquarium, it will attract wealth. The wood element means growth and vitality, and its colors...
are brown and green. You can use wooden items, flowers or plants, even pictures of flowers, to decorate your home; it will bring you financial stability.

Is *feng shui* interesting enough for you to give it a try? Create a good *feng shui* environment at home or in your office, and maybe it will bring you health and a happier life.

Relocated from southwest China to New York a year and a half ago, Kun Yang Tucker loves traveling, movies, and swimming. She says she enjoys life in the U.S. because people here are more tolerant of immigrants, and this country offers more opportunities to newcomers. She wants to improve her English and go to college next year. At the Adult Learning Center of CUNY’s College of Staten Island, her ESOL instructor is Olga Pagieva.
Two noisy women came to King Solomon. He was very smart. The women brought a marriageable young man to him.

One woman screamed, “He has to marry my daughter!”

“No, my daughter!” yelled the second.

The king thought and said, “Bring me the saw. I’ll saw him in half.”

The first woman said, “I agree with you.”

The second thought, “Why do you want to kill an innocent soul?”

King Solomon said, “He will marry the daughter of the first woman. It’s my decision.”

The second woman said, “Why? She wanted to saw him.”

King Solomon said, “She is the real mother-in-law.”

Russian-born Sofiya Shteyman lost her father in the Second World War, and at age seven went to Moscow with her mother. She graduated from the Institute of Communication and worked for many years as an engineer at Central Television. Since 1995, she has lived in New York City. She now studies at FEGS Brooklyn Resource Center, where Ana Lopez-Betancourt is her ESOL teacher and Linda Napolitano is the director. “Life is not easy,” Sofiya Shteyman says. “Sometimes I feel like a pigeon; sometimes I feel like a monument.”
I DO ALL THE HARD WORK, AND I AM STRONG

Writing about Family
FATIMA KANU

I Am the One

I am the one who wakes up at three every morning and goes to work.
I am the one who takes care of the house.
I am the one who picks up the garbage and takes it outside on the sidewalk so that the garbage truck will come and take it away.
I am the one who pays the bills.
I am the one who takes the ladder if the light bulb goes off and I have to change it.
I am the one who cleans the house.
I am the one who does the laundry.
I am the one who brings the money home.
I am the one who fixes things if something breaks.
I am the one who does the cooking.
I am the one who goes to the supermarket and does the grocery shopping.
I am the one who takes the subway every morning to work.
I am the one who walks on the street early in the morning.
I am the one who watches the football game on Sunday afternoon.
I am the one who likes to travel.
I am the one who likes to play music in the house.
I do all the hard work, but I am still strong.
A Note from the Tooth Fairy

My niece has three sons, ages eight, five, and three.

I want to share a story my niece told me about her two oldest boys, Te’yon (aka Te’Te’) age eight, and Tyler, age five. Te’yon recently pulled out his loose tooth. That night, he put his tooth under his pillow for the Tooth Fairy to find. The next morning he received a note from the Tooth Fairy, which read:

“There are too many toys on the floor in your room for me to get to your bed. I am leaving you a few dollars since you are a good boy, but I am not coming back. Save your tooth to remind you to clean your room the next time. Signed, T.F.”

Te’yon’s younger brother, Tyler, was devastated after hearing the Tooth Fairy’s note. Tyler said, “Awww MAN!!! Te’ Te’ really messed it up. Now the Tooth Fairy is not coming back for MY tooth.”

Rosalind Alford is a Brooklyn native who spent part of her childhood in South Carolina. She returned to New York City shortly after high school and has lived in Brooklyn ever since. At age 63, Rosalind Alford intends to “enjoy retired life,” with traveling and sightseeing as her priorities. Glad to have joined the computer class at the New Americans Welcome Center of the Prospect Park YMCA, she calls her instructor, Christine Randall, “great,” and has enrolled in another session. Nabila Khan is the site coordinator.
Hurricane Sandy was a storm that hit New York in October 2012. It destroyed lots of houses around the city. My two-year-old daughter is a hurricane all by herself. She is like Sandy, a force to behold. She destroys everything in the house.

When she comes into the room, the TV shakes. When she takes a bath, the water runs out on the bathroom floor. When she eats her dinner, she splatters spaghetti all over the walls and floor. Red spaghetti sauce runs down the walls, apple juice drips down the table, and it looks like Hurricane Sandy came into my kitchen.

When I take her to the school bus, the matron holds her head and yells to the bus driver, “Prepare yourself, here comes Sandy!”

When my two year old asks me, “Why does everybody call me Sandy?” I simply reply, “Because you were born on the same day that Hurricane Sandy hit New York.”

Born and raised in Guyana, Juliet Parris has lived in the U.S. for 32 years. She attends the Bedford Learning Center of the Brooklyn Public Library, where she studies with Claire Norville and Haniff Toussaint, the educational advisor. Juliet Parris says: “I enjoy writing about my life. I want my children to read my life story.”
“I Need to Powder My Nose”

This is a story about my daughter when she was four years old. This funny story happened in the winter when we and our friends decided to go skiing.

Before skiing, we all went together to a restaurant to have a bite. At that period, Sasha—my daughter—liked to be a princess; she always was wearing a tiara or crown and other “princess stuff.” When we were in the restaurant, after having lunch, she proclaimed loudly that she wanted to go to the restroom and also what she was going to do there. It was not really an appropriate manner or place to say such things. To avoid this kind of faux-pas in the future, I decided to play a game with her. I said that a real princess doesn’t talk about “it” in that way; usually a princess says, “I need to powder my nose” in such cases. Sasha accepted it with pleasure; she liked this version very much.

Then we had a great time skiing. After a while, we were happy and freezing, and we went to the nearest café to have a cup of hot tea. Unfortunately, the restrooms were in another building, so I had asked Sasha several times when we were going toward the café, whether she would like to “powder her nose.” But she assured me that she didn’t want to, so we entered the café.

We took off all her winter stuff, took her out of her winter “space suit” and were beginning to drink our tea when she, with a very worried facial expression, informed us that we should rush because she urgently needed to “powder her nose.” Of course, I mentioned our preceding conversation where she convinced me that she wasn’t going to need it, but we quickly put all our clothes on and moved quickly toward the next building.

Sasha almost ran. She hurried me, and finally she said, “Mom, please run faster, otherwise I will powder my pants right now!”

Born in Russia, Yulia Tsoy lived for about 10 years in Uzbekistan. In the perestroika period, her family had to immigrate back to Russia because it was dangerous in Uzbekistan then. In 2013, she came to New York and “did a 180” in her life. She had many new experiences and learned new skills, especially in English. She says she had the best teachers along the way, including Joshua Stark and Heidi Fischer, and she appreciates everything the Educational Alliance and BMCC classes have done for her—and keep doing.
My grandmother, Satourou Coulibaly, was a very pretty woman in her time. She used to be a remarkable woman in the town where she was born. She was the unique daughter, with nine brothers. When she smiled, you didn’t want her to stop. She had dark, bright skin and was six feet tall. She had long hair down to her shoulders, a round forehead, a nicely shaped big nose and beautiful eyes. Her ears looked almost like an elephant’s ears, we teased her. When she was nine, she started to have her gums tattooed. At age 12, her bottom lip was also tattooed.

Why is it so important to adopt these African traditions? She told me that back in those days, every new generation had to carry on the traditions. Every tribe has its own traditions, and the Bamana people have a strict culture and traditions.

She could not read or write, but was very good at counting money. Since she was five years of age, she was always helping her mother in the kitchen. That’s how she learned many cooking skills. She was a very good chef—even her plain boiled water tasted very good! Satourou has never changed her lifestyle. She is still preserving her culture and traditions in Mali to this day. She is a very kind, respectful, and honest person. She takes pride in herself. She likes to talk too much, and her grandchildren drive her crazy, but she’s happy with that. Her own children cannot do that because with them she becomes very serious. She never wants to stay in one place too long. She is always finding some work to do. She says, “That’s what keeps me living longer.”
People always have their own dreams in childhood. Sometimes dreams are changed or forgotten when people grow up. Sometimes dreams are given up when people encounter difficulty.

Even though I’ve grown up, I still remember my dream clearly. I have never changed or forgotten it. I remember the sentences I spoke to my mother when she cried sadly in front me.

“Don’t cry, Mom. Don’t care about what grandma said. You are my mother. After I grow up, I will make a lot of money, and then buy a big house. There will be a beautiful garden in our house. You will plant trees and flowers. I will water them for you.” Although most parents think children always say things without thinking, my mother has believed that I will make my dream come true someday.

For my dream, I came to New York City this past March. After I packed my luggage, my mother gave me a jade pendant, which I have worn on a red cord around my neck until now. It is a small, flat, opaque, white and green jade carved into the shape of the smiling Buddha. In China, people believe the smiling Buddha will bring joy and luck as well as protect them from unfortunate and evil things. In addition, they hold the love of the people who gave the Buddha. At that time, I didn't ask why my mother gave it to me.

After I moved to New York City, I had to challenge myself and study hard in English. I always told myself: Never give up. Try your best with studying, and then find a promising job to earn money. Your dream will come true after having enough money. Every time I encountered difficulty, the pendant made me remember my dream and my mother. So I have never thought of this pendant as unnecessary jewelry that my mother asked me to wear. I have worn it every day since it came into my possession. It has already become part of my body forever. It has become my own treasure.
Now I am still on my way to my dream. I wondered why my mother gave me the Buddha. So I asked her. She said, “I wish your life to be safe. Someday I will enjoy the pleasure of planting in our own house’s garden.” Then I said, “You are my ‘Buddha’. My dream must come true someday.”

Zutang (Tom) Xu, age 25, was born and raised in China. He came to the U.S. in March 2013, knowing little English. When he wrote this essay, he was a student in the Intermediate 3/4 ESOL class of the Adult Basic Education Program at CUNY’s Borough of Manhattan Community College. His teacher was Julie Weinstein. In January, he moved into a CLIP (CUNY Learning Immersion Program) class. He is interested in pursuing a bachelor’s degree, but he is not yet sure of the focus of his study.
This summer, we didn’t take many photos. I don’t know why, but I’m already sure I will miss them one day. It was always a big pleasure for me to spend time in the library of our country house, sitting on the big, worn leather couch, burying my hands in an old paper box.

At random, I take out several black and white images—from a party, my parents’ wedding, me on my father’s knee, and my sister with her blond braids. I admire the clothes—so nice, so chic. I observe the faces, trying to discover if at that moment they looked happy. On the floor, a cup of hot black tea keeps me in this charming nostalgia.

But it’s impossible to rest and dream for a long time without being disturbed by a noisy and generally disruptive visit. Méliné and Vahram, my beloved three-year-old twins, want to participate, to look at the pictures with Maman.

After trying to discourage them, I give up very quickly—after all, it’s their story, too—and invite them to journey through time with me. Because I don’t want them to look at every photo, I pick a few that might make sense to them. The one, for example, with me and my toy dog, a big yellow one with blue ears. They laugh, and I tell them I might be seven or eight years old on that Christmas night. Behind me, almost 20 people from my French and Armenian family are sitting around the table. I remember my joy, the smells, the profusion of food and drink that provide a feeling of safety. This abundance is not only part of our Armenian culture; in our case, it also seems like revenge for the very hard time my grandmother had during the genocide and after, when she came to France. But for now let’s hide this episode from the kids; it’s too soon to tell them.

Oh, here, look at your grandpa working in the garden of our first small country house. I loved to go there every weekend because of Martine, the farmer’s daughter who lived across the road from our house. We spent our time together running in the fields behind the cows and picking yellow flowers. We also enjoyed eating vanilla cream while listening to LPs from bad fashionable singers. Martine told me the news from the village. We had such pleasure!

Okay, let’s try another one: Me wearing earrings, without my parents’
permission. It was in Rome; I was 18 and Nathalie, my best friend at this time, went with me for two weeks. We laughed so much, felt so light, so free. The future was ours.

This feeling was mine again two years later. You can almost see it in that bad photo in my small studio in Bonn, Germany. I sit down on my bed, smoking a cigarette rolled by myself, young drunken people around me. No, no, no, it's not a good example.

I put that picture back and take out a photo at the Armenian Church in Paris. Papa and I are holding you in our arms, you see? You were so young, so little, even at almost 10 months. It was your baptism—June 25, 2010. They start to ask more details. I remember the date very well because I got married just before.

Our family and friends from all around the world came to this event. I was so impressed that I cried a lot. My husband also cried, I must confess. It was a very moving day, a symbol of happiness, at last, after all we'd gone through. Méliné and Vahram start to move now, to go up and down from the couch.

I understand that it's time to close the old box and go outside. To run in the garden and to tell other stories about nature, which for my little boy and girl seem, I guess, as magical as our family stories.
I lived with my maternal grandmother and grandfather when I was one to six years old. I love them very much, especially my grandma. Her name was Zhang Shi. She married my grandfather when she was 10 years old. She had only one child, my mother.

My grandmother was a very nice, friendly, brave and diligent woman. When I was a little girl, China was very poor. Most families were destitute. There were shortages of all kinds of food, but Grandma still shared our food with relatives, friends and neighbors. She never got angry about anything, and it seemed everything was good. She always smiled at people, so I thought she liked all people around her.

My parents and my grandma lived in different villages that are very close. When I was six years old, I went to school and stayed with my parents on weekdays, but I still stayed with my grandma every weekend and holiday.

When I reached middle school and high school, they were in town, far from my village. I stayed at school on weekdays and some weekends, but on holidays I still stayed with Grandma. Because of education and work, I didn't stay at home most of the time during my teens. Then I got married, and in time I moved farther away from my hometown. I needed to see Grandma if I went back home. I missed her so much when I didn't see her for a long time.

Every time I came to see her, she always cooked food I liked to eat when I was a little girl, such as fried peanuts and braised chicken. Grandma grew the peanuts and bred the chicken herself. That never changed in almost 30 years. It was so simple, but so warm. It was the happiest time for me.

When she was more than 80 years old, she still lived in that village with my grandfather. The last time we saw each other was at my brother's home. She still brought a bag of fried peanuts with her to see us.
Two years ago my dear grandma passed away. I did not see her one last time because I was in America. It is the most regrettable thing in my life. She lives in my heart forever.

Shaomin Wang, age 37, was born and raised in the village of Beibu in the Anhui province of China and immigrated to New York City in 2005. She studies with Joshua Stark in an ESOL class as part of the Lower East Side Literacy Zone, a partnership between the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) and The Educational Alliance.
Not every child is born with blessings. I was born into a poor family. My family had to pay one thousand dollars to the government because the rules of the Chinese government limit each family to only one child, and I was the second. My mother was a teacher in an elementary school, but she got fired when I was born. Meanwhile, my dad was just an apprentice carpenter who didn't earn a lot of money but needed to pay everything for our family. After I was born, my family was even poorer. My parents asked friends to loan them money. We don't have a lot of relatives. Those we have ignored our existence. So, since I was young, I have understood the meaning of money.

During feudal society, most Chinese family elders liked to have a male grandson who could carry their last name. But even though I have a brother, my grandmother didn't like me. She asked my parents to throw me away. In all honesty, I'm glad I have good parents who never gave me up, even when I was really sick.

When I was born, my weight was abnormally low. I was very small, like a little cat. Also, every Chinese newborn baby is pink in color, but I was white. And then the next day I changed to a dark brown color. That's what my mom told me. The family was so shocked about it.

I cried all the time and didn't like to sleep in bed until I was one year old. Therefore, my parents took turns holding me and singing me to sleep. My mother stayed at home to take care of us children and our grandmother, and she also did the housework. Once, when she making noodle soup with one hand, while she held me in her other arm, somehow the soup almost burned me. At that moment, my grandmother just stood aside and looked at her. Fortunately, the woman who lived next door came and told my mother she could help take care of me. It is very sad that this woman treated me better than my own grandmother.

Everything has seemed better, however, since my father decided to move to
the U.S. in 1992. In fact, the dollar was worth more than the yuan at that time. The rest of us got the approval from the Immigration Office in 2004. We chose to move to the U.S. immediately. But during that one month before I moved, Grandmother changed. She brought a cake for me, she took me for a walk, she even sat on the stairs and told me stories about my dad’s childhood, and we got closer. That month was the best month of my life, the first time I felt my grandmother’s love.

After years of hard work, we're accustomed to life here. We got jobs and bought a house and car. We haven't ever borrowed money from anyone. But we have been able to help other relatives who needed help. Yes, that's right: We helped relatives when they needed it, when we were doing better than they were. My mother always taught us if people are bad to you, you need to forgive them, because they don't have an obligation to be good to you. But you need to be grateful to people who treat you well.
Everyone is surprised to learn that the potato was originally developed in South America, in the area now known as Peru. There are more kinds of potatoes in Peru than anywhere else: more than 2,300 different types. Spanish conquistadors brought potatoes to Europe more than 400 years ago, where they grew in popularity to the point where they are now a major staple of the world’s food supply. The potato (in Spanish, *papa*) was an essential food during the Incan Empire (approximately 1400 AD). Nowadays, Peruvians still use potatoes as an essential ingredient in their cuisine.

I suddenly think of a traditional savory food made with potatoes that makes me remember my sunny Sundays in Peru, where I spent my childhood. An image permeates my mind. It is a food that evokes a calm home, sincere love from my mother, and how simple my life used to be—*causa*.

*Causa* is my all-time favorite food. It is a traditional Peruvian food made with *Papa Amarilla*. They are different from the potatoes used in home fries. They are small and round, like baseballs, with a dark yellow core that is delicious. *Causa* is prepared with peeled and sautéed traditional Peruvian yellow chili peppers called *Aji Amarillo*, blended with oil, garlic, and lemon juice. After that, it is mixed with mashed potatoes, and shaped into a square. Then, it is covered with a layer of chicken with mayonnaise, and it is shaped with one more layer of mashed potatoes. Finally, it is garnished with hard-boiled eggs, parsley leaves and olive halves. The result looks like a shining small piece of heaven where the ancient Peruvian Inca Gods used to live.

It seems strange to me to feel nostalgic about a food my mother used to prepare for me because she was not a good cook. However, she was completely capable of making this food with exceptional talent. I still remember how happy I was every time I waited for a piece of *causa* just made at home.

While my siblings and I were still sleeping, my mother would get up early to buy all the ingredients needed to start the preparation. I still remember the
sounds from the kitchen while my eyes remained closed some Sunday mornings, as I started to wake up. Straightaway after I woke up, I used to run to the kitchen and make a joke, like, “What are you playing?” And her reply would be a smile, saying that she was making my favorite food. She used to prepare this food on Sundays because my siblings and I were available to eat at home on weekends, and she also preferred to make it in the warmer seasons of the year when the sun was shining hard.

Every sunny Sunday in New York makes me remember causa, the culture where I come from and the stunning smile of my mother during my childhood. Recently, I have tried to prepare causa, but unfortunately I did not find some ingredients, and I didn’t use the exact amount of others. The result looked messy, and the taste was very different. Maybe when I go to visit my mother, I will taste the flavor of my childhood again.
I CARED FOR A THOUSAND COWS

Writing about Nature
On January 16, 2010, I arrived in Perth, Western Australia. I came to the country with a Working Holiday visa. I wanted to travel and work, and I liked the opportunities available in Australia.

My first jobs were picking grapes and making sausages. In September 2010, I got a job at a dairy farm. Working on a farm is very hard, and the hours are long. We started work at 4 a.m., and worked between 10 and 17 hours per day, with a few hours break in the middle. The job was very hard emotionally. This dairy farm doesn’t raise bulls, so the bulls must be killed after birth. My boss and co-workers realized that I would be sad if I knew when they did this. They knew I cried when a cow got sick or anything bad happened to it, so they did this part of the job. They would always have me work at a different part of the farm, or wait until I was off to do this, so I wouldn’t witness it. Another part of the job is separating the babies from their mothers. Often, we would do this when we did round-up for milking. Most of the time my co-workers did this, and when they arrived for milking, I would take over. The main part of my job was milking. The cows don’t like to get milked the way humans do it. When cows get sick, injured, produce bad milk or not enough milk, or get old, they may be sold or killed.

I yelled, “BABY,” and she turned to us and mooed.

For all the bad parts of the job, there were more good parts. The first good part was good pay. I also liked getting free milk. I enjoy working with nature. When you work on a farm, you make a healthy product that people enjoy. The best part was helping keep the cows healthy. It gave me a great feeling of achievement. I took care of more than a thousand cows and milked them twice a day. Also, when the new calves were born, I taught them how to eat.

There was one cow that was more special than all the rest. Her name is Baby 442. After working on the farm a few months, I noticed one cow stopped and looked at me several days in a row. Most cows kick you or run away if you approach them. I went up to this cow that kept looking at me, and I touched her.
She liked it, so I pet her. I could do things with her that no other cow would let me do. I could even kiss her. Sometimes she would kiss me back. She wouldn't let other people do the things that she let me do. One time I was talking with my boss's wife, Di, and we saw a group of about 20 cows about 60 meters away. I pointed at one: “That cow over there is Baby 442.” Di asked, “How do you know that?” So I yelled, “Baby,” and she stopped walking, turned to us and mooed. Di was very surprised and said, “Oh my God, it’s Taiwanese magic.” I love my cow very much. She always brings me happiness. She will always be special to me, and I always think of her. Baby 442 is six years old; her birthday is November 23rd.

I worked on the farm for 15 months, until my visa expired. When I worked there Baby 442 would show up early to meet me, but one of my co-workers told me that after I left she stopped showing up early. I left the farm at the end of February 2012, and went back to Taiwan. I traveled to New York for three months, and I bought a stuffed Baby 442 from Build a Bear. Stuffed Baby 442 traveled with me back to Australia. We went to the farm, but we couldn’t find my cow. My cow was pregnant, and pregnant cows can roam a large area after they stop giving milk until the baby is born. The area is too large to find each cow. I felt very sad, and I cried. I promised myself I would try to visit her again. I got my stuffed Baby 442 an ear tag with the number 442 on it.

When I left Australia, I went back to Taiwan, and then I came back to New York. My stuffed Baby 442 has traveled the world with me.

Born in Tapei, Taiwan, in 1983, Michelle Tsai moved to New York City in September 2012. She now studies with Joan Benham at the Aguilar Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. Michelle Tsai loves animals and wants to help them. She plans to go to veterinary school in this country and become a veterinarian. To the delight of the LR12 team, she brought photos of her favorite cows to the photo shoot.
Time stops during a scene on TV. An adult elephant is lying on the ground without any movement. A small creature is running back and forth surrounding her; he is so panicky that he hits everything in front of him. I’m that little creature, a little elephant.

I have just been in this world for two months, and everything is new and exciting to me. However, during what just happened, my fear was welling up instinctively, even though I didn't quite understand why. When my mom and I were having lunch, we were chased by some strange little creatures that had only two feet touching the ground. How could they run so fast with only two feet? My mom was hurt, I realized, when she fell down after a short distance, with a wound on her back. Driven by fear from my deep soul, I could not help but run away, even though I desired to check on her. But just for a moment, I turned back, and I could see those little things were surrounding my mom. Threat and sadness stopped my imagination as I noticed the cruelty that was happening to my mom.

That is the last picture for me of my mom, her watering eyes staring at me, struggling to stay open. I knew she was trying to tell me more stories, but she couldn’t. When her eyes closed, I felt the world shut down at the same time. I couldn’t see anything in front of me because of my tears. I didn’t know what I should do.

My mom was lying behind me, which made me feel that she would stand up and hug me a couple minutes later. As time went on, and the two-footed creatures left, I felt tired and returned to lie next to her. The sun was still warm, but it could not warm up my heart. When with time I realized that hope was gone, my brain was blank. What should I do? Mom couldn’t tell me.

I dragged myself to my feet again. I felt that I should do something, even though I didn’t know what. I lingered around there without any purpose. Suddenly, I saw the little two-footed creatures again. I ran away without thinking. Oddly, the creatures left. I stopped running, but I just stayed still without a thought in
Hunger and thirst are always the most powerful enemies in nature. Mom always told me this. Now I realized it is true. I felt I could not move as usual. But I stood still, because my mom also told me, “When you lie down, you can never stand.” Because of my mother's words, I did not lie down, and I survived.

Stephen Wang writes: “I'm 33 years old. I was born in southern China, and I graduated from college there. I have lived in New York City since I was 29, studying English by myself and for three years at University Settlement. Time streams through me when I realize this. I taste the flavor, which is sometimes bitter or sour, and sometimes sweet, and I am grateful for the growth.” At University Settlement, Michael Hunter is the director of the Adult Literacy Program.
When Winter Comes

When winter comes I’ll be ready to embrace whatever Mother Nature throws at me. Come snowstorm, freezing rain, hail, or chilly winds, I’ll be ready. I have already stocked up on coffee, cocoa, ginger biscuits, cans of soup, and a few bottles of red wine to warm my heart. I have already selected my favorite kinds of music, like Marvin Gaye’s “Let’s Get It On,” and Barry White’s “Practice What You Preach.” My winter coats, scarves, and gloves are all hung up, waiting to be worn. My winter boots and socks are brand new, just waiting for winter to show up. So when winter comes, I’ll be ready.
Welcome to My Country

If you were a bird flying over my country, Chile, you could see the waves in a dark blue sea filled with fish and marine life.

If you were starting your trip flying north to south, you would see the desert with its incredible brown, gray, and red mountains, and if you went to the highest hill you would see the geysers spouting water high into the air. You could also see the most wonderful cactus plants, such as *copiapoa* and *opuntia*, species you could not see in any other place in the world. If you got lucky, you would see the desert covered with flowers—but that only happens every four or five years. Every year for just a few weeks, the mountains turn glorious colors—orange, purple, yellow and red.

After a few days flying you would get to Santiago, the capital, a pitiful city, polluted and overcrowded, but with gentle and welcoming people. You would love the Andes, a magnificent mountain chain always covered with snow.

Later, you would continue your flight over what will surely be your favorite part of the trip, the south of Chile, a green and endless rain forest filled with vegetation and all sorts of animal life. You could rest on the edge of a lake or take a hot bath in thermal waters surrounded by trees (but be careful the water is not too hot or you’ll injure your wings!). You could fly from one island to another, taking deep breaths of the pure air. Welcome to my country, and let’s fly.

Camila Lara studies at the Aguilas Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. Elaine Sohn is the site advisor. Camila Lara writes: “I’m 26 years old, and I was born in Santiago, Chile. I have been in New York City for 18 months. I love watercolor and oil painting and spending my time in nature.”
I never participated in any volunteer work when I first immigrated to the U.S. In my opinion, time is valuable; time is money. I treasure my time. I'd rather watch TV or search a website at home than hang around outside or go window shopping. Volunteering is a good thing, but I spent my time otherwise. About 10 years ago, a manager of a nonprofit organization said he adored my smiling face and asked me to be a volunteer at a reception. With my smiling face, I couldn't say no. I said that if they paid me, I would smile more.

Year after year, this past decade, I have been touched by countless volunteers. They work in hospitals, libraries, senior centers... any place that has events or activities. In fact, the volunteers have an important place in our lives. They are enthusiastic, sincere, and devote their valuable time and love to help others.

I experienced Superstorm Sandy in October 2012. Parts of New York City suffered serious damage. About one-fourth of the area had power failure. Most stores were closed. The streets were desolate. Only volunteers were active. They withstood strong winds to deliver relief supplies. In New York City’s Chinatown, I saw many volunteers working in Confucius Plaza. They ran up to the 44th floor to bring food, water and warmth to the residents. It lasted for days. I was touched by their sincerity. I joined their team resolutely.

My sister Cindy’s house was in a heavy disaster area, Atlantic City, New Jersey. Her house was damaged a lot. A group named “Atlantic City Long-Term Recovery Group,” volunteers from other states, came. They spent two months helping Cindy fix up her house. Builder Brendan Mackey is from California. He told me: “I have not gone back to my hometown for seven months, since that hateful Sandy happened.” What an American volunteer. How great!
Now, I am a volunteer serving in the Visiting Nurse Service of New York and TimeBanksNYC, where members exchange skills and services with other members. If someone asks me to volunteer doing something, I smile and say, “Yes, I will!”

Born in China, 64-year-old Shu Zhang has lived in the U.S. for 20 years. She studies at the Seward Park Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. Her tutor is Liliana Montano and the site advisor is Terry Sheehan. Shu Zhang writes: “I like to learn English at the Adult Learning Center. Here, I can read more and learn more. My tutor teaches me a lot of things.”
EXISTENCE WASHED AWAY

Writing about Extreme Experiences

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JULES PHILLIPS

New Orleans: Katrina

Angola. Country? Or Prison? Inmates picking cotton, growing crops, doing farm work. Slavery by another name. My father was locked up there, my uncles were locked up there, my great-grandfather was locked up there, and one of my uncles is still there. Katrina was no different. We felt like caged animals. Water. People's lives, homes, existence washed away. That's how we feel as people from New Orleans.

Before I knew Hurricane Katrina was coming, it was hot. I was playing baseball. After the baseball game was over, I went into the crib to get some water, take a break. As soon as I walked in the crib and closed the door, my mother came right behind. She ran in talking about having to pack: “There's a hurricane coming!” I went to my room, started to pack my stuff. When I was done packing, I went to the window to look outside. I could see the daylight turning dark. Then everyone took a turn in the shower before getting dressed. I was the last to get in the shower. I came out the bathroom, and I opened the door. I could hear the water brushing against the carpet downstairs. I went to my mother's room, where everyone else was, my sister and brother and my mother. She told me to get dressed and to get on top of the dresser. My sister and brother were on the bed, my mother and I on the dresser. We were just sitting there for hours and hours until it got dark.

Night time. The water was halfway up the stairs. I slept on top of the dresser. The next morning, I woke up to see my mother's room halfway under water. I woke up my mother and sister and brother. My mother was saying we had to leave. She opened the window, and we climbed out the window onto a ledge.

We waited until the water rose so that we could reach the roof. Then we got onto the roof, and we sat for a while. I knew it was something big, because the water had never gotten that high before.

My mother had a backpack with canned goods, noodles and a couple of bottles of water. My mom started opening canned goods so we could eat. She gave
me and my sister and brother each a canned good and two bottles of water to split because we didn't have that much water. Time went by, and it started to get dark again, but this time it was different from last night, because I heard gun shots and saw them. I heard kids yelling, women yelling. It was pitch black dark because now the water knocked out all the electricity. I was up there for two days. The water kept rising, but once it got to the roof of our two-story house, it stopped. I could see other families on their roofs.

At night, once we started hearing the gunshots, my mom took a sheet from her bag, and put the sheet over our backpack to hide it so other people couldn't see we had food. I started to see dead animals floating in the water, dead people floating. Also, I started to see people floating on mattresses, refrigerators, anything they could hold onto. Earlier the next morning, four or five a.m., a boat drove up to the roof, filled with five people, five guys. They stopped in front of my building. They started to look around the roof to see if people had any food or guns. The four guys on the boat all had guns. Two of the guys got off the boat and jumped onto our roof. Then they started walking towards us. I didn't know what was going to happen. Once they got to us, they all just looked around us to see what we had around us.

I thought we were about to die. One of the guys said, “Just leave them; she’s with her three kids.” So they got back on the boat and drove off. Time went by. It was 12:30 or 1 a.m. I heard a male voice yelling “India, Alvin, Jules, Latrice”—screaming our names. As the voice got louder, I could see a boat turning a corner. My father was in it. He pulled up to the roof and asked if we were okay. Then he told us to get in the boat. I noticed there were multiple canned goods, multiple bottles of water, and two guns. We rode off with them. My father explained to me that he was on the roof for the first two nights until this morning, when he saw a boat just rolled by his home with no one in it. He grabbed it and found a piece of wood to row with.

He told us we had to go downtown to a higher point in New Orleans, maybe to the bridges of the Superdome. As we were riding downtown, I started to see things were getting worse. I saw more people on roofs. I heard more kids crying. More ladies crying. I saw some people just swimming through the waters. I even saw alligators, some dead, some alive. I remember as I was riding the boat, I kept leaning over the side, looking at the water. The only thing I can remember about
the water is it was pitch black and it had an oily look to it because gasoline was in it. We drove downtown. There was part of a bridge. The water was halfway up the bridge, so my father rode us halfway up the bridge and dropped us off so we could walk to the Superdome where everyone else was.

Once everyone got outside, screaming for food and water, I could see big crates, huge crates dropping out of the air from helicopters. Each crate was filled with army packaged food, water bottles. People started to take food, but it wasn’t enough.

These are some of the daily things that we as people from New Orleans go through, even without a hurricane. Lack of food, lack of safety—we are a forgotten people.

Jules Phillips studies at the Fortune Society’s Education Center with teacher John Kefalas. A native of New Orleans, Louisiana, Jules Phillips has moved all over the country, including Texas, then New York City, as a result of Hurricane Katrina. He is the father of two and a talented chef, who has interned as a farmer at the Urban Rebuilding Initiative in the Bronx. He says he loves to talk about politics.
Part 1: A Good Friend of the Family

Many, many years ago during the regime of the Khmer Rouge, my family and I had the most miserable four years of our lives. We suffered from hunger and lack of freedom. Cambodia only has two seasons, dry and rainy. It seemed like every rainy season we had to suffer from lack of rice. The government gave us only one cup of rice a day, for my family of seven people. My parents were very weak and sick because they ate so little to save the food for us.

At that time, tobacco was very precious. Luckily, one of my father’s friends who lived near our village had a better life than we did because he had never left his hometown and had access to tobacco. He took his tobacco and exchanged it for rice for us. When I saw him bringing us the rice, I wanted to cry.

Part 2: Leaving Home

In the summer of 1979, after the Vietnamese soldiers conquered Cambodia, my family eventually left my hometown for Vietnam.

We didn’t have passports or papers. My father paid ounces of gold to a Vietnamese person to bring us across the frontier. It would be dangerous if we were caught. He told us to dress like the Vietnamese and not to talk to each other in Chinese on the way. We hid in a cottage during daytime and walked at night. While we started our journey at night, we were told to follow the Vietnamese person’s pace. We couldn’t go wherever we wanted because the war had just ended, and there were mines everywhere. Many people became handicapped at that time, while crossing the frontier.

We ultimately arrived safely in Vietnam. Thinking back on my experience, I feel lucky.

Erica Ong was born in Cambodia, under dangerous political circumstances. She eventually moved to the U.S., married, and raised her children. Growing up in an unsafe time and place made her appreciate what she now has in life. She feels lucky to have a nice, loving family. She also likes taking English and computer classes at the Lutheran Family Support Center with instructor Caitlyn Conefry.
At the beginning of September, I got a letter from my sons’ school. It said that we had to check our children’s heads because one kid in school had lice. Fortunately, I did not find any in my two sons’ heads. Who wants to see lice? Nobody! Those insects are not welcome on our heads. But thanks to lice, I am here today. How is this possible? I have to step back in time.

During the Soviet and Nazi invasions of Poland during World War II, life throughout Poland was very difficult. First the Soviets, and later the Nazis were killing people—Polish intellectuals, Jews, members of the Polish underground, and ordinary people. Many of my grandma’s family members and friends were grabbed from the street and sent to a concentration camp. People were hungry. But the stores were not for “Poles, Jews, or dogs,” as it was written everywhere. My grandma was a young, pretty woman. She lived in the city of Lvov, where many young people lived. But how could you survive if you were not a German? She needed a special ID called a *Volkslist* to be able to walk on the street. She needed work to get food.

One day, somebody told her about a Polish biologist, Professor Rudolf Weigl from the Weigl Institute in Lvov. He was the inventor of the first vaccine against typhus, which had been epidemic. The professor employed and protected about a thousand people who worked in his Institute. The Soviets and then the Nazis let him work, but he had to provide vaccines for the army. He also smuggled vaccines into ghettos and concentration camps. Work was one of the strategies Rudolf Weigl used to survive that terrible time. My grandma started to work for him. She was able to get a *Volkslist* and food. When the Nazis saw her ID and where she worked, they didn’t even want to touch her. They were completely disgusted and just let her go.

Why was this? It was because my grandma worked as a lice feeder. She fed lice her own blood. She let them suck on her leg through the small screen
of specially constructed small wooden boxes. She had to feed around 400 to 800 lice on each leg per session. One day she showed me the exact spot on her thighs. It’s hard to believe, but at the time she was happy with the work because she could help her family. And because of her sacrifice, she was able to survive the war.

A native of Gdansk, Poland, Joanna Zygmanska has lived in New York City since 2002. She studies at the New York Public Library’s St. George Adult Learning Center, on Staten Island. Geniene Monterrosa, the literacy assistant, is her teacher. Married with two sons, Joanna Zygmanska’s goal is to have her Polish master’s degree in social work evaluated, so she can finally utilize it here in the U.S. She also published an essay in LR11.
Born in Sierra Leone, West Africa, in 1958, Umu Bah came to the U.S. in January 2011. She now lives with her daughter and son-in-law and helps her daughter take care of her small children. “My daughter has been very kind and loving,” she says. “My aim is to learn English so I can start working. I am willing to work hard and be independent.” Umu Bah studies at the St. George Adult Learning Center of the New York Public Library. Her teacher is Geniene Monterrosa, the literacy assistant.

UMU BAH

The War in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, on January 26th, 1998, I was living with my two daughters and my son when the rebels entered the city. They came with swords, guns, and knives. They came to kill people. Everybody stayed indoors for a week. The rebels were walking outside. They broke into stores and houses. When they found people in the stores and houses or even outside, they killed them. I saw my children and wondered how I would save their lives. I looked at the floor, the sky, and my belly. I couldn’t keep them anywhere. I felt sad and left things up to God.

Then the Guinean and Liberian soldiers came and helped us. They fought the rebels, who ran away to the forest for three days. Then they came back. They cut off hands and breasts and burned houses, including mine. I saw this with my own two eyes. Some of us ran, including me and my children. God helped us and showed us the way to escape. We didn’t know the way, but God saved us and showed us. We ran for two days. We ended up at the safe house that God led us to.

Now I am in America, living with my family. I am alive to tell this story. I thank God a lot. I will never forget this experience, not ever until I die.
JOAN ALLEN

The Tool Box Terrorist—in Poetry and Prose

Forgotten at Journal Square
B60 bus stop
A blue unattended tool box
Raised the suspicion
Of a terrorist attack

When we went back to retrieve the box
It was under tight scrutiny
By the New Jersey cops
And Azimuth Team
On red alert
All buses and commuters
Were stopped, barred
From entering the terminal

In an unfamiliar spot
We were surrounded by cops
Who perceived us as black evil
When I was asked to name
The color of a tool in the box
As proof of contents
My memory went blank
But the owner of the box
Gave the cops
The answer

Slowly an officer
Opened the box
Revealing the tools
We were given the green light
Free to leave
With the tool box
When I accompanied my beloved friend to his work in New Jersey, we traveled on the PATH train. I held his blue tool box in one hand. We hustled through the crowded Journal Square to the B60 bus terminal. While I went off to the restroom, I gave the tool box to my friend, and he waited for me. We got aboard the bus, and in no time we arrived at our destination.

“Where is my tool box?” my friend turned to me and asked.

“You don’t have it?” I responded, realizing that we had forgotten it at Journal Square. My heart beat faster than usual as I feared losing the tool box.

Quickly, he said, “Let’s take a cab to Journal Square.” Off we went. We arrived there and found the bus terminal swarming with New Jersey police officers and the bomb squad. We exited the cab and started walking toward the place where we left the box.

An officer approached and said, “No one is allowed in here.”

I said to the officer, “We forgot our tool box.” The officer looked at us in disbelief, as his facial expression said, Are you for real? We all walked and stood around the box. The buses were prevented from entering the terminal as a measure of precaution because they thought the situation could be an act of terrorism. Someone must have alerted their attention to the box being there unattended.

I have never had such close contact with police in all my life, except for having a policeman for a neighbor back home in the Islands. When an officer needed proof of contents and asked me to name the color of a tool in the box, I couldn’t remember a single color of any tool in the box that I knew by name. My friend and the owner of the box was the one who told them the color of his pliers. I guess by this time they felt somewhat more at ease. An officer slowly opened the box, and they saw the tools. They handed the tools over to us.

Boy, were we happy to reunite with that blue tool box! The box was safer than we were. It was being heavily guarded by New Jersey police officers.

Joan Allen, born in Kingston, Jamaica, moved to the U.S. in 2002, and now lives in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn. A student at the Brooklyn Adult Learning Center, she also published a poem in LR11. Teacher Jay Rasin-Waters submitted her writing both years. Joan Allen writes: “Through reading the work of Langston Hughes in class, I developed my passion for writing poetry.” She says she shares with Hughes a positive and humanistic outlook on life and writing. Poetry is now her favorite pastime.
This story happened a long time ago when my daughter was in middle school. I used to prepare her lunch bag, and every day I put in a surprise like a piece of cake, some candies, or marshmallows. One day I asked her, “Did you like the surprise?” and she answered, “What surprise? I didn’t find anything.” Another day came and I asked again, “Did you like the surprise?” and she answered the same. At that moment we figured out somebody was stealing her snack, and we said we would find out who was taking it.

The next day, I prepared her lunch like every day, except that day the surprise was “Hot Marshmallows.” I took a hypodermic needle, and I put a very hot sauce inside, and that way she found out who was stealing her lunch.

After that, the girl who took the lunch went to talk with the teacher and gave her a complaint about it. The teacher brought them to the principal, and she asked my daughter, “Why did you do that?” My daughter answered, “I didn’t do anything. My mother knows I like ‘Hot Marshmallows.”’

After that incident, nobody touched her lunch bag.

Ana Duran was born in the Dominican Republic and came to the U.S. in 1995. She writes, “I didn’t know any English, but I said if I was going to live in this country I had to learn. When you have a dream, you have to follow it, and the only limits are those you put on yourself.” Ana Duran studies with Jay Klokker at the Adult Learning Center of the New York City College of Technology. When she brought food to the class party, she laughingly promised, “No hot marshmallows!”
This is a story about a hand.

This story took place at the PATH station during rush hour, but it happened to me many years ago and a few times before that. Twice more, to be specific.

The first time I met the hand was in an operating room at the age of 14. It was during a simple surgery. I remember the faces of doctors and nurses surrounding me. I was nervous, but I didn't realize it until one of those nurses gently took my hand. The second time was again in an operating room, but on this occasion I was giving birth. Another nurse's hand came to my rescue, taking mine in a simple, strong, powerful, and primitive instinct of protection. Those relatively ordinary procedures were simple and short, but I always remember the sensation of security that those hands gave me.

I didn't realize exactly when I became surrounded by so many people on the PATH train. I was self-absorbed, thinking a lot and at the same time about nothing, when I suddenly felt the pressure of many people struggling to breathe at the same time. I was standing and leaning on a seat close to the door. Crowds steal identities, drown peculiarities, and disguise humanity, so I couldn't see to identify faces on that train.

It was imaginary, of course, but somehow, I felt like everyone wanted to steal the air from me. The sensation became worse. Suddenly, I felt weak and started to see tiny, white, bright dots in front my eyes. I felt a strong pressure in my chest while thoughts of death appeared in my head in a swift and scary dance. I was fainting.

But as I was still learning English, my concern was trying to explain to any of those strangers how I felt. I was embarrassed that someone might ask me how I felt because I didn't even know how to say, “Me estoy desmayando” in English. Thank God my face was pale enough to speak for itself.

“Are you okay?” asked a male voice.

“NO,” was my trembling answer.
“No,” was my trembling answer.

“Get down,” he whispered to me.

The hand appeared in the shape of this male voice. I squatted on the floor, and I held his hand. An unnoticed hand. A regular hand. A strange hand. And I was there: scared and alone, losing control of my beaten body in a city that I barely knew and which didn’t know me either. Sweating. Alone.

I held that hand so much that I was squeezing it. I hung onto that hand with fierceness, like the trapped rat that is perfectly able to attack a cat in order to survive, with nothing to lose, with so much to gain. That hand became familiar and warm in the most unexpected way, holding me, steadily, firmly, strongly. At that moment, I felt that that unknown hand had become my mother, my father, my child, my lover, and all of them together. That hand was my rope to life, my connection to earth, my umbilical cord that invited me to suck in life’s fire, pulling me towards it, and bringing me back to the safest place in the world.

After a moment of silent, quiet, and perfect communication, my heart was alive, and his hand was still there. The fierceness, the anxiety, and the fear yielded to a pure sensation of gratitude. And at that moment, I understood that gratitude is one of the purest feelings anyone can ever experience. And I stood up slowly, feeling much better, indeed.

During all those moments, I felt I was dying. And the beautiful thing was that those hands helped me. Those hands were a contact to a human being and were the humanity that saved me in many ways.

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Graziella Peri-Wieder, age 42, comes from Caracas, Venezuela, where she worked in marketing research. She has been in the U.S. for a year and seven months, and now lives with her husband and their daughter in Hoboken, New Jersey. She studies at the International Center of the Catholic Charities Community Services. Elaine Roberts, director of immigrant support programs, submitted her work for publication in LR12.
Dear Villain,

You made me believe you were the cure for my every kind of pain. I had you wrapped around me while I let you take control of my life. At that time, I didn’t know who or what you turned me into. But you made it impossible to get through days without you. You made me feel so sick that I was helpless, not knowing what to do.

I started doing the things I swore I would never do—lying to and cheating the people who meant everything to me. Before I knew it, everyone I loved saw this side of me that was hurting them inside. Every time they questioned me, I did what you taught me to do—lie.

You had me convinced that throughout my life you were determined to stay and that I did not have the option of turning and walking away from you. I wanted to let you go and get you out of my life. I was so scared to tell someone, imagining what they would think of me. I didn’t want to be judged. It was a decision I would have to make, but I’ve wasted so much time—22 years of my life. It was a little too late, or so I thought.

Being put in jail was the final straw, but it also gave me a feeling of relief, knowing that I could not get to you.

It was a struggle but a worthwhile fight because now I have my life back. You are out of my life! Being sober turned me into the person I’ve always wanted to be and that I knew I could be. This was the one day that you were praying I would never see.

Now I am doing the good things I never imagined possible. And I can proudly say that I am doing it all without you.

Sincerely,
Juan
I CAN WRITE MY NAME

Writing about Learning
Afam Ibeneme
REFLECTIONS ON EQUALITY

Shaojuan Wang
WORDS DEEP IN MY SOUL

Sydney Parkes
SOMEONE WHO CHANGED MY LIFE AND DOESN'T KNOW IT

Yasmine Soofi
(SUPPORT + ENCOURAGEMENT) x HARD WORK = SUCCESS

Rosa Delgado
A FAMILY ON A BOAT

Terry Lee
EDUCATION

Amina Tiiti
I’LL CATCH YOU

Vitaliy Krylov
MY MOUNTAINEERING COACH IN UZBEKISTAN
Sanday Jawara, age 36, has lived in the U.S. for 17 years. In her native Gambia, she did not go to school or learn to read and write. She says it bothered her a lot that she could not help her three daughters and three sons with their homework. Now she is so happy because she has learned to read and write a little, and she wants to continue learning. She studies at the New York Public Library’s Bronx Library Center, where Sarah Horton is the ESOL site advisor.

SANDAY JAWARA

Now

I can write my name.
I can write my phone number.
I can write my daughter’s name.
Reflections on Equality

There is a saying that everyone is entitled to his or her own opinions. That works, but not all the time. There is nothing wrong in someone having a vision or holding a strong point of view, but with my experience I have come to realize that the only thing permanent is change.

I come from Nigeria, where men work diligently outside the home to provide for their families, and women are responsible for the children and are made to take care of the family inside the home. In church, we were told that women should not utter a word at the gathering; rather, if there is something that is unclear to her, she should wait until she returns to her home where she can ask her husband to explain. In my society, women who attended school were tagged as prostitutes.

As a young man growing up, I was made to understand life like this. Though I felt some nagging doubts begin to develop somewhere inside me, I could not articulate them. I continued to grow until I was offered the opportunity to travel out of the country. My view of the world widened, and my view of women’s roles in it; and as I have continued to grow, I have come to see the many women who are working hard to build the world in so many ways.

As I was watching the memorial service for Nelson Mandela, I saw Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, and Oprah Winfrey all gathered together. I began to wonder where the mentality of so many people in my home country comes from. Angela Merkel is a politician, a scientist, and a religious leader. She is the first woman to be elected as Chancellor of Germany, the first woman to lead the Christian Democratic Union, and only last year was named one of Forbes’ “Most Powerful People in the World.” Hillary Clinton was arguably one of the three most important people in America until she resigned as Secretary of State only last year, and is now likely gearing up to contend for the presidency come 2016. Oprah Winfrey seems to be the global queen of the entertainment industry. And in the churches I've attended, I see so many women being used by God to preach the gospel, even more than men.
In conclusion, my life and opinions have greatly changed since I left my first home to come to America. I have come to understand that beliefs and opinions arise in a certain time and place, and we need to be open to new ways of doing and understanding. Pope Francis said that the church has abandoned the cause of following the word and continues to follow the doctrine, and the body of the church is suffering because of it. He said, “We need great freedom, no discrimination, no demagoguery and a lot of love.” As I watched the memorial for Nelson Mandela, who fought for the recognition of all human beings as equals, and continued to believe that we could all work together despite all odds and adversity, I felt one of those old doubts that had been nagging at me come to the surface. I know now that the belief that all people are created equal does not mean “all men,” and I have come to the knowledge that men and woman are created equal and can work together. If we want to move towards a more just world, there is no other option.

Afan Ibeneme came from Nigeria, West Africa. He is 42 years old and is married with three children. He has lived in Brooklyn since coming to the U.S. in 2004. He studies with Jill Siegel at the Turning Point Educational Center in Brooklyn.
A weather-beaten face appeared in my mind while I was sitting on an airplane, peering at the clouds and blue sky through the window. Her words echoed in my ears, “Be brave and strong to face your future life in a new country. A brave person is not someone who does not feel afraid, but someone who conquers their fear.” The words were from my grandmother, my personal hero.

My grandmother was born in 1927 and is still living in China today. She is from a wealthy family from a small village in Guangdong province. She married my grandfather, who was a poor servant in her home. Her family had opposed their marriage, but she ignored them. She insisted Grandfather would be her source of happiness.

After their sixth child was born, my grandfather tragically lost his right leg in a traffic accident. My grandmother was a mere 29 years old. She was a stay-at-home housewife. The burden of supporting their family suddenly fell on her shoulders. She felt helpless, but she stayed strong and optimistic. She learned from her neighbor to fish for a living. She worked hard every day, caught fish by herself, and sold them to support all six children through high school.

My grandmother told me this story before I immigrated to the United States. She told me to always look ahead, to be positive, and to never give up. Her words remind me of Nelson Mandela’s famous quote, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.”
SYDNEY PARKES

Someone Who Changed My Life and Doesn’t Know It

My daughter Jennica is in Jamaica. She is a good daughter. I love her so much. I want to send some clothes for her and her child and send some money to make them happy, but I can’t afford it. One Sunday evening I was sitting under a tree in front of my house. I was sad, and my evening was blue. There came this lady walking by. She stopped, smiled, and asked me if I was okay, and I said “Yes!”

She looked in my eyes and said, “Here is a book of encouraging quotes.”

I opened the book, and I read the first quote: “Sometimes when I say I am okay I’m really not, but I just need someone to look in my eyes and tell me that I am okay.”

After that day, I didn’t see that lady again. She changed my life completely, and she doesn’t even know it. Now, I understand and accept all my feelings better.
(Support + Encouragement) x Hard Work = Success

I used to live where girls couldn’t finish their education. They used to quit school at the fifth or sixth grade or earlier. There were just two schools in our sub-district (sub-districts have different villages). One of the schools was close to where I used to live, but the other school was far. In my country the girls study in a separate school if it is available, but at that time there were just the two schools, so the boys and girls were studying at the same school, but in separate classrooms. There were just male teachers.

In 1991, my sister and I started going to school. My sister was eight years old, and I was five years old. My mom was afraid to send my sister to school when she was five because she wanted us to be together and help each other. In the beginning, in the girls’ class there were about 40 to 50 students, but the number of girls decreased year by year. When we came to the sixth grade we were just seven students, and they mixed boys and girls classes because of the low number of girls, but each on separate sides.

When we finished sixth grade, our school was being repaired, and we couldn’t continue. We didn’t think about whether we could go to another school. My sister and I and all the girls who used to be in my class just quit school, stayed home, and didn’t care at all while the boys went to the other school, which was far away. One month later, my oldest brother, who is a doctor, called my dad and told him that we had to continue our education and to find a way to do it. He suggested that we should register at the other school, which was far. My dad went to school and they told him that we were late. They told him to go to the main office and ask them if they could accept us. We were accepted, and that was unbelievable.

I finally began seventh grade. I started going to school with my friend, who was in sixth grade. At the new school, my class had just five girls and about 40 boys. My sister studied at home because she had to help my sister-in-law. I tried to teach her, but that was hard for both of us. That was the hardest time in my educational life because of the strange school and the distance, but we did our best while our family members were encouraging and supporting us.

In the beginning of eighth grade, the old school was repaired, and we went back to it. When it was the first day in the eighth grade, I was surprised because there were no girls in my class, just boys, and also my sister continued studying at
home. That drove me crazy. I asked myself: How could I study alone with just boys? It had never happened to any girl before. I told my parents and my brothers about that, and they said it would be fine and supported and encouraged me. Also, the principal and teachers encouraged me and notified the students in my class that they had to respect me and not to bother me. They put me in the front, and they took special care of me. It was a hard time, but the support and encouragement from my school and my family helped me a lot and let me be brave, work hard, and get high grades. The principal and teachers used to say that I was a good example for the girls to follow.

My sister got married when she finished ninth grade, and the girls in the other school quit in the ninth grade, but I kept working hard at school. That encouraged the girls who came after me to continue their education. After that, the number of girls increased year by year. In 2003, I finished high school—the first girl to finish high school in my sub-district. Then I stayed home the year after. In 2005, a new school was built for girls only, and they invited me to be volunteer math teacher because I had gotten a high score in high school. I volunteered for three years, then got the paying job and continued teaching until 2011, when I moved to New York. I was also the first woman who got a job as a teacher in the new school. Right now, hundreds of girls study at this school (50 to 110 students in each grade), with more than 10 female teachers and the rest males. I’ll never forget this part of my life and everyone who supported me and encouraged me because I became what I wanted to be. Right now I want to continue my education in New York and become a math teacher. I know it is going to take a long time, but I have to do it. My family and my husband are supporting me. I hope I can reach my goal and do what I have dreamed about in my life.

Born in Yemen, Yasmine Soofi has lived in Brooklyn with her husband since June 2011. She studied English at the Bay Ridge branch of the Brooklyn Public Library as well as at Turning Point Educational Center. She now studies at the Adult Learning Center of CUNY’s New York City College of Technology. She thanks her teacher, Jay Klokker, for helping her. She writes, “I love New York, and I want to be highly educated because I know that the educated person can live a special life.”
In September 2013, I wanted to go back to City Tech to continue my English class. My teacher and my manager helped me register for the fall semester. I thought: “If everybody is encouraging me, I have to do my best.” But I couldn’t go the first day because on June 2013 my doctors had given me some bad news: “Rosa, you have breast cancer; you need a mastectomy and chemotherapy.” The treatments have been hard.

On the second day, I got up and went to school. Nobody knew how I felt, with a hat on my head because I’d lost all my hair, but the pain in my stomach was worse.

Only my teacher knew my condition. That’s why I tried to talk in class and learn like a normal person, but in my mind I repeated: Enjoy, Rosa, enjoy this English class, maybe tomorrow will be too late. I saw everyone’s face there, everyone was from different countries, spoke different languages, had different cultures and different religions, and nobody was forced to go. All came with an immense desire to learn English.

After the teacher gave us instructions, we tried to memorize the names of each classmate. In this game I thought: We are a family with 25 members in the same boat, and our teacher, Jay Klokker, is the captain.

The group that I became part of was diverse. Some had a lot of knowledge about computers and smartphones, others had a lot of experience in traveling, and one of them even told us how he was a leader of his community. In this group there always existed a spark of happiness that allowed us to burst out laughing every single time. Everyone always showed respect and disciple; they were truly an admirable group of people.

I was so happy learning English and making new friends, but suddenly my treatments didn’t let me continue my English class. I had low blood pressure, and so much pain after each chemotherapy session. My doctor said: “Rosa, don’t take pain pills. You have to resist and fight. After five or ten years you will forget this.”

I talked to my teacher and my classmates about my condition and didn’t go back to school. But I missed them: I missed their smiles, their jokes, their words, their advice and the teaching. I try to stay in touch with them through our class
website at nicenet.net.

On October 30, on Halloween eve, I asked my daughter if she could take me to my school because I needed to visit. I brought my costume and chocolates and gave them a funny surprise. When they saw me, they laughed, and I felt my heart lifting. While I handed them treats, I asked them, “Can you pray for me, please?”

I could see in their eyes their expression of affection, and my teacher gave me a hug. I tried to hold back my tears, but I felt like I was falling from this beautiful boat. I closed my eyes, and I heard their voices and with the eyes of my soul I saw their hands trying to hold me. My family was still on the boat, learning English and supporting me.

I don’t know who had the amazing idea, but they made a card for me, and they made a special video just for me with pictures, wishes, a song and a poem. The card has supportive words, and it was signed by all. The pictures are of us in our costumes and Halloween masks. The wishes: hope, blessings, health, love, admiration, faith, enjoy, laughter, joke, strength, fashion, etc. And Guito sang a song and read his own poem for me. I loved it.

My teacher even thought of a special gesture: He carried the video to my house. I have seen the video so many times. Their words are marked in my mind and in my heart: “Rosa, if you don’t see us by your side, you listen to your heart and you hear our song in echo. We love you.”

I am so proud of my friends and grateful for them and for my teacher, because they gave me one more reason to survive.
I feel green; fear is running down my spine, and my palms are sweating from how tightly I am clenching my midterm results. As I walk to the front of the classroom, my legs wobble from the sight of my teacher holding a twig that would later be used on my hands.

Even though this happened 22 years ago, I always remember how strict the teachers were in Kenya. I grew up with a British system of education and all the teachers believed in the same conduct of strictness. I hated attending school, but the thrill of learning something new kept me going. After school, my classmates and I would rush home to study before the sun went down. Having electricity in our homes was a luxury not many could afford. Sometimes, without cause, Kenya Power would shut off electricity to its subscribers for six months and still send the bill. I found it heartening that pupils in Kenya enjoyed and valued learning even without the necessary facilities for a proper education. During breaks, my friends and I would huddle in the field and talk about our dream careers. Even though we knew that it would be impossible to reach them, we always kept our heads high and worked to make our dreams come true.

All of the experiences of attending school in Kenya molded me into a stronger, more hardworking student. When I started school in the U.S. in January 2012, I was suddenly introduced to a melting pot of students from all over the world. I was forced to adapt to the new environment, culture, and schooling system. I noticed that students viewed attending school as an obligation, but I saw it as a chance to develop and better myself.

Now that I have the chance to reach my dream job, I make sure to take every opportunity that is handed to me, and I commit to every task even when faced with challenges.

Terry Lee, who is 36 years old, was born in Nairobi, Kenya. She moved to New York City in December 2010 with her 16-year-old daughter. At the Department of Education’s Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, her teacher is Teresa Bell, and the instructional facilitator is Diana Raissis. In addition to English, Terry Lee speaks two other languages, Kikuyu and Kiswahili.
Amina Tithi was born in Bangladesh 20 years ago. When she first came to the U.S. in 2012, she had a very difficult time with the language, but many people have helped her to overcome this problem, and her English is improving day by day. She loves to spend time cooking food from her native culture, and she loves reading science fiction. She studies with teacher Stephanie Mueller at York College’s CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program).

AMINA TITHI

I’ll Catch You

English, English, English
I am learning you
I am learning you
You are so hard!!!
English, English, English
You’ve hurt me,
You’ve given me frustration and hard times.
I was criticized because of you
I cried only for you,
But I never gave up hope.
I never give up my hope.
English, English, English
I am learning you
I’ll catch you
I’ll overcome all problems
That you’ve been giving me.
You are not so far
I’ll catch you
I’ll speak very fast
Without my voice shaking.
You are not so far!
George was my mountaineering coach in Uzbekistan. When I was studying in Aviation Technical School, I met him. He was a teacher. He suggested to me and my friends that we hike in the mountains of Tyan-Shan in Uzbekistan. It was a great journey for us, and the first time I left my parents’ house and felt independent.

I came face to face with nature. That route was very difficult for us, but we were happy. George taught us what mutual care is, and how to be a team, which was needed if we were going to reach the summit.

After that, I started training as a climber. I learned about mountaineering equipment and got mountaineering skills and practice.

After that, I became a high-rise worker and worked on very tall buildings. I used the knowledge that George gave me about 20 years earlier. I appreciate him very much.
EVERYONE HAS A DIFFERENT DEFINITION OF LOVE

Writing about Love

Abdelwahed Rachidi
HOW MY PLAN CHANGED

Oswaldo Rodriguez
I WOULD LIKE

Tsvetomila Valcheva
EMPTY SPACE

Cherie Ebron
LOVE

Allison Forbes
THE LOVE OF MY LIFE NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT

Brian Liang
TO A FRIEND I LOST CONTACT WITH

Yency Buitrago
A BLACK EYE FOR A WHITE WEDDING

Angel Rodriguez
DESCRIPTION

Rosy Argudo
HELPING A HOMELESS MAN

Adriana Castillejo
A LITTLE LOVE STORY
I am from Morocco. For family reasons, I left Morocco when I was 14 years old and went to Italy. My goal was to help my family, and I did so by working hard. I worked in many cities in different jobs. I worked in a factory, driving a forklift, for a few years; I served people as a waiter in a hotel for three years; and when I was a teenager I worked by myself, selling merchandise like hats, socks, scarves, and belts on the street. I earned money, and every month I sent some to my family. I did that for nine years. When I was 22 years old, I decided to work a few more years to earn more money. Then I would go back to my country to get married and live in Morocco for the rest of my life. That was my plan until I met an American woman in Italy and my plan changed.

When I was working in a hotel as a waiter, at one of the tables I served a beautiful woman was sitting. I served her a cappuccino. She was nice to me. I liked how she looked, but there was a problem: I didn’t speak English, and she didn’t speak Italian. I thought that I should ask her to go out for a pizza. I went to my friend to translate into English the Italian words that I wanted to tell her. He told me the words “go out for pizza.” That morning when I served her cappuccino, I asked her to go out for pizza. She accepted my invitation. We had a nice time together. The next morning she had to leave for America. We shared our email addresses before she left. When she left, I was very sad because we had only spent a short time together.

We exchanged emails for several weeks. I asked her if she could meet me in Italy again, and she accepted. I was so happy. After four months, we decided to meet in Milan, Italy. I was on pins and needles to see her again. Even when I went to the airport to meet her, I wasn’t sure she would be there. I was so surprised to see her coming out from the gate. I hugged her and said, “If I am dreaming, please don’t wake me up.” We spent a wonderful week together. We got to know each other more and fell in love. She left for America again and left me very sad. We kept in touch by phone and exchanged emails. After four months, we met again in Rome. We spent a nice week together. Again she left for America, and I was sad.
I was left in Italy thinking about her. We talked on the phone a few times, until one day she called and surprised me. She told me that she was pregnant. I was going to be a father. I was afraid and happy at the same time. I didn’t know what to do. After I thought about it, I called her and asked her to marry me. She said “yes,” but I had to move to America. I was very nervous to move to America because I didn't know how to speak English. I had a lot of friends in Italy, and my family was in Morocco, which is close to Italy. The only thing for me in America was her and our son. I decided to leave everything and move to America because I loved her, and I wanted to spend my life with her.

I applied for a visa. It took 13 months because the American consulate wanted to make sure that I was a good person. They asked me to bring a lot of documents from Morocco too. I was a little bit nervous waiting so long. I couldn't wait anymore, but finally I got a visa, and I planned my move to America. When I came to America, I was so happy to see my future wife and our son for the first time. We got an apartment in Brooklyn and started our life together. Now we are married and we have another son together. We are very happy.

You never know what will happen in life. Even if you have a plan, something unexpected can happen and change your plan. If my plan hadn’t changed I could be in Morocco right now. Maybe I would have a Moroccan wife and children. I don’t know if they would be boys or girls or what they would look like. I think it’s good that my plan changed because I was looking for happiness, and I am happy now. Also, there are more opportunities in America for me and my children. We will have a better life in America. For these reasons, I am happy that my plan changed.

A 28-year-old man from Morocco, Abdelwahed Rachidi has lived in the U.S. for 15 months. He studies at the Brooklyn Public Library’s Central Learning Center. Susan Knott is the literacy advisor and Winsome Pryce-Cortes is the site manager. Abdelwahed Rachidi writes: “I am a father of two boys. They are the most important things to me. I like to spend time with them, and I like to cook for them.”
OSWALDO RODRIGUEZ

I Would Like

I would like to tarnish my gaze
with a cloud of crying,
and relieve my heavy eyelids
of tears eager
to fall like the rain.

I would hide my voice
in the echo of the sea
and in the dark northern gannets,
for not to hear the babble of that deep unexpected sigh
that dares to replicate
the sorrow of my life,
with my lips trembling
still pretend
to kiss you yet.

I would like to get away from you
maze of caresses,
sweet halite to ravish
and in the end . . . you get away.

Oswaldo Rodriguez has been published in LR for three consecutive years. Born in Ecuador 49 years ago, he has lived in the U.S. for 20 years. He writes: “I was a literature student in Ecuador. I like to write in verse and prose. I would like to thank my teacher, Jackie Bain, who encouraged me to follow my dream of becoming a writer. Also, I am really grateful to the Consortium for Worker Education for the wonderful program where we can improve the way we speak and write in English.”
He lay on his back, staring at the ceiling. His arm stretched out, feeling the empty space. The sheets were cold. He felt so alone after he lost his wife. He closed his eyes, trying to ignore the pain, but it was impossible. He could feel it pressing down on him, slowly reaching and crushing, like a coffin. Then the noises began.

There was a horrifying moment when he thought he was just imagining it all. It was hard to say which would be worse—knowing the creeping and scratching noises were real, or knowing that he had lost his mind.

Then he heard the faint sound of breaking glass. The frame with his wife's picture lay, broken, on the floor. He cried.
Cherie Ebron studies at the Brooklyn Adult Learning Center of the New York City Department of Education. Her teacher is Jay Rasin-Waters. She writes: “I’m just a girl from Brooklyn, born here and still here at the great age of 40, and the mother of three wonderful sons. My story might be like many by those who grew up poor, especially those who did not get the parenting they wished for. Still, my dream of being a great mother has come true. The other two are getting my high school equivalency diploma and becoming an author.”

CHERIE EBRON

Love

He touched me with his eyes
He undressed me with his smile
He kissed me with a whisper
He held me near with just one word
He made me who I am
Beautiful, sexy, lovely, and wanted by so many
He’s the one who loved me
without me seeing or smelling a scent of him
I called it love
Some call it by other names
The Love of My Life No One Knows About

It was a bright and sunny afternoon, August 3rd, 2001. I was taking a walk in Prospect Park, where everyone goes. At the park, I sat on one of the benches by myself, admiring the beautiful birds chirping in the trees above me. Suddenly a young man approached me and said, “Can I join you?” He had a very warm and beautiful smile, so I said, “Sure, that’s fine.”

We started chatting. Tom was around 29 years old and lived with his parents and his older sister and younger brother. It was almost dark when I looked at the time. I told Tom I had to leave to get home before my favorite TV show, “CSI,” began. As we left, Tom invited me out to dinner the next day. I said, “Sure.”

Around seven the next evening, I arrived at Don Cookie Restaurant, which specializes in seafood, to meet Tom for dinner. He was awaiting me. As he saw me, he stood up to greet me and gently pulled out my chair so I could sit. Then he surprisingly placed a beautiful necklace around my neck. I said, “Thank you; that was very sweet of you.”

I asked myself: Why should he care about somebody like me? All I knew was that I couldn’t stand to be away from him. His curiosity and sense of adventure made me want to dance, jump, or yell with excitement. I even loved the sound of his voice. I remember the feeling of love I felt—as if I had found the love of my life. I couldn’t stop smiling. My mind went ballistic just with the thought of him.

It’s a shame I have to keep it a secret because I’m married. He’s still the love of my life that no one knows about.

Allison Forbes is a 40-year-old female born in Jamaica, West Indies. She has been in the U.S. for five years. At the Brooklyn Public Library’s Flatbush Learning Center, her instructor is Luz Diaz, the literacy advisor, to whom she is grateful. Gladys Ortiz is the site supervisor. “The Love of My Life No One Knows About” is a work of fiction.
To a Friend I Lost Contact With

We had not seen each other a long time: no phone call, no text message, and even no email. It seemed our friendship had come to an end.

We each have a new life, a new world, and new friends. We are both working hard on our dream; we have adjusted ourselves; we have no time to think about each other; and we have no time for memories.

I thought our relationship was already done; I thought you would never get into my life again. I thought you already had become history.

Until one afternoon, I was cleaning my apartment, and I found a handmade candle that you had made as my birthday present. On that candle, you engraved some words of blessing that are still there: “My dear friend, I wish all the best to you. I will love you forever.” In that moment, I felt like I was in an art film. I sat down on the floor. Yesterday was like a movie playing in my mind: your face, your smile, and all the good times that we had. I couldn’t stop thinking of you. And I didn’t know why we lost contact with each other. I embraced the candle; it was like embracing you—your body warmth, your breathing, like you were standing before me.

I am still thinking about you. You were a part of my life; you will always be in my heart. Life is tough; people come and go, saving accounts go high and low, careers up and down. The environment changes us, the times change us. There are some things we can’t control, but we have something that will never change. I lit the candle in the night, and opened a bottle of red wine. Sitting in my backyard, I invited the moon instead of you. My old friend, I hope you know, I never forgot you and wish all the best to you.
William had been going out with Kate for so long that he thought it was time to take their relationship to the next level; it might be time to marry her. How would he ask her or find the right moment to pop the question? He decided he needed to plan it step by step. He then wrote the plan on a sheet of paper because it would be hard for a girl to refuse a marriage proposal when everything was done romantically and executed in perfection.

The first step was to get an engagement ring for a reasonable price, not too expensive and not too cheap. The second step was to take her out for a romantic dinner at an extremely fancy restaurant. However, since Kate had been to many fine dining venues because of her work, he had a hard time choosing one that would surprise her. Finally, he thought of a famous and fancy restaurant with the exotic name of Kathmandu, which she would definitely enjoy. The third step was to write down exactly what he wanted to say to her. He then wrote something like, “You know I love you very much. You are the most beautiful, intelligent, and loving woman a man could ever ask for, and I can't imagine spending my life with anyone else. Will you marry me?” With that, his plan was set.

Days later, he found a perfect ring for the proposal, made a reservation at the restaurant, and wrote the final draft of beautiful words he was going to say. He was nervous and excited when he called to invite her to go out for dinner. But Kate answered that she was too tired to go out for dinner. Oh, no, he thought. His plan was already falling apart. “Honey, please. Come on. You've got to have some fun and relax,” he insisted, but she suggested other options, such as going to a movie or playing video games. William, being a salesman by trade, used his negotiating skills and promised her they would go see her favorite comedy show next time, although he really hated that show.

Thirty minutes later, he arrived at her house to pick her up. She opened the door wearing an old sweatshirt and sweatpants. He was surprised and thought that was not how he had imagined she would look when he rehearsed the whole thing a thousand times in his head. “Honey, it would be better if you wore a beautiful dress. I would love that,” he pleaded. Although Kate wasn’t comfortable with the idea, she gave in and agreed to change her clothes. When she returned, she had on a beautiful black dress that made her look radiant.
William was afraid to lose the restaurant reservation, so he sped in his car to get there. The waiter showed them to their table, but it was very small, and Kate thought the seats were uncomfortable. In the middle of their meal, the belly dance show started. William thought he would propose to her during the performance, but when he saw the dancer, he was discouraged because it was an out-of-shape woman who did not dance very well. *It is a disaster*, he thought.

He was very nervous the entire dinner. Finally, he said to her, “Honey, I have something to tell you.” At that moment, he knocked over a lamp on the table, and it hit her right on her face. Kate got bruises around her eye and started to cry. She became angry and said, “I’m getting tired. Can we go now?” William said, “Yes, but before that I have to talk to you about something really important.” Kate interrupted, “Can we talk tomorrow?” William said no and asked her if she was going to be with him forever. She babbled a little bit and then realized what he had said and asked, “Is that a marriage proposal?” William said, “YES!” She then said, “Well, you have to ask me first. No?” She was thinking about torturing him because of her black eye and the disastrous night she was having. At that moment, William recited the words he had rehearsed, and he took out the ring to slide on her finger. Tears streamed down her cheeks. She never thought that she would cry hearing those words, especially since she was angry with him at the moment, but she could not help herself. She said, “YES!”

One year later, William and Kate celebrated their honeymoon at a beautiful resort. They would never forget the crazy dinner that joined their lives forever.
Description

The light of the dark night describes to me how beautiful you are.
The place wants to talk as soon as it sees you.
The chairs try to walk to be next to you.
The light turns on because it puts more attention on your
beautiful and sweet skin.
I don’t need to talk about the windows. They show your reflection
to the world.
And me, I just want to be next to you my entire life and make all your
dreams undeniable.

Angel Rodriguez writes: “I like to write poems to relax my mind. With poetry
I can describe the world and all the beautiful things in it. I also use poetry
to study English and learn new vocabulary. Pen and paper are the best
therapy, and you don’t have to pay for it.” Born in the Dominican Republic,
20-year-old Angel Rodriguez has been in the U.S. for two years. James West
is his instructor at the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP) of the
Borough of Manhattan Community College.
ROSY ARGUDO

Helping a Homeless Man

Last summer every morning, my friend and I spent one hour doing exercises in a park in our neighborhood. Every day, we saw a young man sleeping on a bench.

One day while my friend and I rested, we felt kind of sorry for him so we decided to help him. First we called our husbands to join us. We sat next to the homeless man. In spite of the fact that he was very dirty, he seemed like a decent person.

After that, we gave him some food, and he told us his story. His name was Pedro, and he came from Peru. He remembered his father's and mother's name, and he gave us an old identification card. But he did not remember anything else. We tried to convince him to go to a homeless shelter, but he refused.

Days later, through a Peruvian friend, we located his sister. She told us that five years earlier he had disappeared. Since then a group of teenagers in Brooklyn, where they lived, had hit him on his head. Two weeks after we located his sister, she came to the park and saw her brother. They hugged each other with joy, and he went back to Brooklyn to start a new life.

My friend and I will never forget the day that Pedro was reunited with his sister after five years. We cried with happiness. However, Pedro returned to the park, and now he is a homeless man sleeping on the same bench again. He was accustomed to living in this place.
Every person in the world has a different love story. Everyone has a different definition of love. Each person keeps in his mind a place, a date, a song, or a perfume that reminds them of somebody. Some love stories have a happy or a sad ending, but every single story leaves a mark in our hearts. I am going to write a true story that started in Mexico.

A few years ago, a young girl was very upset about love. She thought that true love does not exist, and she started to write to express her feelings on a website where she published stories and poems. Many people visited her website, and they read her texts. One day, she published this text:

*I know. I know that you are there. But where? I do not know it yet, but I know you really exist. Every night, when I open my window, I can feel you through the wind, and when I close my eyes, I can feel your lips on my lips. I know your silhouette because I can see it, but I do not know the color of your eyes. I do not know how your face and your hair are, and I also do not know the warmth of your arms or the fragrance of your body. In other words, I don't know anything about you because you are like a ghost that escapes from my dreams and visits me every night to remind me that you really exist and that you are in some place. Can I make you real? I would give whatever I have to know where you are. Now the moon is coming, and I have to open my window because I have a date with you again.*

Over time, the girl received a “friend” request on her website from a boy, and she accepted him. The boy told her that he liked her story, which was an unremarkable situation for her. She continued writing and published her texts. Months later, the girl went to the Mayan pyramids, and she met a boy from New York City who was on vacation in Mexico. They shared their e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers, and after the boy came back to his country, they kept in communication through the internet for many months. One day, the boy told the girl that he was in love with her from the first day they met, and the girl told him the same. They started a long-distance relationship, and they traveled to meet three or four times annually. They kept meeting for almost three years. Now, the girl believed that the boy was the ghost from the text, but she knew his face,
name, and the warmth of his arms. She had found her true love.

One day, the boy went to Mexico to see the girl and they traveled to the Mayan pyramids, the same place where they met. The boy asked for her hand in marriage, and she accepted. The girl decided to leave all that she had and come to a new country where she did not know anybody or anything, just to make her love story come true. After they got married, the girl was surfing the internet and opened her old website where she had published her texts. She was very surprised when she realized that the boy who sent her the “friend” request a long time earlier was her husband now.

The girl still keeps in her mind a place, a date, and a song that remind her of the beginning of her love. Now, she believes that it is does not matter when or how, but everybody is going to meet his or her true love. Everyone has a person waiting for them someplace in the world.

Maybe this is not the best story, but this is my story. The story that I always dreamed about. I am that girl who was alone one day writing about a fantasy and imagining a silhouette of a boy. Today, that silhouette has become real. I still do not have the right definition of love, and I might never be able to define it, but I can feel it.

What is your love story?

Adriana Castillejo, age 24, immigrated from Mexico, where she received a bachelor’s degree in chemistry and pharmaceutical biology. She has lived in New York City for two years and studies in York College’s CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program). Her instructor is Lalit Bajaj, and the director is Hamid Khereif. Her main goals are learning perfect English and completing the CUNY pharmaceutical science degree, to become a successful professional. She dreams of traveling around the world; and, with her husband’s help, of building a nature reserve in Ecuador.
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The Gallatin School of Individualized Study

is a small 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 1,350 undergraduates and 200 graduate students. In close consultation with faculty academic advisors, 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 New York City's numerous institutions, businesses, and arts organizations.

The Writing Program includes a curriculum of more than 30 courses each semester; a Writing Center staffed by undergraduate Peer Writing Assistants; several event-series: Global Writers, Careers in Writing and Publishing, Writers in Progress, Gallatin Teachers Reading, and Students Reading Their Writing; the Gallatin Review, an annual student literary and visual arts magazine; and two Community Engagement Projects: the Literacy Project and Great World Texts.

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

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

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

Look for the Literacy Review, Volume 12 online this summer at the Gallatin Writing Program website: gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing.html