Realities

2009–2010

A Publication of Life Experiences Written
by Students at North Hennepin Community College

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Founders and Editors

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For Submission Instructions and Guidelines, please visit:
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Realities is dedicated to all people who have had the courage to cross over their boundaries, thereby enriching their lives by seeing how other lives are lived.

Note from the editors:
To preserve the authenticity and character of the writings, they have been minimally edited.

Cover art painted by Leny Emmerzael-Wendel, Cover and Publication design by Jennifer Caudill

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2009-2010 Acknowledgements

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All the students who submitted writings
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Introduction

Realities *is a non-fiction student writing publication that brings to life true chronicles of students at our college who have had significant life experiences gained crossing boundaries, such as boundaries of culture, faith, tradition, language, family, and personal habit. Its goal is to promote campus and community-wide education and understanding of the complexities of human experiences, which often go unnoticed in daily interactions.*

As North Hennepin Community College is committed to educating a diverse community of learners to maximize their intellectual, creative, and leadership potential, Realities, with its intensely written testimonies, serves as a tool to pursue this mission by highlighting cultural experiences, demystifying inaccurate assumptions, and creating an educated and an empathic understanding.

Editors Remarks:
In his poem, *Idea of Order at Key West*, Wallace Stevens enjoins us to order words in "ghostlier to demarcations, keener sounds"— to transform our sense of ourselves and the world around us by seeking experience beyond our everyday perceptions, experience that moves us out of knowing the probable into imagining the possible.

The words in this second issue of *Realities*, as in the premier issue, do just so: they give order to the words of those who have journeyed beyond the boundaries of their everyday perception of reality, the one held to filter out information that does not fit our mission of getting through the day with some success, but the one that also keeps us from seeing others and the world around us as anything other than a reflection of ourselves. We keep hold of the filter because it works; with all the panache of a rock crusher, it grinds up anything opposite to our presumptive understanding of the way things work — or ought to work. It verifies the given, and it discounts the different. It allows us to feel secure — but not at rest.

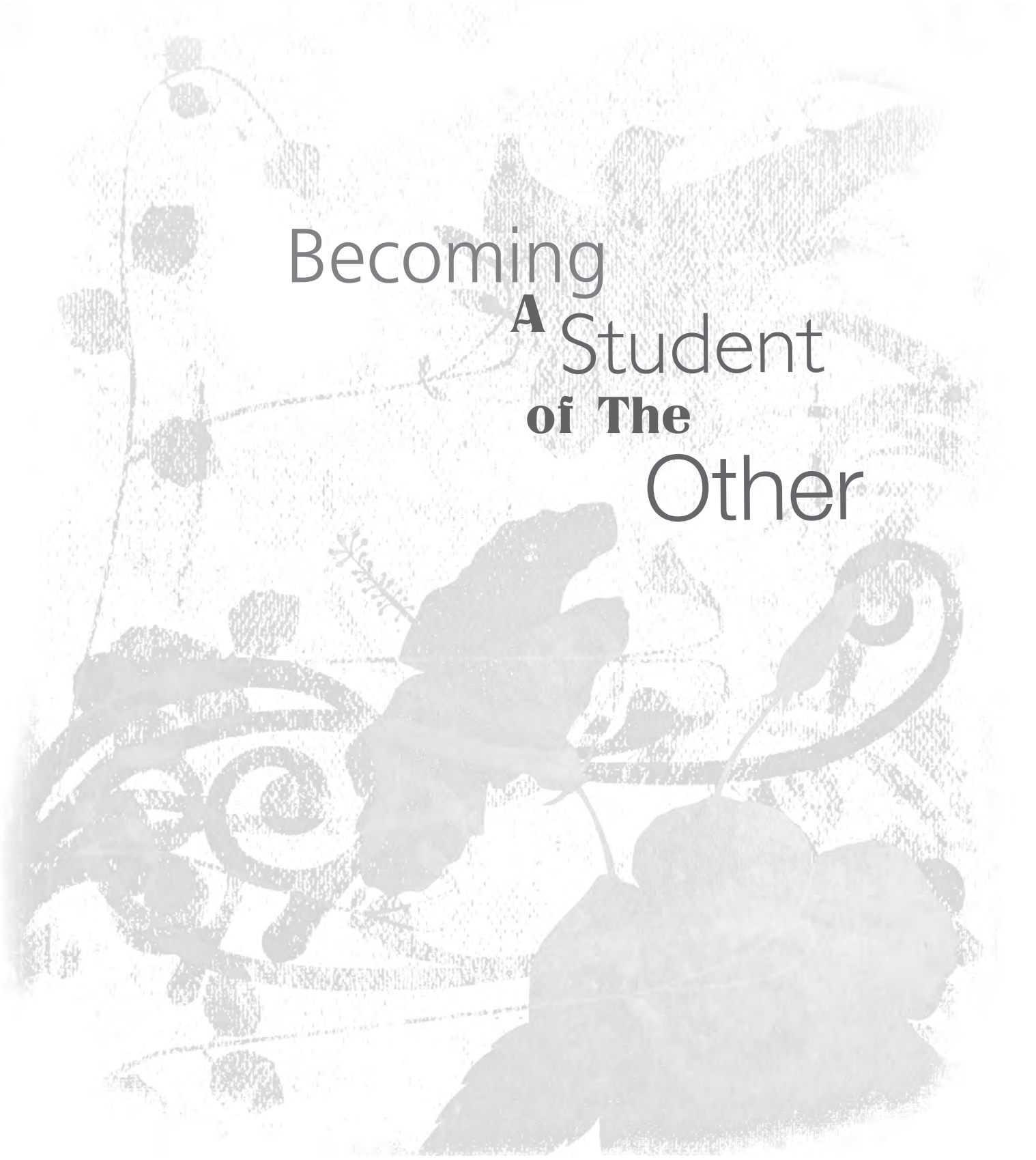
And so we bound our lives by the comfort zone we take for shield, though, as many come to know, it is no more than a bubble that is likely to be burst from within by monotony as well as to be burst from without by challenge. When that bubble bursts and we feel the weight of irony upon us for expectation suddenly unrealized, we can either blow another bubble around us or listen to voices of those we may think of as the "other," absorbing their reality into our own.

In that chilly moment of uncertainty, question becomes more important than answer; the once crisped-edged verities wither, the old demarcations become ghostly, but in place of loss, we feel the primal sympathy of being to being, see anew into the life of things, and as Shakespeare's King Lear finally found the faith to do, "…take upon ourselves the mystery of things." We discover we are part of an unnamable whole in which we find our identity vaster than we thought. And so we come to know what the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats came to know as he wrote in "Among School Children:"

O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

So we invite you to listen to the authors in this issue, who in varying degrees recognized "ghostlier demarcations" and heard "keener sounds," coming to know that in the great mystery, we all dance together.

Sincerely,
Mark L. Larson
Don Wendel



Becoming A Student of The Other

Ichi-go, Ichi-e: *One Chance, One Opportunity*

By Brandon Cutler

As a person who has never been anywhere truly outside of American culture, I have always been interested as to what it would truly be like to go somewhere exotic. I love to read books where people go on exciting adventures and see amazing places. Often times, I even find myself looking up ticket prices for countries I'd like to visit. However, there is something I have found on my travels to nowhere that has been a bit of a gateway to another type of people. This eye-opener is Aikido, originally just another credit for college but one that turned into a way of life.

At the beginning, I was a little nervous about the class and how the professor, Sensei, would act and what kind of homework would be assigned right off the bat, just like any other college class. I filed in with the rest of my new classmates at noon into a room brightly lit with windows and a wooden floor. As we walked in, we were told by the teacher's assistant to take off our shoes and line them neatly against the wall and to do the same with our belongings. Next, we were instructed to start helping lay down some mats that were stacked neatly in a corner. Once completed, we sat on the mats until the Sensei came in. He looked average, nothing I wouldn't have expected from any other teacher, except he seemed rather serene and jubilant. As he walked, he greeted us and then came to sit with the group; it seemed like being in kindergarten all over again. Although he was very upbeat, he was very serious about his class. We were told stories about how in Japan if you weren't serious about training, you'd literally be thrown out of the dojo, but, of course, he wouldn't do that to us since we were new students at an American college. Our new Sensei would not deal with goof offs, however, and he made that clear because the things we would come to learn could hurt someone very badly if done improperly or for the wrong reasons.

I watched many people become more humble from what Sensei taught us, and I myself became a better version of me. This new experience would soon change the way I lived my life.

For the rest of the semester we trained and learned, learned about respect for ourselves and each other. Everyone was equal regardless of previous martial arts experience, height, weight, religion, anything. We all sat on our knees, bowed in together as a unit, bowed to each other before training, and helped set up our Japanese environment every class period. I watched many people become more humble from what Sensei taught us, and I myself became a better version of me. This new experience would soon change the way I lived my life.

Throughout the class we learned about Japanese culture by way of stories, class activities, and our midterm projects. Our project was to find something we enjoyed about Japanese culture and relate it to Aikido. Everything from politics to weapons was covered, and somehow everything had Aikido in it, the path to spiritual harmony. The other activities we participated in were a traditional Japanese tea ceremony, where we were able to make our own *matcha* (powdered green tea) and drink it with others. Another activity we did was calligraphy, where Sensei brought in brushes and ink from Japan, along with each of our names written in Katakana, thanks to his wife. We learned how to write "Aikido" in Kanji, and the correct stroke order for each character. I found calligraphy to be very relaxing, and I continue to practice it today.

Eventually, the class came to a close, and for the first time ever I felt mournful for a class to be over. The end was not to be in my case, however; this spring semester 2010 I signed up to be in the class again because I loved it so much. Now I would be considered a senior student, *sempai*, and would have the ability to gain even more knowledge both technically and spiritually from the Sensei and my new fellow classmates. During this semester I found Aikido truly had become a way of life; I constantly do the wrist stretches we do before every class, I treat everyone with some kind of respect, when I vacuum at work I practice shikko (walking on the knees), I still train outside of class whenever I can, and I find myself even more aware of my surroundings than before. Today Aikido is practically my mind set now, not a physical thing I do or something I merely think about, but the way I function. I know that if I had the means to go to Japan I would go in a heartbeat. I would love to experience their way of life firsthand - all because of what Sensei has shown me.

"As soon as you concern yourself with the 'good' and 'bad' of your fellows, you create an opening in your heart for maliciousness to enter. Testing, competing with, and criticizing others weaken and defeat you."- Morihei Ueshiba

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Brandon Cutler *graduated from NHCC with an Associate of Arts degree spring semester, 2010. His parents are from northern Minnesota and Ohio, these also being the only major places to which he has traveled. English is his main language, but he took three years of Spanish in high school.*

My Bond *to* Education

By Keng Xiong

The love of education is everywhere, from my parents to their children. My mother never had a chance to pursue a good education back in Laos because her parents would not let her, for she was a girl. My father, on the other hand, was the oldest son in his family and had to stay and watch his dad and work in the fields. Neither of my parents had a decent education until they moved to the United States. Growing up, I only had my immediate family, which included my two brothers, my mother, my father and me. My grandparents, my uncles, my aunties and my cousins secluded us from any family activities. I was too young to remember why, but I was not young enough to know that I only had my family. I did not mind the isolation from my relatives. I was never lonely to begin with; I had my brothers and my parents. Life in America was hard for my parents because they had barely any education, family support, and money, but they worked hard for the sake of their children even with all the challenges of learning to live in a new world and in a new culture. My parents still amaze me to this day. My parents showed how much they loved my siblings and me and through motivating us to reach our goals no matter what was ahead of us, by teaching us about their life-long journey to pursue education, and by showing their undying commitment to their children.

My parents came over to America from Laos during the Vietnam War. After coming here, my dad was put into high school at the age of fifteen. After graduating from high school, he married my mother, who never had the chance to attend high school herself. Soon my oldest brother was born, and that was the start of our growing family. School was different for my siblings and me for many reasons. For starters, my parents barely knew how to speak English. I felt that the lack of my parents' education hindered my success in school. I was put into English as a Second Language classes because I did not speak English well. At home, our primary language was Hmong, and English was occasionally spoken.

There were times when I was a full time translator. At teacher conferences, I had to listen to what my teacher said in English and translate it into Hmong for my parents. Sometimes I had to call and talk to people for my parents just like in Amy Tan's story *Mother Tongue* where she says, "in this guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at who had been rude to her." Even though there were many setbacks from having parents that lacked English, I always stayed strong because of my parents' actions. Growing up my mother always said, "Mus kawm ntawm xwb yeej tsis sab yu." It meant, "Go to school because education can't hurt you." They told me to always keep my head up and look at the best in life and remain focused on school. At times when I was scared, they would say, "We believe in you, why don't you believe in yourself?" There were many times where my parents would put our problems first, even the small things like buying a pencil to buying a computer to work on assignments and projects at home. Through all the hardship and struggle, I am still going strong with the help of my two greatest supporters.

Education is a rule we live by in our household. My parents not only taught it to us; they would idolize it. Our small messy house was always full of posters relating to education. In the left side of my room, there is a poster of General Vang Pao reading a story with a caption saying in Hmong, "Read More". After feeling unable to help communicate to our teachers, doctors, dentist and so on,

> "Mus kawm ntawm xwb yeej tsis sab yu."
> It meant, "Go to school because education can't hurt you."

my parents took English classes at our local community center. My parents tried to perfect their skills, even though they would mix up the pronunciation. By the age of fifteen, my parents became efficient English speakers. I remember the first time my parents talked English to our neighbor Mrs. Johnson, and she was so surprised. I could not help but smile as I saw Mrs. Johnson so engaged in the conversation. It was an achievement not only for my parents but also for us, their children.

After moving here to Minnesota my mother soon registered for high school. At the local ALC, Adult Learning Center, my mother struggled to get her high school diploma. After four years of working at the company RMS, running a household and attending school, my mother obtained her high school diploma. I remember the day my mom put on the shiny purple gown she bought for her graduation. I never saw a person smile as wide as my mother did that day. Now her diploma hangs right next to mine.

My father had his own success in education. He attended college, Onondaga Community College in New York, near our hometown and received his certificate in Blue Print reading, which was a

certification to operate heavy machineries. This showed me that my parents not only supported education but they sought it. They are my motivation to seek a higher education and to better myself, so maybe one day I can spread the love of education to my children as well.

Unconditional love was given to us every day from our parents. I never understood why my parents worked as hard as they did until I got older. I remember waking up one night to see my father come home from work. His hands were all dry and scratched up, his eyes were blood shot, and his face was as white as the winter snow. My parents never said a thing when it came to money; whenever my brothers and I asked, they would say we have plenty. Our house was always full of toys, food, and books. We were spoiled by our parents. When I look back on how my parents were, I would feel ashamed of myself. My parents never asked for much in return. They would only ask us to read and do homework, and then we were free to do anything we wanted. I always thought turning in an art project at school was a way to thank my parents and show them that we were even. "Here's my pretty picture in exchange for all you do," my art project proclaimed. Thinking about it now, I feel foolish. Now I know a parents' love is immeasurable.

My parents' story is a great, aspiring, motivational one. From their lack of education to their struggle in the States, my parents worked diligently for what they believed in. As I look back at all the struggles I encountered, I always remember two faces who never ever gave up, my parents. I can see them shouting, "You can do it!" every time I failed or thought of giving up and "That's our son" every time I succeeded. My parents' struggle to learn a new language has shown me that there is no end to learning and no end to their love. Their triumphs show me that anything is possible as long as I am willing to reach for it. Even though my parents did not have anyone to support them, they both worked hard on their goals on raising their children into adulthood and making sure their children were always happy. My parents were never taught about the importance of a good education, but they never stopped trying to pursue it regardless of everything they had been through. They are the glue that binds our growing family.

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Keng Xiong *was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 22, 1990, in a family of four, which consisted of his mother and father and his older brother. His small but growing family moved to Syracuse, New York, in 1992. In 2001, after Keng was in sixth grade, his parents decided to make a life changing decision and moved the family of eight to Minnesota. He graduated on June 6, 2008, from Park Center Senior High. After high school, he took a year off to work to find his calling. During his time off, he realized he wanted to become a family counselor to help with troubled families.*

My First Day on The Island

By Kaitlyn Gartner

My junior year of high school was spent on an island, literally. I attended De La Salle High School on Nicollet Island for one year. I learned and experienced more throughout that one year than I ever could have imagined.

I spent one year outside of the public school system that I had know all my life. I was forced to wear a uniform that included a polo shirt and a black pleated skirt that was high-waisted. The shirts were to remain tucked in at all times.

I remember my orientation, which took place in August, quite clearly. I was so scared and nervous. Even though I grew up in North Minneapolis, I had spent the entirety of my educational career in the Robbinsdale Area School District. Robbinsdale is a well-to-do suburb of Minneapolis. I had grown used to the comforts of what was familiar to me. I did not like the idea of changing schools, especially switching to a private school eleven years into my education.

> What if I got lost?
> What if nobody liked me?

I had received the letter about orientation early in June of that year. Uniforms were required. Lunch would be provided. I had no idea what to expect. I had only visited the school a few times. I didn't even know where the 'Robert Casanova room' was located. Asking in the front office when I arrived just before eight in the morning, I remember feeling like a complete outsider.

I was anxious. What if I had read the letter wrong and mixed up dates or times? What if I wasn't supposed to be in my uniform? What if I got lost? What if nobody liked me?

A kindly woman was waiting to greet me just outside of the Casanova room. She was being overly-welcoming. She smiled and graciously showed me to my seat, where a white notecard with my name hand-written had been placed. The card to the right of me read "Satavee" and the card to my left read "Juan."

Satavee showed up just a few minutes after I had. She was a short girl with choppy black hair. To my relief, she too was wearing her uniform. Almost immediately, we began to chat. I learned quickly that she was actually from Thailand. She and her father had moved to the States for his job. Her mother had remained in Thailand. I was amazed at her ability to adapt so easily not only to a new school but also to a new country as well.

Juan was a little bit late. He was very tall with a muscular build. He had tan skin and big eyes. I noticed almost immediately when he began to talk that he had a profound Mexican accent. The woman who had greeted me came back to our table. She explained that Juan was from Acapulco. He had only arrived in the States a few days prior to orientation. He had attended De La Salle's sister school in Mexico but had to travel to the States to finish his education if he wanted to attend college in America.

For the next three hours, I sat with Satavee, Juan, and a handful of other new students of various grade levels. One girl was from Kenya, and she was just as scared as I was. I learned that Satavee didn't actually like the States yet. Juan went on for at least an hour about the beauties of Acapulco. But both were very excited to start the new school year just as I was.

I learned a lot that day. Not only did I learn where my new locker would be, I also learned a great deal about culture. There I was, having switched school districts and finding other kids who had traveled across the world to attend De La Salle.

We were all afraid. But after spending the day with Juan, Satavee, and the others, I realized that I really didn't have that much to be scared of. We are all people, and together we make up the perspectives that form cultures, ideas, and the principles of life.

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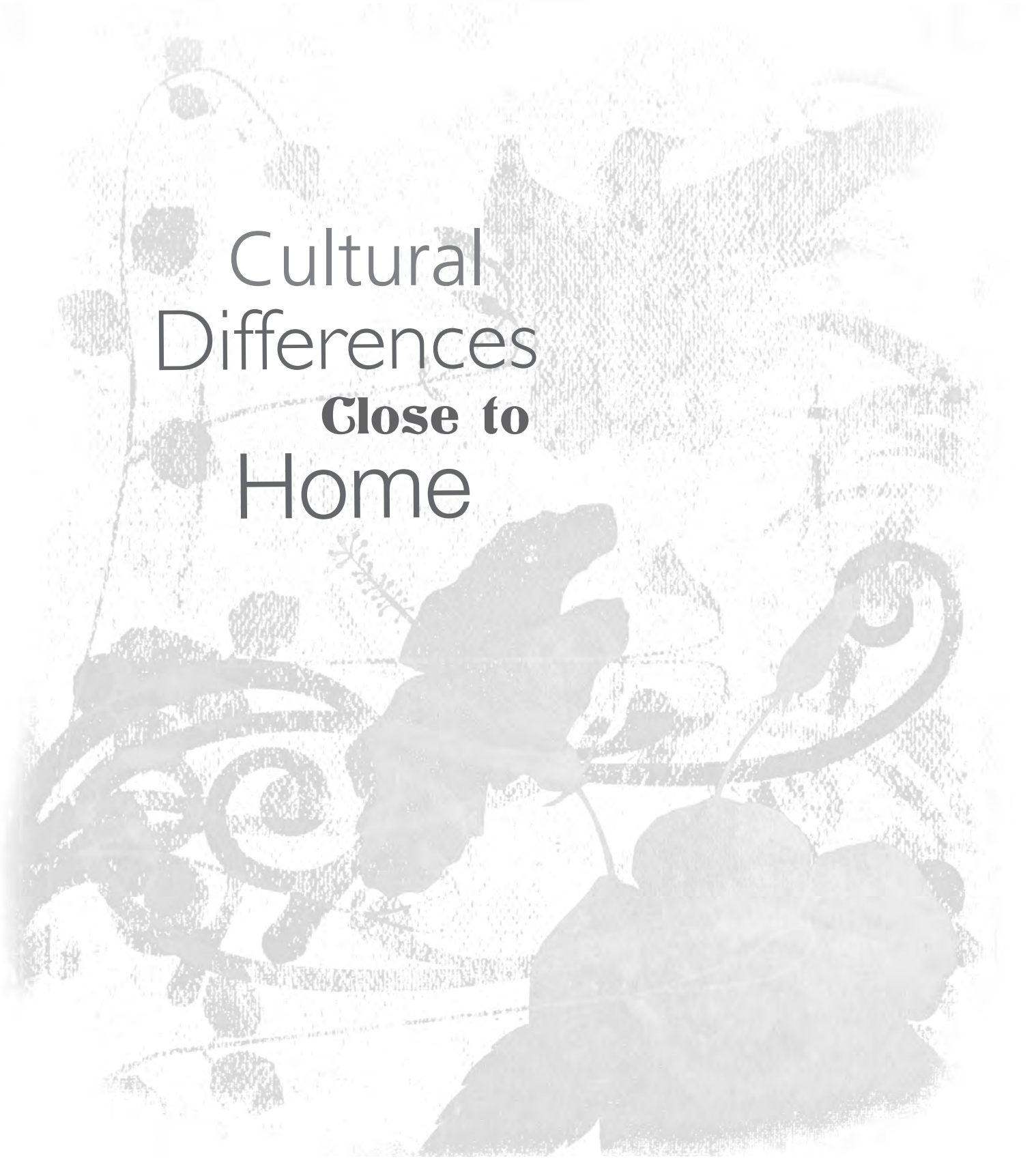
*As a PSEO student, **Kaitlyn Gartner** has enjoyed being a part of a college campus. She cannot wait to continue her learning experience and hopes to major in pharmacy and continue writing creatively.*

Cultural Differences Close to Home



A Different Kind of Different

By Ryder Grumbo

In my high school, the special education program was specifically designed for people with mental and physical developmental disabilities. That meant that it did not matter what kind of disability you had – you were put into the same program as everyone else with any disability in the district. I often worked right along side students with mental disabilities. This made the curriculum very tedious for me.

> When I was
> **four years old,**
> I woke up in the middle of the night
> and somehow found a
> **loaded gun.**

After many protests from my mother, I was finally moved into the standard classes with the rest of the student population. I received many strange looks because of my left side. It looked very different from what the student body was used to.

When I was four years old, I woke up in the middle of the night and somehow found a loaded gun. I was playing with it when it went off, hitting me in the side of the head. The result was a partial paralysis of the entire left side of my body. This is why I ended up in the special education program in school.

When other students saw me, many of them started to tease me because they did not understand what had happened to me. I was unlike anything they had seen in their "culture." In this culture, I was unusual, and people tend to fear what they do not understand. Believe me, people can be very cruel when they do not understand what you are about. I was so used to people being very supportive when I needed some help that it was quite the shock to me when these people were not able to understand exactly how hard it can be to have to learn how to do everything with one hand. Imagine trying to do some of the everyday things such as tying your shoes or getting dressed with only one hand.

It took me so long to get over being shy because of this so that I could even try to make friends. Most people do not understand that just because you are quiet and keep to yourself you are not a bad person. Eventually, I did get over my shyness and started talking to people, and they realized that my brain was not affected by the accident. I was still an intelligent individual with thoughts and ideas of my own, capable of contributing to society.

I definitely identify with those who are from other countries or who have different religions because in many ways they are viewed the same way as I was and sometimes still am. People today sometimes do not take the time to try to get to know these people. This non-action often contributes to the behavior of both sides.

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*When **Ryder Grumbo** was four years old, he was involved in a gun accident. He was shot by a .25 caliber handgun at point blank range. As a result, his left side is partially paralyzed. However, he has learned how to do almost everything with only one hand. He is going to school with the goal of contributing greatly to society.*

CULTURE SHOCK in Brooklyn Park

By Erik Jerde

Some people may think that a guy who has never been to another country has not experienced a cultural difference. I do not believe this to be true. I attended the very same school from the very first day of kindergarten until the day that I graduated from high school. The school that I attended was Orono public schools. I had a lot of friends in my school, but I also had a lot of enemies. I am what some people like to call a "Redneck." And I just so happened to go to one of the preppiest schools in the entire state of Minnesota. My school was predominantly wealthy Caucasians. Now I would have fit in being a Caucasian, but I was not wealthy. And I really enjoyed the outdoors. As a person who enjoyed the outdoors and attended Orono, I was hated. Nobody in the school hunted, fished, or camped. The only people I can name that actually enjoyed these activities were my friends. As a student at Orono, if you did not fit in, then you were harassed and ridiculed. You were made fun of and even pushed into lockers.

> I am what some people
> like to call
> a "Redneck".

I am now attending NHCC and it is a total culture shock to me. My school is no longer ninety nine percent Caucasians. There is so much diversity here at North Hennepin. People come in all different shapes and sizes. The people that attend North Hennepin seem to be a lot more kind and open to differences in culture. I have not once been made fun of for hunting or fishing. In fact, most of the people I tell that I hunt and fish ask if they can go with me sometime. When I hear these people say this, it makes my jaw drop. Throughout my whole life, I've never met people so open to new and exciting things. I have made more friends in three months at North Hennepin than I have made all my life at Orono.

Every day I learn more about different cultures around the world just in my class of thirty students. I cannot express how different my life is now that I am attending North Hennepin. I feel more open to sharing my culture with different people, knowing that there are a lot of people that might not experience the same culture as me. I also feel more comfortable meeting new people because the individuals around me are a lot more kind. I have even made several friends that share the same experiences as me. They love to hunt, fish, and camp, and they went to a very preppy school. I am shocked every day when somebody holds a door open for me. At Orono, if you held a door open for somebody, you were thought of as a "tool." I now realize that the school that I formally attended was filled with immature and insecure individuals that did not genuinely care about others. People at North Hennepin are totally opposite. They care for others and want others to be happy. My professors are even different at North Hennepin. The professors seem to care more about the individual student than the teachers at Orono. Attending North Hennepin has been a complete change to my life. And I would consider it to be the biggest culture shock I have ever experienced.

Mixed Company

By Sarah Steensgard

I have experienced several cultural differences within my lifetime due to the great journey that my life has brought me through. I began noticing differences back when I was about three or four years old up until now at twenty five years of age. I have learned to respect everyone for their beliefs and practiced religions and the way they choose to live their own lives. I believe that is the only way in which one can truly live life in an honest way to both themselves as well as each other.

Growing up in Saint Louis Park, Minnesota, I noticed the majority of the community was Jewish, but others in our neighborhood were Asian. My family practiced Christianity, so while growing up we were taught and read stories from the Bible. I had a few Jewish friends that had a similar book that they lived by called the Torah. I recall a time where I was taught that the Bible was the only "true" religious book and that it was written as the events had happened in history. However, when I started sharing some of the stories from the Bible with my Jewish friends and they shared stories from the Torah, I noticed how similar the morals and verses were in a sense, for they all preached about honesty, respect, loyalty, and devotion to life and your family. That is when I made my own first personal rationalization that even though they didn't read the Bible, it doesn't mean that they are wrong or bad. If their lifestyle is healthy and they are happy, then I wanted to be happy for them.

I noticed one gentleman that, at a specific time of the day, would take this beautiful rug out of his locker and lay it out while he prayed on it.

When I was roughly about twenty years old, I took a job at Boston Scientific. There I had met several people from different nationalities and countries; there were definitely different types of lifestyles. I noticed one gentleman that, at a specific time of the day, would take this beautiful rug out of his locker and lay it out while he prayed on it. I was impressed with his devotion to his beliefs and traditions and the fact that he did it for himself and no one else. As time went on I met a woman about the same age as myself. She was Hmong, and her name was Gao Lee. We eventually became good friends, and I noticed that she carried on her traditional ways within her life through cooking and bringing up her son. When I saw her wedding picture, I was shocked that she wasn't wearing a white dress; instead, they were wearing her country's traditional wedding ceremonial clothing. I could not believe how intricate and beautiful the garments were. It must have taken months to make them with all the fine woven details and colors that had been meticulously placed.

Around the same time I met a Puerto Rican girl, Dorita. The three of us spent time with each other on the weekends. We attended a traditional Puerto Rican play up at St. Cloud State University once. The clothing and entertainment were great. We also got together on several occasions and make food from our traditional cultures, and then we would teach each other how to make it. I recall at one time Dorita asked me if I would go back to Puerto Rico to marry her brother so he could come back to the states. She told me all I had to do was stay there for a while and then when the paper work came through we could come to the States and then get a divorce. It was a tough decision; I really wanted to do it for Dorita, even though I didn't believe it was the right thing to do in my heart and what would I tell my family if I just up and went to marry some random stranger. I decided against it and told her I just couldn't bring myself to it. We all still talk and have a wonderful time when we meet up.

I was about twenty-one and I met another wonderful woman named Abeer. She was from Egypt and had the most beautiful green eyes and curly brown hair I had ever seen. As I got to know her, I found out that she had been placed in an arranged marriage back in Egypt where she had two baby girls; eventually her husband became very abusive towards her and her babies, so she fled. Her brother who already was living here in the States saved up money to arrange another marriage and bring her over to the states. Now in a much better environment and very thankful for where she is, she throws several cookouts where she makes a ton of Mediterranean food from her culture and invites lots of people. The first time I attended one of the cookouts, was my first experience of Mediterranean food, and I loved it. I began coming over for dinner sometimes to enjoy both her family's company and the food. Something that has stayed in my mind is that every day she cleans and sometimes twice, and when her husband would come home from work she made sure there was food on the table waiting for him. I once asked her why she was so particular about this, and she said, "He is my husband, and I am here to take care of him." I love the devotion and dedication she proclaimed in that statement.

Through all these experiences, I have learned to have a strong passion for those who still carry on their ancestral traditions to this day. I understand that it is not easy to do while society and the government continually urbanize the country on a daily basis. I struggle myself, and respect those who still live the urbanized life while at the same time continue to practice their traditions out of respect for their ancestors.

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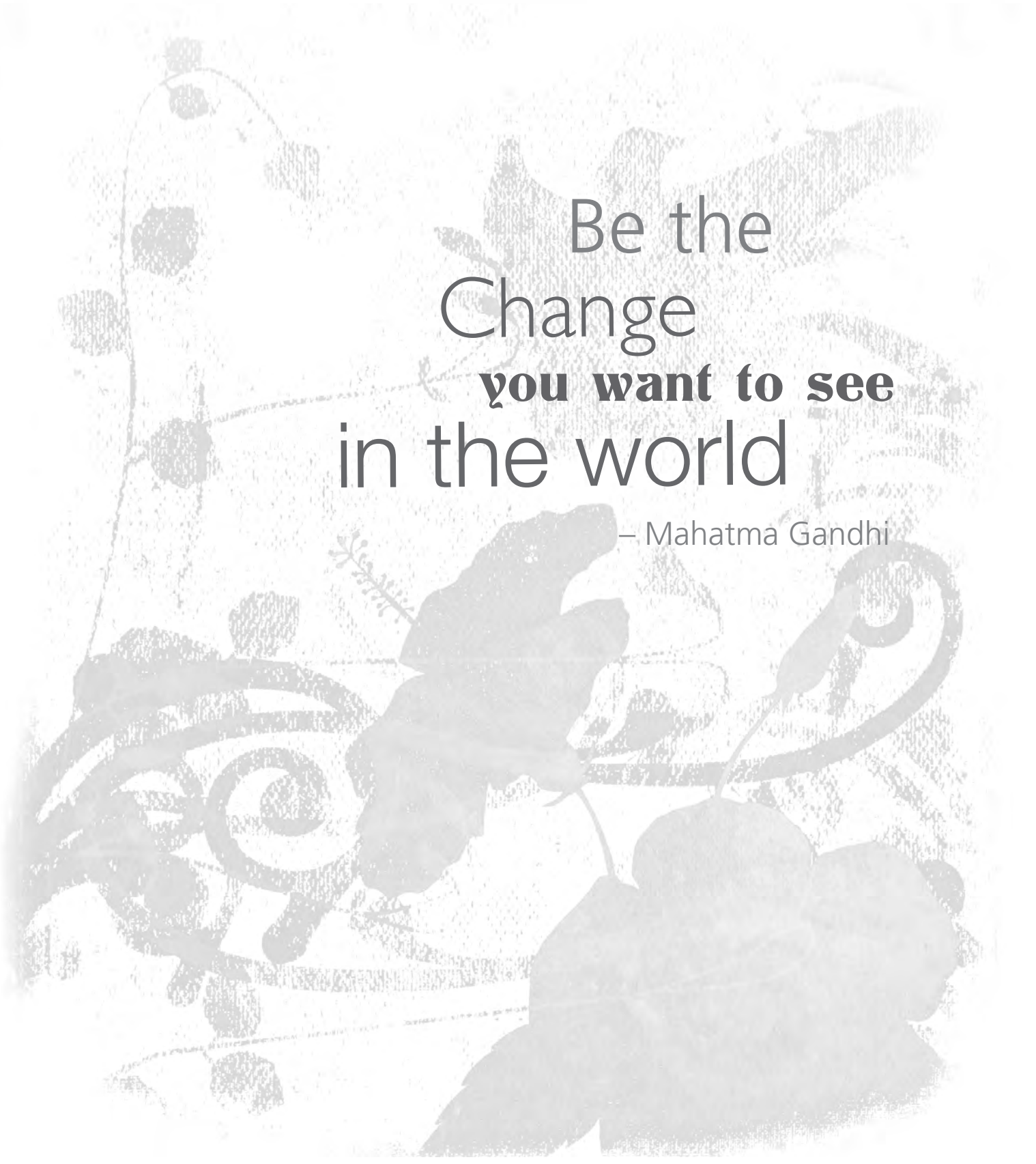
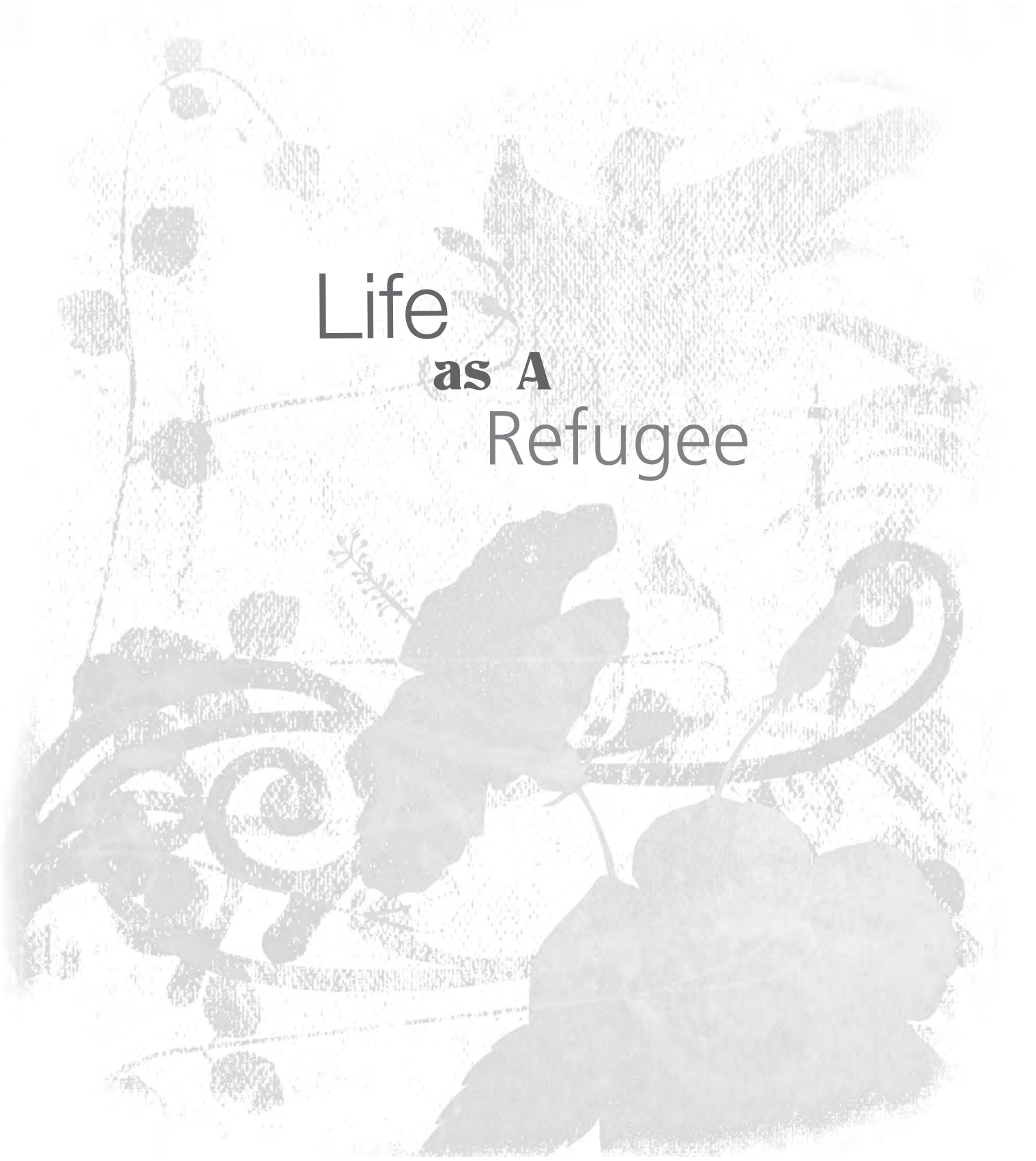
Sarah Steensgard *was born in Robinsdale, Minnesota, in May of 1984. During her middle school years, she attended Zion in Crown, Minnesota. At Zion she picked up soccer as a new hobby. She went to St. Francis High School and participated in both gymnastics and soccer. After graduating in 2002, she attended Anoka Ramsey Community College for a year, but she was not sure on what she wanted to major in. In the summer of 2009, she returned to college at NHCC to pursue a career in nursing.*


Be the
Change
you want to see
in the world
– Mahatma Gandhi



Life as A Refugee

A Place *to come to*

By Tou V. Xiong

One of the best things that ever happened to me was coming to America.

The United States of America has given me a new hope and a new beginning. Here in America I am free; where as in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp I was not. In America, everyone regardless of age, sex, and race is free, but in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp I was locked up in a small camp surrounded by razor-wire fences. Although I was still a child, every day of my life I felt like a rat in a rat cage. The razor- wire fences blocked my path to the outside world. I and the rest of the people in the camp could not go out beyond the fences. Even though we wanted to, we would have been unable to because our flesh would have been pierced by the razor-wire fences. Although my body was locked up inside the camp, my mind and spirit wondered about what it was like beyond the fences.

The standard living in America is very different from Thailand, Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, where I was born. There were no jobs or any way of earning income. One had only a small area of land, less than one hundred feet, for farming. The only source of income and food supply was the aid from the United Nation and those aids only came once a day. We would only get a small portion of rice and meat, mostly fish, in the morning and nothing else for the remainder of the day. Lunch and dinner, we had to provide for ourselves. Back in those days the Tuna fish was really good, better than eating a bowl of rice and ginger or hot pepper dip with salt. Most of the time when there were nothing to eat, my mom would give me one baht, which is equivalent to one penny of States money, to buy a small slice of water

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melon that she chopped it into smaller pieces, mixed them with a bowl of rice to share with my siblings. If not that, we would buy a small bowl of extremely hot papaya salad, no more than fifteen to twenty shredded strips of papaya. The reason for the Papaya Salad being extremely hot was so that we would eat very little and would still have some left for later. My mom would only eat whatever was left after we had eaten, but most of the time she would starve herself as long as I and my siblings had something to eat. Then, there were other problems, such as not having new clothes, especially shoes because we could not afford it. Once a year we would get new clothes, and then only because it was for the New Year Celebration.

Ban Vinai Refugee Camp was never a home to me because I never felt secure, but it will always be viewed as a resting place for me to continue my journey to America. America as we were told is a place of abundance with

unlimited food and clothes and nice houses. In Ban Vinai Camp, our home was a small fifteen by ten wooden room with no bathroom. There was no running water and there was only water that was collected in wells and in a rusted metal container during the rainy seasons. However, during the dry season the level of water decreased to the bottom of the well. Trying to take whatever water they could from the bottom, people stirred the water and turned the water yellow with dirt. Still it didn't stop them, for they knew there were no other sources of water. Although Ban Vinai was a camp for refugees, it had many good things. Even though we were very poor, my mom, my siblings, and I developed a very strong bond together. As a family we supported each other through the good and bad times. And whatever adversities we came to face, whether it was having no food or no money, we always managed to overcome them together. We didn't care about not having nice clothes, a nice house, or money. Although we didn't have much, we always had each other. Our love and happiness kept us safe from the hunger and possibly from the harm that the corrupted Thai official could do to us. Those times of love and togetherness are priceless.

As of today, I am very fortunate to be an American citizen. As an American I have a better home and a better standard of living. Also as an American citizen, I have the opportunity to achieve my desires that I was unable to achieve in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. I have the best opportunity to get an education and have a secure place that I can call home. America will be my home now, but I will never forget those priceless years in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp.

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Tou Vue Xiong *is currently a full-time student with North Hennepin Community College. His goal is to graduate with a two year degree in Business Computer Systems and Management by at the end of May 2011. After graduation, he wants to continue his education by transferring to a four-year college or university to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Business Management.*

IT ALL MATTERS

By Lisa Nygard

Imagine with me a world where even the smallest consideration or act of kindness tipped the scales of a world that's hanging in the balance. After visiting Dachau Concentration Camp I came away with a new appreciation for every act of kindness, no matter how small. A hurt forgiven, a grievance released, a helping hand to those on the margins of society–these are the things that matter in the long run. Everything matters.

The somberness of this place met me like a cloud of mist that settled on my heart as I emerged from the parking lot. The birds held their songs in this place. The pictures and text on the museum placards gave a snapshot of the horrors this place held as documented historical event after event settled on me like a bad dream that just can't be shaken, the kind that makes me wake with a pit

> The birds
> **held their songs**
> in this place.

in my stomach. They told of things that happen when good people do nothing. The twisted metal memorial sculpture met me with a strange greeting, begging me to look deeply and study it, yet the contorted, grotesque figures it represented repulsed me and made me want to look away. The eerie quiet of the compound told me this was no regular museum. This place held secrets: deep, horrifying secrets. What happens when people look the other way, when I look the other way?

Studying the layers and layers of tangled barbed wire lining the outer perimeter wall, I remembered as a little girl how it hurt to have one of those little barbs accidentally scrape my leg as I meandered over and under fences that kept our rag tag band of cows in the pasture on long lazy days of summer. I wondered, "what… how... what would fuel this level of barbaric cannibalism that would make one human being suppress, dominate and feed off another human being?" Standing there, I followed the trail back in my own mind how things like this get started. One little thought left unchecked, one offense left unattended and the smoldering starts, which, left unchallenged, provides the perfect kindling that raging fires of this magnitude need to get started.

Once outside the gate, I welcomed the sense of life and beauty the towering trees added to this otherwise desolate and God-forsaken place. However, as I read the first memorial in this wooded area, I realized the sense of life and beauty was but a strange capsule holding the hallowed ashes of those who had succumbed to the cruelty of this place. The trees became a line of somberly standing sentinels guarding the sacred remains now at one with the ground they were hastily cast into. Their presence acted as a silent memorial announcing that someone would remember, honor and guard the nameless, voiceless ones that were crying out from the earth for justice. I felt the sacredness of human life in that place.

Dachau was where I felt in a real way how these kinds of atrocities start. The magnitude of the soulish stench made me wonder deeply about how the unimaginable becomes reality. It made me wonder how much I have in my power as one person to change the environment around me for the good of all mankind. It made me face my own hellishly illogical grievances. It made me realize that everything starts somewhere, even the holocaust.

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Lisa Nygard *grew up in Alexandria, Minnesota. Although her family did a lot of camping when she was growing up, she never traveled out of the country until about two years ago when she visited some friends in the Netherlands. On a day trip over to Germany, she got the inspiration for this essay. This actually is her first essay of her first college class after over 20 years of being away from school.*

Just Life

By Dimtrije Zarkovic

It was late September 1995. My mother and I had just met up with my grandparents and uncle in Serbia. This was to be my home for the next five years, before I ended up in the United States. It was a long and interesting journey and one of the biggest turning points in my life so far. The process, transition, and new life style have changed my views about people and life.

We traveled from Croatia, across the Bosnian border, and finally into Serbia. It was a nonstop trip, taking three days and three nights. I remember being hungry, tired, hot, along with everyone else, but we had to endure. The road seemed endless, but I was reassured–over the course of days–with "just a bit longer." When we were safe, we settled near the unloading docks of a railroad yard that belonged to my uncle's relatives.

My mother and I stayed with my aunt's family for about a month after escaping together, but then looked for my grandparents and other uncle. They were staying in a refugee camp about 150 miles away. What we found when we got there was nothing close to a camp.

The place where my grandparents were staying, along with about a hundred other refugees, was nothing more than a high school gym that was converted into a temporary shelter. Nevertheless, we decided to stay with our family.

Everyone received rations according to the size of their family. Everything from the number of sponge mattresses to sleep on, blankets, the amount of meal servings, the loaves of bread and canned Spam-style meat was rationed accordingly. We had no tables of our own, so we were given school desks to use for eating. The book compartments under the desks served as "mini-fridges" for many.

My mom found a job as a waitress in a nearby restaurant. Working twelve to fifteen hour shifts, she earned about fifty dollars a month. My grandma would sometimes get hired to clean stores or restaurants by the flea market. My grandpa and uncle would occasionally work odd jobs or spend entire summers picking vineyards in Montenegro. They'd come back as if they'd been cleaning chimneys instead. The summers reached 48 degrees Celsius.

At school, some city kids would look down on the refugee kids. In their eyes, we were poor, "dirty", and we didn't belong. We were outsiders and should go back wherever we came from. I overheard even high school kids complaining how "the damn refugees had taken over our gym". But at least we were a "step up" from the gypsies, or the nomadic Roma people, who live in worse poverty and discrimination.

I encountered prejudice from some of my classmates, but they learned the hard way that I wouldn't have any of it. After a good brawl or two, we became good friends. From second grade on, I had a teacher whom I liked very much. Mrs. Rodich was fair, but many times let me slide when I got into trouble. She knew how to motivate and challenge me, and I grew to love learning. In the dark after "lights out", I lay on mattresses with my mom, inches away from the gym floor, and she'd tell me to study hard and go to college. Before drifting off to sleep, the thought of going to college excited me.

The government and other organizations improved our living conditions. After two years in the gym, we got army bunk beds. Now the cockroaches couldn't reach us and many people came down from sleeping in the stone bleachers of the gym. Some saved enough to afford some luxuries and bought real mattresses, color TVs, or bikes. One family even bought a small refrigerator.

It was a nonstop trip, taking three days and three nights. I remember being hungry, tired, hot, along with everyone else, but we had to endure.

For those that couldn't afford extras, they found ways to make living bearable. I remember catching my best friend's dad eating mushy, near rotten bananas. He said he loved them and shared his enthusiasm with his children. On another occasion, after returning from play, his kids said they were hungry. He asked where they were and they told him that they were with me, playing with snails. The recent drizzle brought out many of them. He told us to go collect as many as possible and he'd prepare them for us. He convinced us that they were a delicacy. We returned with our shirts folded up to our bellies, filled with snails. He cleaned and then fried them. They were a bit chewy, but other than that, just like chicken.

There were hard times, but I had decent food, shelter, and people who cared for me. The people there became like a big family. I recall

some of the happiest times being in those circumstances. I'd spend hours playing on the pummel and vaulting horses, or swinging on the parallel bars. They were the good, innocent times of my life, careless and just enjoying each day with the people there.

Life is a cycle, however. In the years 1999 and 2000, four years after escaping it, war had caught up with me once more. Explosions went off in the distance, the ground shook, making the windows tremble in their frames. I heard the sharp sound of fighter jets breaking the sound barrier. Their bombs woke me up and forced us to get out of the gym in the middle of the night. Many refugees were paranoid, due to their previous experience. Often, bombs felt as if they'd fallen only a few hundred meters away.

Kosovo held much of the Serbian history, pride, and culture, so Serbs naturally "denied" the land by force. The States interfered and for three months, Serbia was bombed and starved economically. Additionally, even more immigrants from Kosovo poured into Serb territory. The country was overwhelmed.

The sound of the air raid siren became a common occurrence. Many times, the bombing caused the power to go out in the gym, forcing people to cook on fires or mini gas stoves. Others cursed the pilots for making the TV go out. They'd miss another exciting episode of *Baywatch* or *Beverly Hills: 90210*. On those boring afternoons, I snuck out to play despite the sirens, but found the neighborhood empty. The basketball courts, the soccer field, and sidewalks resembled ghost towns. There was an uneasy, eerie silence to it all, and I briefly felt like the only human being on the planet.

Pinned onto clothes of many people were stickers or papers with a black and white "target" symbol. It was a sign of patriotism, but also an anti-war statement. Patriotic songs played on the radio, but there were also some political spoofs, which focused on the then recent affair Bill Clinton had with Monica Lewinsky. Even though the country was getting chewed up, there was also celebration and pride over the images of the downed F-117 bomber.

Over the years, some refugees dispersed to larger cities, returned home, built new homes, or went to a different country. Others joined alternative housing programs offered by the government, or applied to refugee organizations that helped move them overseas to more stable countries such as Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and the United States.

My mother applied for one of the foreign country programs. The selections are based on eligibility of the family. Within a few anxious months, my mom got the "yes" from the organization. The excitement was overwhelming and everyone was happy for us. I told my classmates and teachers, who all responded with enthusiasm. While everyone was happy for us, they were also sad. We formed close bonds with refugees and citizens alike, so it wasn't easy to say goodbye. However, it was something we had to do; our futures depended on it.

After all the paperwork and traveling interviews, my mother and I arrived in Minneapolis, Minnesota on July 27, 2000. In the beginning, my mom was overwhelmed, stressed out, and wanted to go back. It wasn't the first time we had to start with nothing but necessities in a foreign environment, but U.S. was a completely different beast to tame.

I adapted and picked up on things quickly. In school, things I learned in second or third grade were being taught here in the fifth. Watching American TV shows in Serbia also paid off. Over time, all those things I wished of having as a kid, and more, came into my life. They were the basics here. My own room, my own TV, my own shower, a big bed, a closet with a change of clothes every day, a fridge, a large stove, a machine that does laundry, a sink, a real kitchen table, a thick carpet, and even a couch.

Whenever I think back, I feel lucky and grateful to be here. Living outside of the U.S. and in the transition, I've learned many things. In war, the only thing I truly know is that people suffer. After having my "dream materials", I realized I could have things, but I also realized not get lost in the pursuit of them and be grateful for even the basic conveniences. If I ever feel sidetracked in life, I look back on where I've come from and what I've been through, and my priorities are set straight. What made my life wonderful were the diverse experiences, the people, the relationships, and the timeless lessons that came in that package. I wouldn't change those for anything.

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Dimitrije Zarkovic *was born in Serbia to Croatian parents. After his parents divorced, his mother moved back to Croatia, taking him with her. They lived briefly on his grandparents' small farm and then moved to a city. From there, he was forced to move back to Serbia due to the ethnic and religious conflict in 1995. He lived in Serbia as a refugee for almost five years before arriving in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2000. He is still very fluent in Serbo-Croatian and knows some Spanish. Dimitrije has been taking general classes at NHCC since 2008 and is employed at Target. He has found his diverse life experiences invaluable.*

Clashing **Cultures**

España

By Johnny Bates

When it comes to cultural differences, I am proud to say I've experienced a clash of different cultures. Two years ago, during the summer of my junior year in high school, I traveled to Spain with my Spanish class. When I found out I'd be going to Europe, I was ecstatic. It had been a dream of mine for as long as I can remember. The trip was spread out over two weeks. The first week was dedicated to touring by bus, and the second was dedicated to learning the culture by staying with a host family. There's no better way to learn a culture than to stay with a Spanish family all alone for a week, right? My feelings toward the trip flipped dramatically. I went from ecstatic to terrified. Although I was literally scared for my life to stay with a family full of strangers, I continued on with my plans to go to Spain. I knew the offer was too good to refuse.

The first part of the trip was going great. I had an amazing time touring museums, seeing famous sites, and eating delicious food. Time flew by so fast. Before I knew it, I was being dropped off at the doorstep of what was to be my home for the next week.

"Hola, Juan," said Jose. He was the same age as me. He greeted me with a soccer ball at his feet. I knew right away that we'd get along just great. He introduced me to his mother and father. They did not speak English. Jose knew about the same amount of English as I knew Spanish. At first it was very difficult to communicate. I became so frustrated, but I didn't tell my host family. I didn't want them to feel at fault for not knowing my language.

I am a shy person by nature. By being put in this situation my level of shyness skyrocketed. During my first night, when it became time to sit at the table for dinner, I didn't know what to say. Apparently, noise is the key to a good family meal in Spain. They would not stop talking. Back home I am used to eating alone. It was an awkward situation because I knew I should be contributing to the conversation, and I knew they knew I felt out of place. I just could not get myself to speak.

> I went from **ecstatic** to **terrified**.

On my third day with the family something happened that broke me out of my shell. Jose brought me to the park. We met up with four other boys that are friends of Jose. After being formally introduced, we played soccer. We played for hours. We did not arrive home until dinner time. I had so much fun with Jose and his friends that I had forgotten that I was living with a family of strangers. At the dinner table I spoke better Spanish than I had ever spoken. I created conversations with a family that does not speak my language, and the scary thing was, by the end of the night, I felt as if I were one of them.

The last four days flew by so quickly they seemed they were never even there. I didn't want to leave. There was so much more to learn. I felt as if I were leaving with work still to be done.

It's amazing how my views changed. At first I was angry and frustrated with the culture, but after giving it a shot, I learned to love it. After only seven days, I had learned so much that I'll never forget. I cannot wait for my next opportunity to visit Spain again — I have so much left to do and see!

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Johnny Bates *likes hands on science classes and hopes to become a dentist. However, he likes candy, specifically Airheads, Starbursts, and Werther's Originals. He has traveled to Canada and Spain. His favorite song is constantly changing, but for now it is Michael Jackson's Smooth Criminal.*

Feeling Foreign on Both Sides of The Pond

By Ryan M.D. Tate

When it was still dark outside, I used to wake up and polish my shoes. My math teacher insisted on being able to "see his pearly whites in them," although his teeth were never pearly, never white, and had a distinctly bad smell, which I recognized later as coffee. His eyes, sunken under his lids, would survey our shoes along the single-file line we assembled in every morning, waiting to be allowed entrance into the gymnasium. My friend Alistair's 'Windsor' knot was always too big, and we'd all have to stand outside and wait for him to retie it. Since we were only six, we wore gray shorts and underwent inspections of our knocked knees to make sure we hadn't been "mucking about" and got them dirty. If someone's legs were soiled, they'd have to go wash them, and the rest of us had to wait. Usually someone like Alex would make some scoffing sound, and we'd all have to wait even longer.

Once inside, the gym was set up with wooden benches in the middle and chairs along one wall where the faculty would sit. The pupils sat according to years and waited in silence for the Headmaster to arrive and conduct morning assembly. We all stood when he entered the room until we were told to sit, and then he made announcements. One predetermined student every morning had to come to the front to make a Bible reading, lead a prayer, lead a hymn, and then stand up front until our Headmaster was finished with assembly. The teachers paid little attention to what our Headmaster had to say. They scanned for troublemakers, who were usually the older boys that had reputations. They were the ones that would pass along notes with words like "shit" on them, for us six year olds to read and ponder over, before going home to ask our parents about what they meant. That's the exact way I found out what a "puff" and a "vagina" was.

We all knew who the troublemakers were. While usually older, they were also usually the boarders, whose parents worked far away or lived in another country. For the most part, they got away with murder, since the school was their home. But when they didn't, they'd have to run laps around the cricket pitch, which was in the center of all the school buildings. Teachers would walk by, leading us younger ones to the cafeteria, and say "Oh, look at those naughty boys." Usually they were the same group of boys that would think during assembly, while 120 bodies were crammed into the small hall, that it was an opportune time to let out a nasty, silent fart and smell all the rows up like rotten potatoes. Then we'd all have to sit there and pretend like we didn't notice, and that it wasn't funny, but, of course, it was.

My first day of school in England went something like that. I was acknowledged in front of the whole school–everyone–and was obviously out of sorts, wearing a blue sweater with green dinosaurs on it since my gray uniform jumper was on back-order at the school shop. My mom made me wear it since it was chilly that September.
"Where's your jumper?"
"I don't have one yet. I'm wearing this 'cuz it's chilly."
Blank stares. "Chilly? Like as in the food? American's must be mad!"
Everyone else wore wax jackets with a smell you'd never forget and Wellies outside when it rained. Wellies were these green boots that everyone had, but sometimes someone would have blue ones with Power Rangers on them, and a whole fad would start.

I had moved to England when I was five years old after my dad accepted a job transfer overseas. For over a decade I lived in Durham, where I'd see Japanese and American tourists come and take pictures of local churches, mistaking them for the Cathedral. Then I'd walk past them in my uniform and they'd look over and smile. My mom would laugh and say, "They probably look at you and think you're a little English schoolboy; little do they know you're an American, too."

The ten years I spent in the UK have had such a big impact on me as a person; I'll probably never know exactly how much until I'm gray and old. I definitely didn't experience much of American culture when I was young, like sports, which is why I went out for running when I was in high school instead of football, baseball, or some other sport that I didn't know the rules to. Later someone asked me why I didn't play soccer. I told them, "'Cuz I wasn't very good." And they responded, "Yeah, in comparison to English kids who played everyday since they were old enough to walk." I suppose that was true, in a way, but definitely a stereotype.

My return to America was curious. Having received a job transfer back the states, my dad told us we were coming to Minneapolis, which I only knew from the Mighty Ducks movies. Originally we were from Illinois, but my parents were just happy to be able to get back on the same continent as their family. I remember my dad sitting with us around the dinner table once we arrived state-side saying, "So, the governor here is an ex-pro wrestler! Can you believe that? Like on TV."

My first day of school in the states involved many firsts. I'd never ridden a yellow school bus or sat in those green seats, never seen football jerseys or real cheerleaders, never been able to wear casual clothes to school, never sat in on a ninety-minute class, and never been at a school with any girls. As fate would have it, someone decided it was a great idea to make my first class of my first day, P.E. I entered into the gym and there were all these girls, all in my grade, running and jumping around in little shorts and tank tops. It inspired an email I wrote later that night to my friends in the UK saying, "Girls are nice. I love America."

But arriving in the U.S. was so much more than that. I was only in the country about two weeks before September 11th happened. At first I didn't even know what the World Trade Centers were, or even why a terrorist attack was such a big deal since I grew up hearing about IRA terrorist bombings in London and Northern Ireland all the time. When my Physical Science teacher turned on the TV

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> and got them dirty.

though, I understood a lot better. This was different. This was big. I remember asking my mom in the car, not long after, "Why do all Americans have flags outside their house?" I didn't quite understand what 9/11 meant in a country I barely knew. Then again, I don't think people who knew it well understood what it meant, either. I learned over the next few weeks that terrorist attacks just didn't happen in America, and this was a matter of vulnerability.

What's probably unique about my transition into American life was that it was not only in a post-9/11 America, but an immediately post-9/11 America. I learned about America at a time when everyone was remembering it, and reliving how much they loved it.

People at the time were showing their love out loud; frequently, they'd say, "I love America," just like that, all the time, like they were talking about their wives or something. I had never experienced anything like that before.

While the country was still grieving, it was nevertheless one of those unique times where everyone just came together. That was my first real impression of this country. The ability to have had a first impression of my home country at all was pretty remarkable, but having had it at that particular time, was definitely aberrant.

Another impact of arriving in the U.S. was my sparked interest in American history since everything, to me, was new and fresh and exciting. I came here able to talk all about the Magna Carta and 1066, but didn't know anything about John Smith, or the Reconstruction, or Harriet Tubman. Here, it was an American Revolution and not a Colonial Rebellion, and we weren't taught that throwing tea into harbors was somewhat ungrateful. I recognized this influence recently, as I started preparing to transfer to a four-year program and major in history.

Still, there's a lot of "what ifs" I think about: What if I had never lived overseas; what if I had stayed in England; what if I had applied for my dual citizenship, instead of procrastinating until it was too late. I'll never know how different my life would be, but I do know that these things make a difference. I am who I am because of where my life has been and taken me. Most definitely, one of the greatest strengths my cross-cultural experiences have brought to me as a person is my understanding of the world as a larger entity and requires ideas and responsibilities of global citizenship. None of us around the world are all that different. We all have people we love and know people who drive us crazy, have influences on the people around us, and share commonalities of just being human. That's what I am most grateful for learning: that this world is greater than the sum of its parts. And recognizing that is really pretty humbling.

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Ryan M.D. Tate *was born in Peoria, Illinois, and moved to Durham, England, when he was five years old. He resided in England for a decade, returning to the United States and settling in Plymouth, Minnesota for high school. Ryan has been at NHCC for three semesters and plans to transfer to a four year college to pursue a major in history. Outside of school, Ryan enjoys reading, writing, traveling, playing guitar and spending time with his fiancé.*

JAPAN at Dusk

By Ryan Murray

"The true science of martial arts means practicing them in such a way that they will be useful at any time, and to teach them in such a way that they will be useful in all things."
— Miyamoto Musashi (The Book of Five Rings: Miyamoto Musashi)

I am a coach at the Minnesota Martial Arts Academy here in Brooklyn Center, and I have taught Thai-boxing and stand up fighting as my specialty for the last six years. I usually help other Thai-boxers or Mixed Martial artists when they train for their fights, spanning from experienced professionals to people who have never fought a day in their life. A friend and fellow training partner asked if I would accompany him to Japan for his fight under the organization "Sengoku". It was a thirteen hour flight from Minnesota to Japan, and, although star trek was the in-flight movie, the trip was torturous.

> I thought how in America with this many people plus beer would probably **mean a riot,** or at least a hell of a **loud party.**

After arriving in Japan we were to be driven to our hotel in Tokyo, near Senjuku Station. The drive was three hours, all through a cityscape; I've never seen so much city, not even in New York. The next day Nick (the fighter) had nothing to do, but diet and get ready to cut weight. So Derrick, my fellow corner man, and I, decided to walk around at four in the morning. We walked and took pictures, waited for things to open, people watched. The first thing we noticed was that there was beer and whiskey waters in vending machines. I remember being amazed at this, I especially took time to read the can that said "whiskey water" as if it were a joke or I was misreading it. But, lo and behold, it was alcohol in a vending machine, so what's a guy to do?

About a minute later, we were walking down the street, I with a beer, he with whiskey water, and we spotted a familiar sight: a McDonald's. We walked in and saw some things on the menu like "teriyaki burger" and a burger with an egg on it. I tried a teriyaki burger and was not impressed, but their fries tasted exactly the same. Later after things opened we found another restaurant and decided to try it out. When we were served, they gave us a big bowl of cabbage, a mortar and pestle with black sesame seeds, and some other type of seed. By watching others, we saw that we had to crush the sesame seeds and add a sauce to it and dip our pork tempura in it. It was by far the best tempura anything I'd ever had.

Walking back to the hotel, there were groups upon groups of people lining the streets, everyone with a beer or two regardless of age. But the amazing thing was that it was silent, and I mean completely quiet. I thought how in America with this many people plus beer would probably mean riot, or at least a hell of a loud party. But here it was hundreds of people drinking, and it was peacefully quite. It was quite surreal.

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***Ryan Murray** has studied Muay Thai, the martial art of kickboxing, for over ten years, and it has afforded him opportunities like the cross-cultural one he writes about. He is currently in school studying anthropology, but his passion for fighting and Thai-boxing has never faltered.*

My Life

By Nicole Anderson

Growing up, for some people, is a real challenge. The need to fit in with our peers can sometimes lead us in a dark direction. In high school there were the jocks, the stoners, the nerds, and then there was me. I tried to be every single one of those types, and I ended up being very overwhelmed. I cared so much about who liked me and who I fit in with that at a very young age, around 16 or so, I ended up in very frightening situations– places that no one should ever see in their lifetime.

The feeling of not being good enough goes back as far as I can remember. Being raised by alcoholic, drug-addicted parents always left me with the need for attention and the feeling that I needed to take care of everyone around me, especially my little sister. My parents divorced when I was five. My father was awarded full-custody of me and my sister. This led to a battle, which is still present in my life today, a battle between my family and me just trying to make sure that everyone is happy.

My dad, being a single parent of two daughters, kept us very close to him. Sometimes this was hard to handle because I felt as if I had to take care of him and make sure he wasn't lonely, sacrificing my own happiness. My sister and I were his everything, his whole meaning of life. Most of his life has been dedicated to taking care of us and making sure that we have everything that we need–it still is this way today. The older we got, the farther we would pull away. After all, it was not considered "cool" to hang out with your dad on a Friday night. The more freedom I wanted, the tighter

> Before I could even blink, I had become homeless, unhealthy, depressed, and **had nothing** and no one in my life whatsoever. This all happened within just **four years** of using drugs and alcohol.

the reigns would be pulled in. My dad found a girlfriend and eventually married and divorced her. She was the closest thing I had to a mother. All that my dad wanted was for my sister and me to grow up healthy, happy, and content. My step-mom was in and out of our lives quite frequently. One minute she would be there and we would all be a happy family, and the next minute, her stuff would be packed and she would be gone– we wouldn't see her for months. This was very confusing and disturbing to me. We didn't have any structure in our lives, which was hard for me to handle because all that I wanted was a "normal" family and life where I would sit down to dinner every night with everyone being nice to each other.

As I finished up my 8th grade year of school, I discovered marijuana, which made me feel as if I didn't need to care about anything but how

comfortable it made me. My friend and I were waiting for the bus, and she had some on her that her neighbor had given her. I smoked the weed and nothing seemed to happen. We got on the bus, and the weed started to have an effect on me. This warm, happy, carefree, feeling came over my whole, entire body. It was as if I were floating on a bunch of soft, fluffy clouds and didn't have a care in the world. All I could do was look at my friend and laugh hysterically. Finally, I had found something that brought me complete and utter joy. We got to school and our other friends knew something was going on with us. When we told them that we had smoked weed before school, they were upset with us. I wasn't going to share the fact that I was finally happy and that I had the weed to thank for it. Instead, I got rid of my judgmental friends that didn't support my weed use and found some friends that did. I suffered no consequences from this first time. My dad and my teachers had no idea. My plan from that day on was to feel that way again, forever if possible.

I waited way too long, so it seemed like, until the next time I got "screwed up." I found a group of kids in high school that enjoyed getting messed up also. I quickly latched onto them, and that is what we did. School was meaningless to me now, and all that I cared about was when and how I was going to get "messed up" next. My grades began to slip, and my family-life started to become really unpleasant.

I started getting caught because I would come home really drunk, over and over again. My dad's reaction to this was to call the cops. My reaction to this was to try to kill myself by taking aspirin. This resulted in me going to treatment for the first time at age 16. It wasn't the last time either. I went to treatment very frequently only because my behavior would land me there on several different occasions.

With my 18th birthday approaching, my dad and I had the biggest, scariest, loudest, fight we had ever had. I had come home 15 minutes late from my older boyfriend's house. My raging father became aggressive and violent with me as I walked in the door. With my door slamming into me and random things being thrown at me, I packed up my stuff and had one of my good friends pick me up. I went to stay with her, eventually going to live with my older boyfriend. By that time, I had graduated to doing harder drugs like cocaine, ecstasy, and oxy-contin. My dad knew I was doing these things, which made him very angry with me.

Before I could even blink, I had become homeless, unhealthy, depressed, and had nothing and no one in my life whatsoever. This all happened within just four years of using drugs and alcohol. I dropped out of school and had no job. I got into trouble with the law. I was facing two felony charges in two different counties. Being in jail and having plenty of time to think about all of these things gave me a sense of an awakening. Like I had the choice of going down road A–continuing with my behavior that landed me in jail and possibly prison, or road B–getting sober and doing something with my life.

I chose road B, which is so wonderful to me. My life now is completely different. I am a great daughter, sister, friend, student, employee, and am also able to help other women achieve sobriety and a better life by sharing what I did and how I did it. I am so incredibly close with my father because we have sobriety in common. I am able to maintain my great life, along with my sobriety, by attending different groups with people that share my same problems. I also have a woman in my life that directs me on how I should be doing things so that I don't go back to how I did them before. Because of all of this, I have almost three years of sobriety. I am 23 years old now and have so many great things going on in my life. These things are possible because I'm sober and had the willingness to change all of the things in my life that were not working out for me. I no longer care what crowd of people I fit in with or what everyone is doing on Friday night. Things that matter to me now are: if I had a good day or not, if I was mean to someone, if was able to help someone else, and if I know I did the best I could do.

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Nicole Anderson *is 23 years old and currently enrolled at NHCC, pursuing a paralegal degree. She recently moved from Champlin to Brooklyn Park. She took College Writing 1 and really enjoyed not only discovering her ability to write but also being able to put everything that she has been through on paper. Her narrative of her trials and tribulations has helped her to see what happened to her in a different way rather than just speaking about it.*

The Mother-Daughter Relationship is The Most Complex

By Cindy Yang

Mothers and daughters are like best friends. A daughter usually looks up to her mother. A mother usually sets a good lady-like example. A mother and daughter can talk about anything. Well, my mother and I don't have a good bond. It's hard to find time to spend some mother-and-daughter time. She follows the traditional way; I follow the American way.

I'm a part-time student and part-time worker. She is a full-time worker. I'm barely home during the day because I either go to school and work right after or hang out with some friends after school. My mother and I don't see each other much because our schedule doesn't fit. But when we get a chance to be home at the same time, it gets a little awkward. We don't see each other enough to communicate. So when I have something to say, it's kind of hard to speak my mind around her. My mother and I are like strangers.

> I'm very limited to things I can do and cannot do. It's difficult to meet **my mother's standards** because I have to **balance** my life as an **American girl** and a **Hmong girl.**

In the Hmong culture, women are expected to be a great house wife before they get married. Also families are honored by the high education one has. My mother believes that a good daughter should be at home to watch over the siblings, clean the house, and pursue an education. I'm very limited to things I can do and cannot do. It's difficult to meet my mother's standards because I have to balance my life as an American girl and a Hmong girl. When I hung out with my friends, my mother would call me constantly to come home. We would get into a huge argument about this all the time. The more we argue about this situation, the more we distance ourselves from each other. When I would buy McDonald's for the family, she wouldn't eat it because she prefers Hmong food. This disappoints her because I'm more into American food than my own native food.

My mother and I don't see eye to eye sometimes. This causes big arguments because I believe that one would find herself if she experiences the world, but what my mother sees is that I'll always be partying and get a bad reputation. I'm attending school to have a good career, and I'm working for a little money to spend on the side. I am an adult who is searching for a future, but in my mother's eyes I am still a child. I'm almost 20 years old, and I believe I should have the choice to make my own decision. For an example, my parents pay for my phone bills, and I decided that since I work and want to be more independent and committed, I would start by getting my own cellular phone line. I calculated my spending and savings, and I had enough to pay the bill each month. But my mother insisted that I do not get one. She lectured about how I'm not committed enough and can't take on such a responsibility.

Friends and family have always told me mothers will be mothers. I understand that a mother worries about the daughter often, but it's a lesson a daughter needs to learn or a life that one has to live. A daughter without a mother is like a nice day without the sun. My mother and I may not get along or have a strong bond, but as long as she is still my mom, at the end of the day that is good enough for me.

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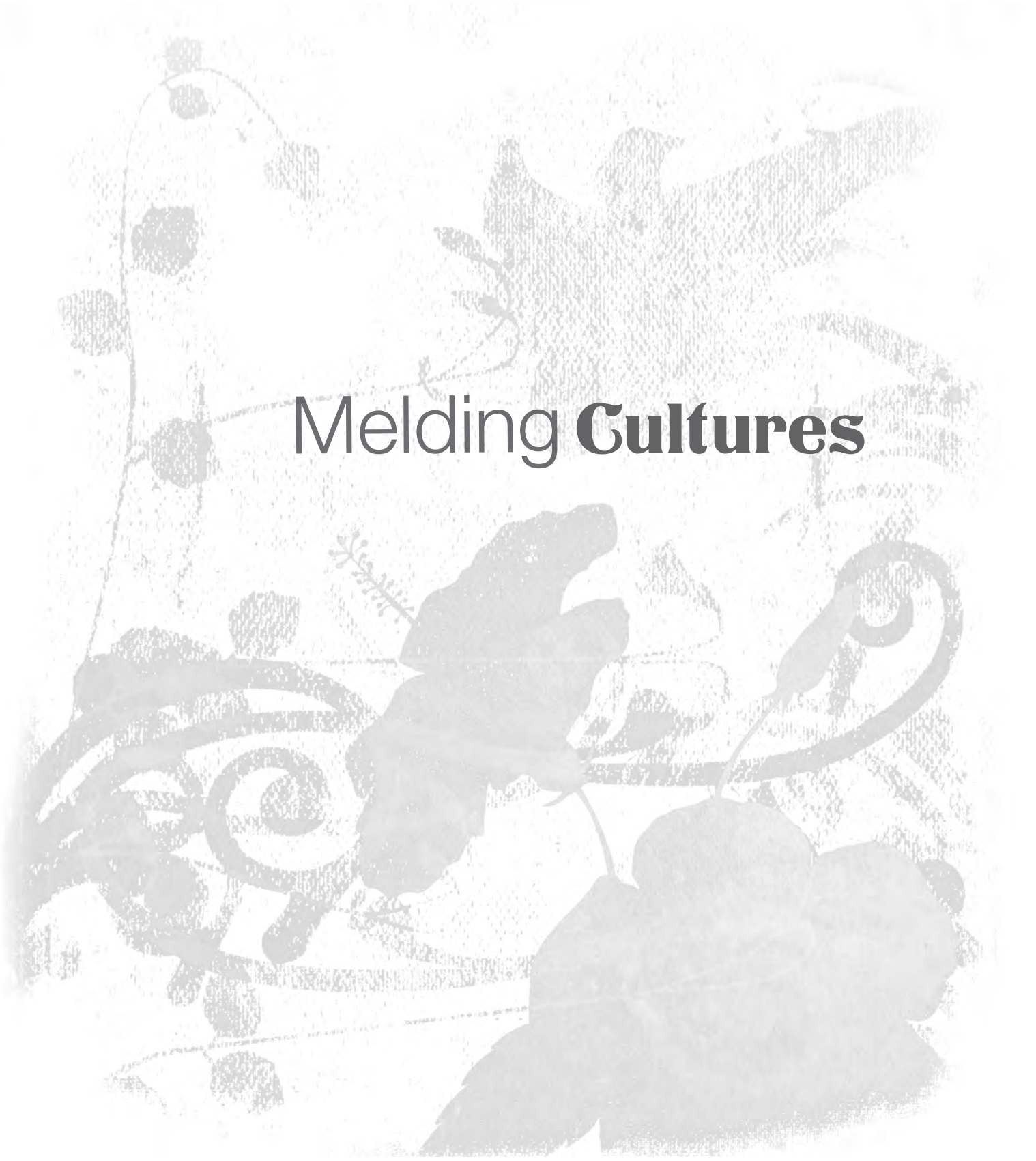
***Cindy Yang** is American-Hmong student at North Hennepin Community College. She was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on May 25, 1990, to Tou Yang and Ying V. Yang. She has two younger brothers. She graduated from Anoka high school in 2009 and is the first in the family to attend college. She claims to be an ordinary, typical girl, who is searching for the best.*



Melding **Cultures**

Blending

By Nicole Rootes

I am standing in a room mixed with the scent of perfume and food in the air. Everyone stares at me; I'm white and they are not.

I grew up with my mother until I met my sister's father when I was nine years old. My mother never married him, but we started living with him when my mother got kicked out of our old place. My sister's dad isn't really my dad through marriage or blood, but I respect him as much as anyone would respect their father. I call him dad.

When I tell people about the blending of my dad and my mom's culture, they tend to stare at me with a look of confusion. I tell people my dad raised my sisters and me with the thought that family is everything; even your neighbors are like your family. However, my mom is the complete opposite. She keeps to herself and hates people, especially family, because that is how she was raised.

I see familiar faces of family and extended family. Do I belong?

I love the Afghan culture and how different it is from the culture I grew up with. I adore listening to my dad talk about it. He talks about his younger days of living and growing up in Afghanistan.

"I remember back in the day when I met the love of my life," he would say with a sigh, "but my father said he would disown me if we were to marry. She was from a poor family, and at the time I wasn't making any money."

"What did you do?" I asked my dad.

"I took off from my home and tried to make enough money for the both of us. I traveled around Europe and came to the United States in the late seventies. I never saw her again."

Other times my dad will talk about his family: "One day my sister and I were fighting. I don't remember why but I remember what I did to Mariam." He told with a smile on his face and took a sip of tea.

I smiled and asked, "What did you do?"

"I took out all of her school books from her backpack and filled them with rocks. Her books were so heavy anyways that she couldn't tell the difference. Then at school her teacher asked for an assignment. Mariam opened her backpack and started to cry. I don't know why, but I still find that funny."

"I remember back in the day when I met **the love of my life,"** he would say with a sigh, "but my father said he would **disown me** if we were to marry.

Chatter fills my ears. Are you talking to me or about me?

My favorite part of the culture is the language. Even if I don't know Farsi well, I can still pick up a little bit of the conversations when I'm surrounded by the family. However, family gossip travels just as fast as a person blinking. Whenever I'm around them, they think I can't understand them. I can… a little bit at least.

I'm alone. I don't know what to do next. Should I sit at the table with them or at another alone?

A big part of my dad's culture is family parties. Every time I walk into a room, I see vibrant bright colors everywhere and smell the spices from the food. The women are dressed, too, in expensive gowns and have make-up caked on their face, and I look plain in my black dress. The music comes on, and my ears are filled with the beats of the Tablas and the singer, who is also playing an organ. Dancing immediately starts in the center of the room. The dancers look like they are stepping to the beats of the music while screwing in light bulbs.

Greeting is a part of the respect each family gives to one another. Three kisses on the cheek for women, one kiss on the cheek for men. I'm about to give respect to my "aunt" when I inhale her mystery blend of perfumes. I turn around to see the face of my cousin. She is smiling.

"Nicole-Jaan, Salaam!"

I do belong. I dance alongside them no longer standing by myself.

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***Nicole Rootes** is transferring to the University of Minnesota to major in Elementary Education. She loves to read memoirs and any culture books. She enjoys music; her favorite bands are Vampire Weekend and Lydia. Her favorite singer is Michael Buble. She loves watching The Office and Flight of the Conchords. Family means everything to her, and she has enjoyed laughing and learning with them.*

Growing Up Hispanic Thirty Years Ago

By Michel Otten

When I was seven, my family moved to Minnesota from Colorado. My mother is Panamanian and my father was born in Minnesota. It was not obvious to me or my siblings that we were different than other kids. My parents raised us like other parents with love and discipline. We never noticed the difference in the family until we moved to Minnesota.

I am the oldest of the kids. Once we were settled in a school and we started to get to know my father's family, I started to see that we were different. My grandfather was much like Archie Bunker (a white man in his 60's with a very bigoted point of view). I started to notice that the family favored the blond haired, blue eyed boys that were my cousins. My brother was the opposite, with black tight kinky curly hair much like an African-American's hair. His skin was olive colored much darker than mine and even my sisters. My sister had a looser curl but it wasn't the smooth wavy curl that I had. Though her skin was white in comparison to mine, it seemed that her hair singled her out more. Now this is the family singling her out.

> I felt that because I resembled the closest to white out of the three of us that I was also favored.

I felt that because I resembled the closest to white out of the three of us that I was also favored. This bothered me a lot. The older I got the more I noticed that my family held some pretty ugly prejudices. I heard all the slang terms for all different races and found it to be very offensive. No one could have known that a seven year old girl would pick up on the terms and within five years learn to understand them to be hateful and hurtful.

By the time I was in third grade we had switched to our second elementary school in Coon Rapids. The first school was not bad and outside of my family I still felt pretty normal. But this new school was another story. On the way to and from school we heard kids calling us names. At first I didn't notice; I thought they were being called out to someone else. As the year went on I gradually realized that these names were being called out to me and my sister.

I had heard the names come out of my grandfather's mouth but they were never used towards me or my siblings. I didn't know what "jungle bunny, porch monkey" were. At first, I didn't have a clue as to what they meant or who they were meant for. So I started to pay attention to what they were talking about at home.

I learned that the names were derogatory names for African Americans. I heard the kids call us the names and knew that they thought we were black. I told my sister that they were calling the names to someone else and told her to ignore those people. I walked back and forth to school everyday with my little sister and held my head high. I never returned or exchanged words with these ignorant children. I knew that their parents were probably like my grandfather and felt sorry for the narrow minded fools that would teach hate to their children.

I still didn't think of myself as different, even though it was painfully obvious that I was different. The next school I went to was a little better, but I did have some issues with the girls. I would never be popular, and I would never be part of any group. I would have a few select friends who saw beyond the color of my skin.

My brother on the other hand suffered greatly for his appearance. The children he went to school with picked on him terribly. They teased him, constantly calling him the "black nerd." Although he was highly intelligent and tested at genius level for math, he was treated as an outsider until he hit junior high and high school.

When I was in the Eighth grade, I was taking a speech class. You know the ones where you get up in front of the class and give speeches? Well one day in my speech class a boy named Roger told me that I was black. I told him that in fact my mother was Panimanian and therefore I was Hispanic. This boy decided that I was wrong about my nationality and race. I let him know that he was incorrect and that I was fully aware of my background where he would not be. The argument caused such commotion and distress for me that the teacher had to get involved. I could not understand how this white boy who didn't know anything about me could argue with me about my heritage.

By the time I got to high school there were several real black kids in the area and people quit harassing me. I learned at a young age that prejudice is a very nasty thing. Looking back, I could not have

handled any of those situations differently. I ignored those that could be ignored and addressed the ones that could not be, even though they believed what they wanted to.

I never really let others' perceptions phase me outwardly. I always stood with my shoulders back and my head held high. But on the inside for me it hurt that my brother and sister suffered more than I did. They were taking on a brunt that no child should have to suffer especially at the hands of family. I was very angry with my dad's family and stepped away from them because of the favoritism for the other children and for the "favoritism" I felt towards me. I was ashamed that I was the one they treated best out of the three of us. It angered me that color of skin determined who people were in the eyes of many people.

I believe that my experiences made me a stronger more confident person. I feel for the most part that I rose above the ignorance by not giving in to their antagonisms. I know who I am and the color of my skin is just that, a color. I determine who I am and who I will be, not the color of my skin.

Times have changed and this type of thing is not so prevalent, but there is still ignorance out there, and we need to be strong in who we are and not allow others to affect us negatively. I am a Hispanic woman who will not let my skin color determine who I am or who I will be. Don't let your skin determine who you are.

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Michel Otten *is a 35-year-old student and mother of two daughters. Her parents met when her dad was transferred to Panama during his time in the Army. Her family moved around a lot but finally settled in Minnesota, where her father was raised.*

Growing Up Vietnamese *in America*

By Annie Ngo

I grew up knowing that it was my duty to follow in my mom's footsteps to learn how to cook, clean, and take care of my family. My mom still tells me stories about how she grew up. She would tell me tales about waking up early in the morning with her sisters to make breakfast for the whole family. My family on my mom's side still resides in Da Nang, and they all live in a little community of houses that are quite close to each other. My mother would go to school till two or three in the afternoon then meet up with my grandma at the market to sell whatever food we could make for a little bit of money. Once my mom had made just enough money, or ran out of food, she would go and buy rice and some fresh vegetables to cook dinner that night.

Homework always came after dinner was fully made and eaten and dishes were cleaned. Being family oriented, my mom cooked for her eight brothers and sisters because she was the oldest and was always the last to eat. I grew up learning the same cooking and cleaning techniques my mother did. It was always so different for me because my mother spoiled me a little bit. She wanted the best for my brother and me, so she did everything in her power to make sure us kids never had to lift a finger. That never stopped me from helping out my mom with whatever I could. I learned how to cook a full Vietnamese meal by the time I was ten, and I'm very grateful for what I've learned.

It was truly difficult growing up in Minnesota knowing that the rest of my family suffered in Vietnam. The best holiday any Vietnamese child celebrated was New Years. It's called Tet over in Vietnam. I've never actually been able to experience Tet in Vietnam, but I've heard plenty of stories. Everywhere you turn and look, the streets, buildings, and even children are all decked out in a vibrant red. Candy is sold everywhere and streamers are constantly going off. The most significant part about Tet is all the money we kids receive. It has always been a tradition to pass out money in little red envelopes to any kids or anyone younger. It's a way of wishing that person good luck, an amazing new year, prosperity, happiness, and lots of love. Although I celebrate my New Years in Minneapolis with my community of Vietnamese friends, I still send home money and words of happiness to my family in Vietnam. I know that even though it's not a lot it'll just be enough to show my family that I'm thinking of them and I wish them all the best.

> I've learned not to take what I've got for granted. I hope that one day, more people will come to realize that we've honestly got it all.

Being blessed with the opportunity to grow up in the land of the free has changed my life completely. I've visited Vietnam a couple times, and each time, I understand the pain and suffering of my fellow aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews. I wish I could better help them out so that they don't have to live day by day. The lives of kids over in America greatly differ from the lives of kids Vietnam, and I've learned to not take what I've got for granted. I hope that one day, more people will come to realize that we've honestly got it all, and the little things we don't really need, should go towards a better cause. I will never stop learning about my culture, and I'm going to make sure that my kids know their roots and understand they're pretty lucky where they are.

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Annie Ngo *was born in Da Nang, Vietnam. Her family of four — mom, dad, brother, and she — immigrated to the United States in June of 1991. Her dad passed away in 1997, leaving her mom to take care of two kids in the American society.*

Lao-American and Proud of It

By Ashley Vongsouvanh

Growing up in America was like having two lives, cultures, family, friends, religions, and experiences. As I grew up, I quickly learned how to behave as a Laotian daughter as well as being an average American teenager.

When you grow up in an Asian family, you quickly learn that you can't always live up to the high standards that your parents grew up with. At a young age of nine, my mother knew how to cook and take care of her parents. Every day, she would attend school, come straight home, cook, clean, and study. For me, that life style didn't work so well. I didn't want to be locked up in my home feeling like a prisoner. I wanted to go out and explore with my friends, have sleepovers, stay out late, and basically just enjoy life to the fullest.

I didn't want to be the typical Laotian girl that everyone wanted to see. I felt that life was different because I was in America and that the Laotian traditional life style just wasn't in me. In the long run, I didn't listen to my parents. But I still respect the rules and aspects that they both grew up with. They showed me that hard work pays off and that I should always try no matter how hard life gets. My parents came to America with basically nothing: no education, little money. But they always had family. They built their life back up, and for that I thank them every day. Sure, I don't always listen to them, cook traditional meals every day, or follow the rules in my culture, but I still am a Laotian girl trying to find my way in life.

> I like having
> **two different lives**
> while living in America.

My favorite part about being Laotian is celebrating the Lao New Year. My friends don't understand why Lao New Year is in April, and to be honest I have no clue either. But I like the idea of getting to celebrate the New Year in January and then again in April. Laotian traditional music is blended with different types of instruments that make you want to get up from your feet and dance. I love being around my friends and family and sharing Laotian traditional meals, speaking in our language, and just spending time with them. I like having two different lives while living in America.

Another strong connection I have is with my religion, which is Buddhism. As I was growing up in my teenage years, I was always open-minded and curious about how people view the world from their religion. Since I was a little girl, I was raised as a Buddhist. Although I don't follow all the norms, I still respect my religion in every way. My father has had the biggest impact on me. Every time we would visit our temples in Farmington, he would take off his shoes and pray with the monks right away. Before bed, he would pray, and every time something important came up, he would do little culture rules to bring good luck. As a Buddhist, we strictly believe in reincarnation. Everything we do in our life will bring good things to happen in our next. I remember one time I disobeyed my father's wishes. Because he was strongly a Buddhist, he didn't want me step foot in a church as long as I lived.

However, as I was growing up in my teenage years, I was always open-minded and curious about how people view the world from their religion. A good friend of mine converted to Christianity after finding things she agreed with more in that religion than in Buddhism. So I was curious one day and decided to attend. I went for two days, and I thought it was interesting how two religions could be different yet the same. I was crossing a boundary that my dad didn't agree with, but being at the age of fifteen, I wondered what else set people apart. In the end I'm glad I got to experience something different from Buddhism.

Since growing up as an American, I have a life filled with different cultural experiences. When I am in a public area and someone else is speaking Laotian to me, I understand it as if they were speaking English. I find it kind of cool, and I am proud to be who I am today. I still have many life lessons to learn and different experiences to encounter, but I will always know that I will carry my Laotian and American culture with me throughout my life.

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Ashley Vongsouvanh *is a second generation Lao American writer and student who is currently studying Liberal Arts at NHCC. Music is her inspiration and she loves to sing for a hobby. She plans to be in the business world in the future, but is still undecided on what career path she wants to follow. She wrote this journal to show others how interesting life can be to grow up with two different cultures. She one day plans to move to California and wants to open a sushi restaurant. This past summer she interned with poet and playwright, Saymoukda Vongsay, during the 2010 Lao American Writers Summit held at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis.*

My Father: My Motivation, My Inspiration, and My Hero

By Allen Yang

It was a hot sunny summer day in room 152 at Palmer Lake Elementary School. My best friend Kevin tapped me on the back and asked me when we were getting out of there? I just shrugged. I mean, I didn't know what time we were out either. At that moment, I saw a twinkle of sweat running down his forehead. The classroom was intense, agonizing, and unbearable. The kids wanted out and we wanted out right now! At that moment, my teacher, Mrs. Lim, suddenly stood up like a twenty-foot giant to make an important announcement.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you are all welcome to tonight's carnival hosted by Palmer Lake Elementary School! There'll be snacks, drinks, and prizes! Everyone's invited!
"Yeah, we're coming!" we all cried out.
"And everyone, one last reminder. Bring your whole family!" said my teacher with a smile on her face.

One after another, all the kids ditched their backpacks and ran for their lives.
"Hey kids! You guys all forgot your backpacks!" Mrs. Lim yelled back outside.
"Don't worry Mrs. Lim! We'll be back for it later after the carnival! That way, my family had to come, no matter what," I said in return anxiously.

I grouped everybody in my classroom in a corner and told everybody to come to the annual carnival that night. Everyone agreed and promised one another they would make it to the carnival. It was an only once in a life time experience when fifth graders got a chance to hang out after school. I ran all the way home and not once did I stop to take a break. I was too excited. This would be the first carnival of my life and the most memorable one. I remembered as a kid watching carnivals on television, and I always envisioned myself in a carnival. There would be funny looking clowns walking around with balloons, there would be big prizes to win, and there would be everyone at the school there. This was my day. That night, I was going to have fun with all my friends! What kind of eleven year old boy or girl would say no to a free carnival? I had to make it tonight. I told all of my buddies they also had to make it.

I reached my house in a matter of two minutes. Out of breath, I searched the whole house for my father. I searched through the dusty attic. I searched the kitchen and living room. I ran down the creaky stairs into the dark basement. Where was he I wondered? I almost gave up until I heard my Dad whistling. My father's whistling was so loud I covered my ears for a second or two. His whistling kept leading me on going until I finally found him outside in the backyard.

"Dad, we have a carnival tonight at school, and we're all invited! I just wanted to let you know so that you can tell mom. I'll tell everybody else in the family. Okay?" I screamed out.

"Who go?" My father asked me with a puzzling look.
"Well, I want to go. And I want everybody to go with me. I also need you guys to take me."
"No, me sorry. Can't."
"Why not?!"

My father wouldn't answer. As a Hmong immigrant, he rarely attended school functions. I persisted. I didn't care. I wanted to go really badly. If I was granted one wish right now, my wish would be attending the carnival with my family and friends. I tried again and again. With despair, I asked one last time, and again I was rejected. I walked to my room depressed and discouraged. I told all my friends to be there. I promised them we would all have fun together. I especially claimed that tonight would be a night to remember. Everything went down the drain as if it didn't even occur to anyone I desperately wanted to go. Out of frustration, I went to my room and fell asleep quietly by myself.

It was not until a couple of years later that I finally found the true reason for my father's rejection. My father was scared to face the outside world, and he didn't want to confront an unknown world. He'd rather not face a world where everyone else's language was not his. His level of English had not met a standard of correctness yet.

Many confusing years have gone by and life went on; I still ponder as to why my father continuously rejected facing the world outside his home. Only just last year, my family had been foreclosed on our home due to inefficient payments for the house. I was worried about the situation, so I asked my father what we were going to do about the problem.

"Dad, did the bank mail us a letter about our house? They've requested us to find a lawyer. What are we going to do about this situation?"
"I don't know, my son. Don't worry," my father replied in Hmong.
"Why not? We're required to look for a lawyer as soon as possible."
"No!"
"Dad! Don't you see that the bank will take us to court if we don't do it the right way, the professional way! What is your issue?"
"I am your father, you don't speak that way to me."

This persisted for another ten minutes. The conversation got rough. My father and I began yelling at one another. My father and I blew up! This wasn't going anywhere near a nice father and son conversation.

"Dad! What are you so scared of?!" I said in rage.
"Who do you think you are to criticize me?! I don't want to go out and find a lawyer! I'm scared! Your father, the one who brought you up, the one who held you as baby is scared! I don't want to face the outside world. People look at me as if I'm different. They take me as uneducated. A fifty year old man, who doesn't know how to speak proper English. I'm embarrassed and ashamed. I've been living here for eighteen years. I don't want to take this anymore. I'm sick and tired of it. I've given up hope. I've tried and tried again to learn English, but it's so difficult. It's too difficult."

I stared at my dad and I saw a tear roll down his eyes. I looked away. My father, my hero, was terrified of facing the outside world. I'm not ashamed of my father. I look up to him as my idol. After that conversation, I looked up to him even more than ever. Even though my father was embarrassed, I give him props for trying. He's been trying for eighteen years to gain a good education and be part of this new land.

My father was scared to face the outside world, and he didn't want to confront an **unknown world.** He'd rather not face a world where everyone else's **language was not his.**

It was not until a week ago that I read Amy Tan's essay, "Mother Tongue," and that essay opened my eyes to possibilities of my father's insecurity facing the public. In the essay, Amy Tan expresses her mother's way of talking in English as "broken" and "fractured." The way she explained her mother's English is somewhat similar to my father's own accented English:

Du Yusong having business like fruit stand. Like off the street kind. He is Du like Du Zong – but not Tsung-ming Island people. The local people call puton, the river ease side, he belong to that side local people. That man want to ask Du Zong father take him in like become own family. Du Zong father wasn't look down on him, but didn't take seriously, until that man big like a mafia. Now important person, very hard to inviting him. Chinese way, came only to respect, don't stay for dinner. Respect for making big celebration, he shows up. Meaning gives lots of respect. Chinese custom. Chinese social life that way. If too important won't have to stay too long. He come to my wedding. I didn't see, I heard it. I gone to boy's side they have YMCA dinner. Chinese age I was nineteen.

It was not until this passage that I fully realized that my father spoke like Amy Tan's mother. Amy Tan has described immigrant families' English as "broken or fractured English…as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness." I've described my father's English "broken" to people around

me, and I never took into account how my father felt deep inside. Yes, I knew he didn't speak proper English, but I would never have guessed he felt that way about his own potentials because, to me, it was understandable, nothing out of the ordinary. As Amy Tan explains, "That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world". In the world between my father and me, the way he spoke English to me didn't matter. That's why I never comprehended why my father declined to go out. My father was not scared like a mouse would be scared of a cat. He was scared because of other people's perspective on him, and how he would be viewed based on his English.

As a child, it would have been meaningful to me if my father took me to places outside the house. I would have loved it if my father brought me out to after school activities, sports, or conferences. But my father constantly gave me an answer of "No." After a couple of years hearing it over and over again, I slowly gave up on my dad and never fully understood why he always said No. I never quite understood how my father felt inside about his own English or how his own English stopped him from allowing us to be like the families of my fellow students at Palmer Lake Elementary.

In a way, my father understood the powers of language. He understood its potential, its impact, and its effect on a person. The powers of language can also put out a negative view on a person as well. My father believed that his lack of English evoked an image of himself as an uneducated and ignorant man to the outside world. But my father is my hero. Whether or not my father speaks English well, I look up to him. My father never once gave up on this new land. My father, afraid and scared, never once told his kids we were leaving the States and going back to our Laos and back to our people, a place where he felt comfortable, where everyone spoke the same language. Even though my father lacked proper English in the United States and felt ashamed of it, he never let us kids down. Although he was mortified and humiliated from his absent English, he held his head strong for us kids and never allowed us to know of his deprivation through all the years here in the United States.

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Allen Yang *was born in Fresno, California, on October 2, 1991, and lived there for about five years before moving to St. Paul, Minnesota, in the summer of 1996. He attended elementary, middle school, and high school in Minnesota. Now a PSEO, he completed his first semester at NHCC during the spring, 2010, and is proud to be part of this school. Born in Laos, his father and mother survived the Vietnam War and came to the United States of America in 1990 after spending five years in Thailand. His family and he speak Hmong. English is their second language.*

My First Powwow *with my* Father

By Christina Baker

My father was part Ojibwa; he had grown up in Northern Minnesota, on the Cass Lake Reservation. He had been adopted into a Caucasian family when he was eight and moved to the Twin Cities. His adoptive parents changed his native name, and he was made to conform to his new identity and lifestyle. My father never liked the Cities. Cass Lake was his home. After my parents' divorce, that's where he stayed.

I must have only been about five or six years of age when my father came for a visit with me, and he brought me to my first Pow Wow. Perhaps I had been to many powwows before, but being my first, this particular Pow Wow I remember. That day is burned in my memory for life. It is not only a memory of my first cross-cultural experience, but one of the few memories of my father.

> He looked me in the eyes and said, "Never wish to be someone else; **you are special** because of who you are." After that we got up and **joined in the dance.**

He brought me to a large brick building somewhere in Minneapolis. He parked his van, turned to me and said, "There's a powwow inside that I want to take you to." I wondered what in the world a Pow Wow even was. Inside people sat on folded chairs arranged in large circle. A large drum sat in the center ring. Men with weird costumes and feathers on their heads sat on the floor and pounded on the drum. They sang a strange song; I remember their song made me feel uncomfortable. I started to laugh. I remember looking up at my father to see his reaction to these strange people, but his gaze was on me. I remember he had a serious look on his face as he leaned over and whispered to me, "be respectful and try not to laugh". He wasn't angry with me, but I could tell he held high respect for these people that he had brought me to see. I heard noises behind us. I turned to see more men with costumes and feathers in their long black hair. They walked down the aisle towards us. They were followed by beautiful women with feathers in their braided hair. The women had on long dresses made of animal skin and wore moccasins on their feet. Some had bells strung from their dresses. The belled dresses jangled loudly and appeared to be heavy. I studied their movements as they danced around the drummers and chanted their song. Around and around the drum they went. The men's feet leaped high off the ground; they turned and jumped as they danced. The women took small steps and gracefully spun their shawls in the air.

The moment I remember most vividly, however, is when the little girls my age came out to dance. They were dancing in a contest, and the winner was to be crowned Princess. I thought that they were absolutely breathtaking with their beaded dresses and shiny black hair. Some had bells on their dresses like the older women. I remember being green with envy; I wanted their tanned skin and dresses made of bells. When the winner was crowned with a jeweled headpiece, I thought that I could not handle one more second. I was so jealous that I began to cry. My Father saw my tears and asked what was wrong. I told him that I had wanted their dresses and tanned skin. I will never forget what he told me. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Never wish to be someone else; you are special because of who you are." After that we got up and joined in the dance.

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***Christina Baker** has been a student at North Hennepin for one year. She is a mother of two children, and is an employee at North Memorial Medical Center. She is studying to be a nurse.*

STUCK BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

By Sitha Kim

I was born in America but my parents and ancestors are from Cambodia. During the years of growing up, I've always had to battle between the stereotype of being the traditional Cambodian girl or living as an American. To be a traditional Cambodian girl means to obey your parents and respect their wishes. My parents always wanted me to get the best education possible because they weren't given the same opportunity in Cambodia. Along with my schooling as a teenager, I was to be at home by a specific time during the week or weekends. The Cambodian culture has the stereotype of teenage girls being the ones that cook, clean, and tend to household chores rather than running around with friends in the mall. It's like you're being trained to be a homemaker.

Throughout my teenage years, I struggled to follow my parent's wishes or should I say follow the stereotypes that had been set for me. I always felt stuck between two cultures because I wanted to please my parents but I also wanted to be happy with my life. Eventually, I chose my own route and did what I wanted, the true American way. It got to a point where my parents became disappointed with the decisions I made. Rather than staying at home after school doing my homework, I was outside playing sports. I remember being 16-years-old and wanting to spend the night at a friend's house. It was a big deal for my parents because it could cause other Cambodian parents to think something is wrong at our house and that's why I'm sleeping over at a friend's. Sleeping over is looked down upon within the Cambodian community. If I had spent too much time at someone's house, my parents would interpret it as I didn't like our house. Traditionally, a Cambodian teenage girl shouldn't be hopping from house to house. It doesn't look good to other Cambodian people. Dating was also another thing that I had to do secretly, but sometimes my parents would know but not speak about it. My parents wanted me to focus on getting my education and fulfilling my goals: a boy did not need to be in the picture because that can always come later and they knew of plenty of parents with sons my age that could be with me when I was ready. The clash between Cambodian culture and American culture has only opened my eyes to experiencing new ways of thinking about different cultures around the world. It has allowed me to understand other individual's cultural differences and accept them for who they are.

There are many Cambodian girls that I've grown up with who either chose the stereotypical route they received from their parents or they made their own way. Some of them became teenage mothers and the talk of the town because their parents were too traditional and the girls rebelled. These girls chose to do what they wanted to do and became teenage mothers, which stopped them from doing other things with their lives. I believe in making your own choices, but I know that I have not shamed my family in any way. Although my parents were not accepting of some of the decisions I made, I know that they're mine, and I am proud of them. Growing up in America has been a struggle for me and also for other Cambodian descendents. It's something that Americans will never understand. I was born an American citizen caught between two completely different cultures, but I have learned to adapt to my environment. I know that I will never lose touch with my Cambodian heritage, which will always be my true heritage. Culture clashes will always be a struggle for me and other generations to come, but hopefully we will be able to gain a common understanding by being open-minded and thoughtful.

> I always felt
> stuck between two cultures
> because I wanted to please my parents
> but I also wanted to be
> happy with my life.

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Sitha Kim *is the youngest of four children and the first to be born in America, which is a pretty big deal to her parents because she has been blessed with great opportunities to gain the best education possible. Her father stressed education almost every day from when she was a child. She has learned to value it because it is not a right but rather a privilege. By spring of 2011, her goal is to have completed an AA degree; then, she plans to attend the University of Minnesota to earn a BA. She is considering teaching abroad once finished with the BA, which will also give her an opportunity for her to see the rest of the world.*

Ten Families

By Rachel Albus

Thinking back to this past Thanksgiving, I remember the overwhelming social experience I encountered when spending that evening with my boyfriend's large family. I had wanted to meet them for quite some time, but had not expected to all in one night. I had felt a slight panic while walking into the house full of people, but I reminded myself that I wanted to know these people. They could one day be my family, too. Although being introduced to a large family all at once is intimidating, the joy of meeting the family your loved one comes from is well worth the adversity.

As a child, I grew up in a typical home with two sisters. Our family was of average size and our extended family was, too. The largest family gathering I have attended was also rather small. Sure, I have several great aunts and uncles who have a lot of kids and grandkids, but I barely ever see them and never all at once. However, my boyfriend, Kevin, is one of five and from extended families with more. His mom is the oldest of seven and his dad the youngest of ten. His dad's side is the family I met on Thanksgiving.

I don't do well in new situations. Usually I avoid them altogether; however, in this case I was doing it for Kevin. He had met all of my family, and after two years of dating, I figured I owed him. After spending the afternoon

> It was just as I was about to open my phone to see how much longer I would **have to stay here** that one of the youngest cousins came up to me with a bowl of popcorn.

with my family, I drove the hour from my aunt's house back to his house just to get back in a car and go another hour to his aunt's house. Both car rides all I could think about was what his family would think of me. I was worried they would think I was too quiet or antisocial. But I was afraid if I were too loud they would see the really weird side of me and not like it. So I resigned myself to only speak when spoken to and join a conversation only when I knew I would be heard but wouldn't be asked too many questions. I could just follow Kevin around and all would be fine. That wasn't what he had in mind.

As I walked into the house, those in the living room on the couches looked up to greet us. I was the last one in the door and got a few quizzical looks as I stepped out from behind Kevin to put my shoes on the designated rug. I smiled politely and took Kevin's hand for security. Inside I was shaking with nervousness. Walking into the other room to put our coats away, the nervousness made its way out and my hand started shaking. Kevin noticed and before walking out into the crowd again, he gave me a huge hug and thanked me for being so willing to do this for him. I took a deep breath, relaxed my shoulders, and walked down the hall into the sea of people.

Being introduced to so many people all at once is slightly terrifying to me. I knew a few family members from previous meetings but that was only a small fraction of the people there. A few of Kevin's aunts came up to say hi to him and he introduced me. Obviously having a sense of humor similar to mine they asked, "Getting to know the family? There will be a quiz on names later." I laughed nervously and gripped Kevin's hand harder. Misinterpreting the squeeze, he turned to me saying, "Don't worry, they're just kidding." I was so embarrassed. I knew what they meant and would have been the person saying the same thing had I been in their position, but now I feared they thought I did not have a sense of humor. Quite the distressing and embarrassing start to the long night.

We went into another room with a very large couch where cousins from two years old to twenty-five were talking. This was obviously the room where all the younger cousins always stayed while their parents and oldest siblings talked elsewhere. Soon they were planning to play catch phrase, a game I personally am not fond of at all. I told Kevin I'd rather not play and he reluctantly said okay. However, his sister decided to be more aggressive in making me play the game saying, "You're only a part of the family if you play catch phrase." I knew she was pretty much joking but at the same time feared those who agreed with her were not. To this day, I wish I had played just to feel more welcomed, but a situation later helped this one fade.

After the kids, middle school and younger, had left the game, the rest continued playing more competitively. It was clear nobody even noticed me anymore. I was feeling like a shadow, sitting towards the back of the couch, behind Kevin, silent, only moving every once in awhile. I felt uncomfortable. I tried laughing when they did but that didn't help. I thought maybe I could slip out and go talk to Kevin's mom, but I was trapped behind the circle the players had formed. I did not know what to do and didn't want to disrupt Kevin playing his game since I knew better than to bother him with something he already knew: I was bored. He was used to me in that state.

It was just as I was about to open my phone to see how much longer I would have to stay here that one of the youngest cousins came up to me with a bowl of popcorn. In my discomfort I hadn't noticed her bringing the bowl around to everyone. With beautiful blue eyes, she looked up at me and smiled. Taking a handful, I said thank you and her smile got larger and eyes brighter. I couldn't help but smile, too. In that one moment I knew I could make it the rest of the night without being uncomfortable. The child saw me through the shoulders, behind the heads, and way at the back of the room. She made it a point to offer me popcorn. She made me feel welcome.

For the rest of the night I continued to laugh with the players and pay attention to what was going on. I tried to make eye contact with everyone and smile just to be polite so I didn't seem rude or too antisocial. At one point in the night, I even got to participate in a funny little game made up by another of the youngest cousins. She had silly rules that always changed. One moment we were standing. The next we were sitting. Sometimes we were all ordered to be silent. Other times it was to stop playing catch phrase. Throughout the whole time she was ordering us around we couldn't help but laugh and still go along with it. I felt included and accepted.

As the night ended and people were leaving, every family was getting a picture taken. I stood off to the side at first, but then one of the aunts insisted I get in the picture. Nobody could sit still and several pictures had to be taken. I was unable to stop smiling and laughing. I truly felt like a member of the family when the aunt looked at me and said with a laugh, "How do you put up with these people? Aren't they so crazy?" Before I got the chance to respond, Kevin said, "Oh, she is crazy too." I just knew the night had gone well when everyone laughed.

Looking back at the night I realized I had been trying to stay within my comfort zone, but that was more uncomfortable than crossing the social boundary. I had to be among so many people who were so tight and still get through the guard they put up. I had to be myself and open to letting them see it. It was hard but I did it, and I learned more about myself. I learned getting out of your comfort zone truly is not leaving it. All you are doing is expanding that zone. That is what I did, and I was very happy with the results. My social and familial boundary crossing did not cost me more than simply my old and outdated comfort zone's boundary. However, it gained me a new family I will one day be legally apart of.

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Rachel Albus *is a first year student at NHCC. She attended Robbinsdale Cooper High School and graduated in June of 2008. Her favorite hobbies include gymnastics, reading, writing, and singing. She coaches gymnastics through the City of New Hope Parks and Recreation and would like to one day run the gymnastics program after she is married. Plans for school are simply to get her degree in Liberal Arts.*

traditions

By Bibiana Hassan

I am from two different cultures, American and Guyanese. My Mom is American born from Coon Rapids, Minnesota and my Dad is from the country of Guyana in South America. Growing up with two different cultures had its ups and downs and also confusion. For my Dad's side we had religious functions for just about everything including birthdays, weddings, graduations, and special Muslim holidays. These celebrations usually included at least one hour of reading from the Holy Quran, their version of the Bible. Then there is a talk by one of the uncles explaining the readings. The most difficult of these is the one after a death. There are 40 nights of mourning and readings to help the deceased pass over peacefully. After the readings there is always lots of food, usually curry, rice and more curry. No one ever leaves hungry.

For my Mom's side, we celebrate the traditional American holidays such as Easter, Christmas, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and birthdays. The birthdays are usually filled with lots of family members, cake and ice cream, and games. There are no long readings involved with these holidays, which is a plus, and when there is food, there is always enough. We celebrate Christmas with presents, trees, decorations, food, and games whereas on my Dad's side we get together for a small dinner at my Grandma's house with anyone who wants to show up. We used to get together with gifts, but since the family grew immensely bigger that ended; now we just eat and talk with multiple conversations going on.

There are food restrictions for me and my brothers because my dad is Muslim. We cannot eat any pork product such as bacon, ham, pepperoni, salami, sausage. We can, however, eat the turkey versions. My Grandma, aunts, uncles, and cousins can only have meat that is halaal, which is meat that has been blessed by an Imaam or a Muslim priest before it is killed.

I love dressing up for the weddings and functions for my Dad's side because there are beautiful shalwars that I get to wear along with shiny jewelry and bangles which are bracelets. Don't get me wrong, I like dressing up for my Mom's side too, but I like mixing it up a bit.

A traditional Muslim/Indian wedding consists of at least three days of celebration. The celebrations usually begin on a Thursday or Friday and end before the weekend is over. The first day is usually reserved for religious activities which include Duahs – blessings for the bride, groom and family members. There are also readings from the Holy Quran plus speeches to explain what was read. In addition, there is also *Meelaud Shareef*, which is the singing of religious songs. The second day is for the marriage ceremony. One very interesting aspect of the ceremony is when the Imaam has to secure the bride's permission to wed before the ceremony begins. It seems so ironic that after so much planning for the wedding, everyone still waits anxiously for the Imaan to return with the bride's answer. Instead of the traditional white gown being worn by the bride, she wears a red and gold shalwar with bangles going from her wrists to her elbows and all the makeup and the groom wears a cream korta which is a traditional male outfit that consists of an extra long button tunic shirt with matching pants. The marriage ceremony is very short and quick. Then the couple is congratulated with a wedding song. Of course, lots of feasting follows.

> Growing up with two different cultures had its **ups and downs** and also **confusion.**

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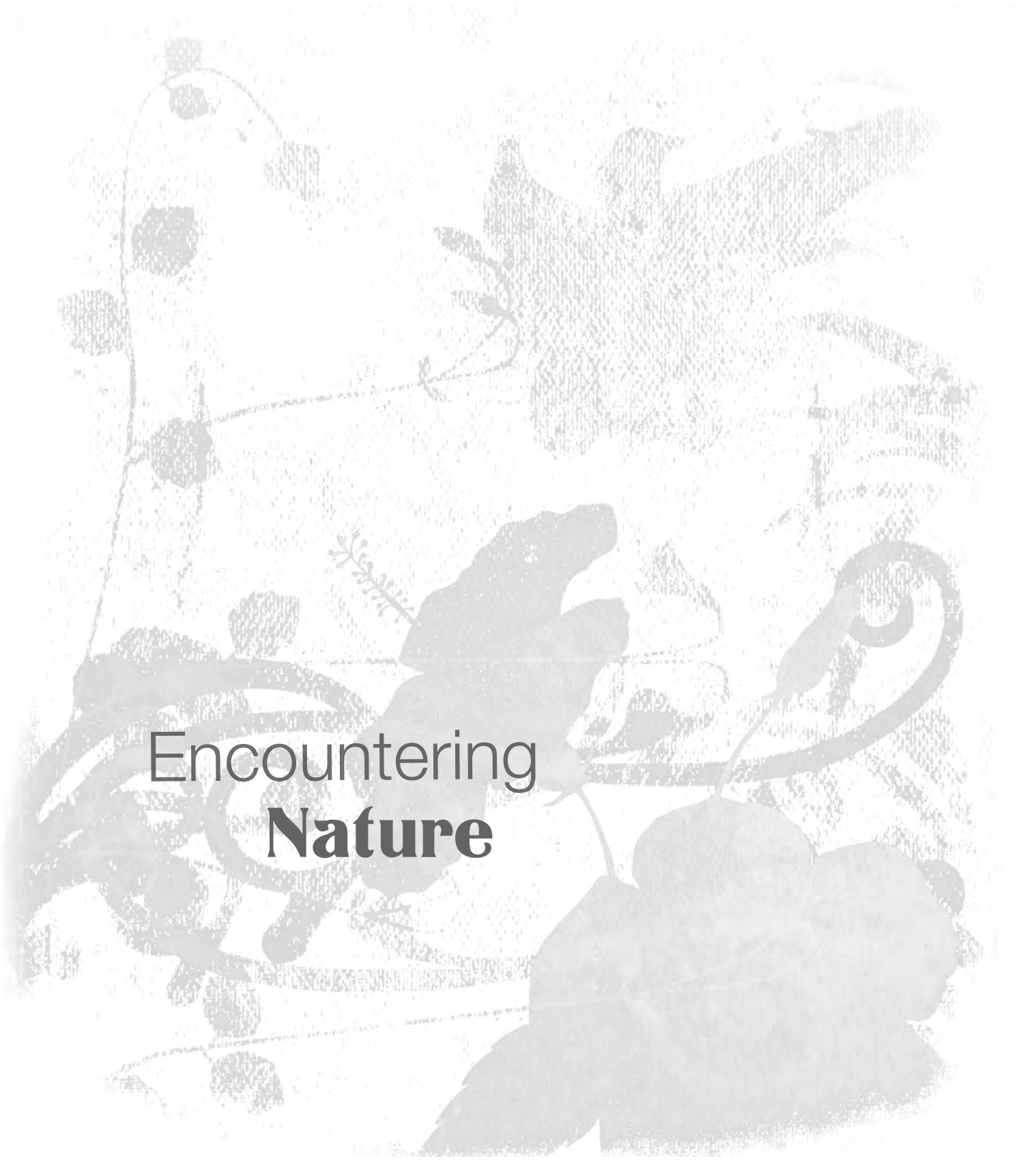
Bibiana Hassan *was born in Coon Rapids. Her mother is from Coon Rapids, MN, and her father is from Guyana in South America. She has two brothers, one older and one younger, and three dogs. She has traveled to many places including Canada, Florida, Arizona, Maryland, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, New Jersey, Washington D.C. and New York. She speaks English, but took a few years of Spanish at Champlin Park High School. She enjoys reading, quilting, cooking, playing with her dogs, and watching movies. She finished her first year at NHCC spring, 2010, and is coming back in the fall.*



Encountering **Nature**

A Close Encounter | By Taren Wang

Today, while walking by Maple Grove Senior High's football field, I noticed a chipmunk standing beneath one of the bushes lining the path. Their foliage consisted mostly of thorns, but the bushes were on a terrace several feet off the ground, so the creature was practically at eye level. I continued walking until I was only a few feet from it, and then paused, wondering why it hadn't fled. It stared at me, and I stared at it, for several seconds; then, it vanished down a nearly-invisible burrow beneath the thorns. After it was gone, I continued walking, but I was somewhat confused. Almost universally, small animals flee whenever anything moves within what they perceive to be striking distance of them. So why was this chipmunk so bold in his (maybe her) stare? It could be that, having been standing in the middle of a thorn bush, it was relatively certain that I would not attack it at risk of injuring myself. It is also possible, however, that like so many animals in urban settings it had become accustomed to the presence of humans. Most likely, it was a combination of both. Here was a natural creature, dwelling in an unnatural location. Can such a creature still be described as natural? After all, civilization is often treated by environmentalists as a scourge upon the planet, contaminating all it touches. Yet I believe that nature continues to exist within civilization, merely adapting. The chipmunk's burrow was strategically located in a thick patch of thorns, on raised ground, a sensible location for a nest. Another example can be found in dandelions; despite our rigorous herbicides, they spring up heedlessly across our lawns. These marvelously resilient flowers are treated as pests, but they always return; if we didn't stop them, they would soon overcome the grass, slowly returning it to a wilder state.

My encounter had an almost surreal feeling. Even so, I didn't really gain much spiritual insight from staring at the chipmunk. There was, though, that moment of silence, while I was taken aback by its presence. I remember it very clearly even now, how the striped pattern of its fur seemed to jump out at me from the thorn bush. There was too a fleeting feeling of sadness and loss when it vanished as simply as it had appeared. I remember wondering how it had burrowed into the wood chips. There was no rapport with the creature; I felt more pity for its odd juxtaposition than any sort of companionship. Perhaps, if, like so many characters in fiction, I could somehow communicate with it, I would know more. Then again, probably not: the thoughts of most animals, such as they are, are likely not particularly deep. It is generally believed that thought (particularly metacognition) is a luxury available only to humans. The chipmunk's simple logic and natural ability had allowed it to survive in this unusual location, a land of paved paths and mown lawns. It probably would have been arboreal, and lived in a cut-down forest. The fact that it was there, living under a thorn bush, says something about its adaptability, and the general strength and tenacity of life in general.

Here was a
natural creature
dwelling in an
unnatural location.

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Taren Wang *was born in 1993 to parents from different cultures. Though both of Taren's parents lived in Los Angeles, studying at UCLA, Taren's mother has lived her entire life in the U.S, but his father emigrated from South Korea with his family when he was young. In 2000, his family moved to Maple Grove. Taren is currently a student at Maple Grove Senior High, and he has attended two semesters at NHCC through the PSEO program.*

AIR BOAT TO CHICAGO

By Beth Frykman

We are flying high above the clouds. Below them, it is cold, misty, and grey in Chicago, the kind of day that highlights people's litter in the gutters and leaves the nose perpetually running. But up here, it is a beautiful, sunny day and the clouds below us become a new type of terra firma — terra softa? — a cloud cover so complete that it looks as though the ground is white and mildly uneven, almost like a soft sand dune, but more truly is akin to being in a ship at sea or on a great lake. As far as the eye can see, the soft blanket of foamy white liquid beckons for me to trail my fingers in it lazily, allowing my fingertips soft caresses of a fine absence of sensation. What does it feel like to touch a cloud, which is no more than compact nothingness, merely a condensed form of the very air which surrounds me at every moment without my notice?

> What does it feel like to
> touch a cloud?

Now we dip inside of it, and I find that I cannot breathe for the absurd fear of getting the froth of the clouds inside of my lungs and asphyxiating. The airbus is rocking and jerking from turbulence, and I force myself to breathe in and out. The buzz and murmur of the nearby conversations continues as the other passengers blithely trust that we will not drown inside of our submarine descending into what is first bright white, the sun blindingly reflected off of our wing, but is soon dark grey and cold around us. We break through the first layer of clouds and someone applies a brake, the plane slowing so drastically it feels we must be landing, but there is nothing out there but more cloud below us.

There — just a peek — Chicago. Not the grand downtown of legend, however–about three blocks of modest suburban housing and what looks to be a school of some sort, more tarmac than building. We pass through another bit of cloud, but then suddenly we're out and it's autumn in Chicago, muted umbers, oranges, and scarlets dotting between brick residences, and then we're down with a few great bumps, surrounded by the same drab greys of airport as at the airport we just left behind, and the passengers are suddenly alive and active again, the air of expectancy rising by the moment. I can feel the collective herd mentality of "beat everybody else out go go go go go go" trying to win out over the calm I have from my ruminations in the lake of air now above us, and I prepare to join the grey autumn chill of The Windy City, but...

I know that truly, it is a beautiful, warm, sunny day out there. We just can't see it.

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Elizabeth (Beth) Frykman *divides her time between being the only parent to two children, studying Aikido, working full-time, pursuing a four-year degree in writing, reading obsessively, turning her first house into a home, watching too many zombie movies, processing her first international trip to Japan, and working a writing tutor. She tries to live with integrity and purpose, which works out better some days than others, especially since she has yet to find her purpose. With the rest of her time she tries to figure out what she forgot.*

FALL IS UPON US

By Carol LaFleur

The summer is now ending but not easily forgotten: the dips in the pool, the animals at the zoo along with many therapeutic afternoons. Now the nights are becoming cooler as the wind begins to whip through the air.

And sometimes the nip of the morning air is a little more than we all want to bear. The days will slowly turn to nights a little bit faster. The children have gone back to school and are cheerful. The leaves will soon turn color and fall from their bountiful tree limbs as we all scurry about to see such wonderful colors and hunt for our most unique size and color of leaves.

The days will slowly
turn to nights
a little bit faster.

Fall will bring with it lots of jeers and cheers and lots of new memories and joys along with holidays full of families and sheer joy. Soon wonderful smells will fill the air inside our homes and in the atmosphere. Our noses so gentle and strong will pick up smells of a log fire and the aroma of fresh-baked bread. It is now time to relax and enjoy–to sit with our families and catch up on us.

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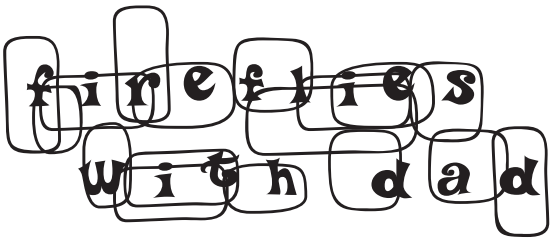
Carol LaFleur *is in her final year at NHCC. This almost did not happen due to the abuse that she endured in her lifetime. She has found a love for writing and feels at peace within the winds and the sun when she writes. She is thankful for the support of her family as well as staff and faculty at NHCC. Healing through her writing has allowed her to prevail and become an advocate for victims of abuse, helping them heal.*



By Sachiyo Baum

When I was a child, I saw many fireflies in my hometown. I remember when I could see innumerable fireflies near my house with my dad. My dad knew a place where many fireflies lived and after we ate dinner, my dad often asked me to go watch them with him. I really liked going there because the fireflies were beautiful.

After we arrived at the place where a rice field was right next to a river, my dad sang a song about a firefly. It was an old Japanese song. I sang it with him, too. Over the rice field, we saw fireflies from one end of the field to the other. They were glowing very gently in mixed hues of white and blue. Some of them were flying and others were just resting. Their lights were sometimes flashing and gleaming on the water in the field, and other times melting gently into the darkness and silence of the night.

Because the fireflies were **beautiful.**

My dad and I would sit there and watch them for a while. It was my favorite time. Now, I can no longer see the fireflies since construction was started. Almost the entire rice field has become just a field and the river has been dammed. Yet, I remember and miss the time with my dad when I could see many fireflies in that special place.

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Sachiyo Baum *was born and raised in Japan. She graduated from Dental Hygienist College and worked in that field for five years until she came to the United States in 2006, after she got married. Since coming to the U.S, she has studied English and acquired an interest in writing.*


Nature
does not hurry
yet everything
is accomplished
– Lao Tzu


Back
to the
Past,
Forward
to the
Future

A Truly American Mutt

By Linda Riegger

"Joshua was part black, you know," stated Minnie.

"Excuse me?" I thought to myself. "This Minnie lady is certainly barking up the wrong family tree!"

While researching my mother's family history, I had discovered an elderly relative named Wilma and phoned to see if she would be interested in sharing information on our family. We met at her farm home. Her daughter Minnie joined us, claiming to have extensive knowledge of our ancestors.

With the air of a puffed up rooster, diminutive Minnie dominated our conversation, claiming the Duncan line of descent was not Scottish as the family had been told for generations, but African.

"How come I never heard anything about that?" queried 90-year-old Wilma. "I would have heard something if that was true. And Duncan is certainly a Scottish surname."

"Well, if it is true, that's fine and good," I said doubtfully to Minnie. I didn't want to offend her, as I could tell that underneath her know-it-all exterior, she was a person who wanted to feel significant and worldly. "But I have a lot of documentation that doesn't say a word about any black blood."

> Being a blonde haired, blue eyed Minnesotan of mostly Nordic descent, I could not conceive of the possibility of having African blood in my veins.

As I drove away from our meeting, full of coffee and pie, I felt a bit amused, thinking of Minnie and her assertion that my ancestor was not only part black but part Indian as well.

"It's not that I would mind if it were true," I said to myself. "But there's no way that what she is saying can be fact." Being a blonde haired, blue eyed Minnesotan of mostly Nordic descent, I could not conceive of the possibility of having any African blood in my veins.

"I'll prove her wrong," popped into my head. "And very nicely, I'll point out to her that she made an honest mistake." I started planning my tactics to disprove Minnie's claim. "Not that I'd mind having African ancestry, of course," was what I told myself. "But there definitely isn't any black blood in our family, and my goal is to make sure the family history is correct."

Having done quite a bit of family research over the years, I fancied myself accomplished at being able to find the necessary facts to write up an

account of past generations. Thinking that I had more experience in digging up the truth than Minnie, I was shocked when I discovered that she was, without a doubt, correct. Joshua was one-quarter African. And so was his wife! There was also, as Minnie had stated, Indian blood mixed in their genes.

It took my brain some time to wrap around the fact that I had black blood in my veins. I wasn't sure how I felt. I grew up in a white world, but during my career had extensive interactions with numerous cultures. I firmly believed that people are people, most possessing innate goodness, no matter what race or religion.

As I explored this newfound aspect of my family's past, I learned that Joshua's father was a free "mulatto" born in Massachusetts in 1721, that he worked as a servant in a wealthy house, and that he became a man of prominence in the community. His son ventured west, taking advantage of land opportunities. This westward migration continued through the years and generations, through sons and grandsons, and culminated in Minnesota in 1858. Having lived as white men, and with the advent of the Civil War, these pioneers apparently saw valid reason to keep the family's African ancestry from future generations. This resulted in four generations of ignorance that ended in my confusion and astonishment upon learning what had been kept secret all those years.

Many members of my family would be shocked to learn of their African roots. There are elderly relatives that I chose not to tell about their history to avoid possible upset.

But it was with great pride that I wrote this piece. I felt honored to share the story of those upstanding, hard-working early Black Americans that came before me. Sons and grandsons of my "mulatto" ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. They pioneered their way west, facing immeasurable dangers and hardship. Among them were a State's Representative, a shopkeeper and an innkeeper. Some were farmers and teachers. They were trailblazers who passed on a legacy of honesty, optimism, and courage. Understanding my family's lineage taught me what it truly means to be an American. African, Indian, Norwegian, German, and English ancestors are all stirred equally into my essence.

"You didn't believe me, did you?" crowed Minnie.

We have joined forces to continue our research and are excited to learn more about our fascinating heritage. The Scottish surname of my black ancestors had to come from somewhere!

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As an Adult Learner with no prior college credits, ***Linda Riegger*** *was the recipient of an ALISS grant. Having a lifelong interest in writing, Linda enrolled in the NHCC Spring Semester Creative Writing Class where she was excited to learn new techniques to enhance her future writing efforts.*

My Parents' Childhood

By Zhanna Shulyak

My favorite stories are from my parents' childhood. It is truly sad knowing how people lived before, and it makes me grateful for what I have now.

It is really painful listening to how people and kids survived after World War II. Both of my parents were raised in the Ukraine during the 1960's. Poor people did not have anything to eat, and civilians that lived in the Ukrainian village suffered the most because they were on their own. They did not have any help from the government or the city. Every family had a farm and a garden by the house in which they had to grow their own potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage and other vegetables. They also had cows, pigs, and chickens. From the cow they had milk and made their own butter and sour cream. Chickens gave them eggs or sometimes they had chickens for dinner. The pigs were only for a special occasion. When they killed a pig, they had a lot of meat, and that meat lasted them for a long time.

> Sometimes they
> had no food,
> so they had to
> go to sleep hungry.

They both had small houses with no comfort. There was no shower and no bathroom inside the house. They had to wash themselves in a special bucket, and the toilet was outside in a small wooden house. During the winter times this was very inconvenient. Their houses did not have electricity or gas like we do now. They only had a fireplace to keep their little house warm with a little bit of firewood, and they had to save some wood for the next days to come. For everybody summer and fall seasons were a preparation time for a snowy and cold winter.

Kids were growing up in this kind of environment, and they had no toys or candies. They always had to help their parents around the house. Both of my parents came from big families. They had to share their boots and warm clothing with their brothers and sisters.

I remember one really sad moment from my mom's stories when she was in middle school and her dad bought a few cows so he could support his family. At 6 o'clock in the morning before my mom went to school, she had to milk the cows. She really hated waking up so early; it was winter time and so cold outside. All she wanted to do was to stay in her cozy bed not milking cows. It was really hard for children living that kind of lifestyle.

One of the episodes from my dad's stories when he was growing up puts tears in my eyes. My daddy was around 10 years old that time. He was the oldest boy in his family, so he had to be his dad's right-hand man. They were poor, and he always helped his family in the time of need. He worked hard helping his daddy with the farm and with the garden. Before going to school, he had to eat breakfast because they would not have any food left for lunch besides apples. During his stay in school for almost six hours he had to eat lunch and all that he had was an apple for his lunch. In his class, there were some rich kids who always brought fancy food and candies to school. They always made fun of my dad because he did not have normal food and candies. After a long day at school, my dad would run back home hungry and tired hoping to find some food on the table. Sometimes they had no food, so they had to go to sleep hungry. A few years later he started having stomach problems from not eating enough. My daddy is 50 years old now and he still has stomach problems, and my mom always has to make special food for him. Sometimes I want to throw some food away, but I feel so bad because I know that there are kids somewhere in Haiti and Africa who have nothing to eat.

It makes me really sad to listen to my parents' stories and how hard it was for them when they were growing up. We have to tell these stories to our new generation about how people lived back in those days without food and clothing so that this new generation appreciates what they have.

****

Zhanna Shulyak *was born in Ukraine. She and her family moved to the States when she was a teenager. She lived in the state of Washington for 10 years. Last September, she moved to Maple Grove, Minnesota. Spring 2010 was her first semester at NHCC.*

Remembering My CHILDHOOD DAYS

By Aisha Sado

I remember when…

I was growing up with my parents and three siblings. We used to walk to school with other children in the neighborhood. It was such a tough period remembering it now because we had to walk about three miles every day come sun or rain. This made going to school interesting as you got to play and chat with other students along the way. Sometimes we got to ride with our dad or a neighbor's dad.

I remember when...
I was sick and unable to walk to school for a whole week. I had to resume after one week even though I was still sick. I almost collapsed on one of the days. When we had to visit my grandma every weekend to do her laundry, grandma would bake some pastries for us when we were done.

I remember when...
Mom would insist I read a pacesetter novel every week. Mom would not allow us to go out to play with the other kids and allow other kids to come to our house except those who were doing well in their academics.

I remember when...
We had to give cold water to neighbors during the hot season because they had no power in their houses. I had to sell ice cubes and lemonade for stipend during the hot seasons.

I remember when...
I had to take the entrance examination to high school, so I had to take classes to prepare for the exam. I passed the entrance exam, and I was very glad at the thought of going to high school. I was going to be leaving home for the dormitory soon. I called up my friends and cousins to share the news with them.

I remember when...
I had to go shopping with my parents in preparation for my high school. We got a list of items to buy from the school when school resumed. We went from one store to another buying all the the items on the list. It was such fun to shop with dad and mom.

I remember when...
The day to leave for school finally came. All of a sudden I became sad because I was going to be leaving home alone for the first time. Mom was equally sad but could not say a word. With a sullen face, we loaded the car and I bid farewell to my mom and other siblings.

Now, I remember that high school was a real time for teens, and a great time to leave home, begin a new life, and make friends.

****

Aisha Sado *is from Nigeria. She is married with two children. Aisha came to the United States in June, 2008, and is pursuing a nursing degree at NHCC.*

Remember When...

By Hoang Nga N Truong

When I was a little girl, my small hometown had a peaceful river with fruit trees, beautiful flowers along the sides, and a small wood bridge across the stream of water. There were immense green fields. In the blue sky, I saw the white storks hovering.

I remember on weekends filled with warm sunshine when I played with my friends. We ran on the fields to fly kites. We dropped our boats made of paper in a small trench. It was flowing through my grandmother's fruit garden. We wished our kites and paper boats would bring our dreams far away to nice days in the future.

I do remember about my happy childhood when I lived with my grandpa and grandma, my parents, and my aunt. That was very, very happy to live in their love. I never had to think about my life—nothing to worry, nothing to bother.

I remember all the folk tales that my grandma often told me in the moonlight nights with her good advice for my life. I also remember the crickets made of coconut leaves that my grandpa gave me for rewards when I got an "A" for my test. Now, even though my grandparents have died long ago, my love for them is in my heart—forever.

When I have grown up and my life has changed, I will remember all of the good memories about my childhood. The memories of my grandparents will encourage me when I have to face obstacles and challenges in my life. I will always remember when I was a little girl.

****

*Born and raised in Vietnam, **Hoang Nga N Truong** had a beautiful childhood in a small town in Vietnam and moved to Minnesota with her parents about two years ago. Because her country is totally different from America in many ways, such as the climate, the environment, the lifestyle, and especially the educational system, she was very worried and concerned for herself and her family when she came to Minnesota. Though her new life was very difficult for her, she appreciated all the challenges and obstacles that she experienced because they helped her grow up. She has learned many helpful lessons from her life in Minnesota. As a student at NHCC, she is really grateful for all the useful knowledge she has learned. She treasures her learning experiences and believes they will lead her to a good and happy life.*

Roots of The Spirit

By Marilyne Marion

Trees need healthy and deep roots in order to grow strong. Similarly, human beings want to grow strong, so they trace their roots in families. By learning from their ancestors, people enrich their spirits. Personally, I do as my great-grandmother did because I admire her life philosophy. When I close my eyes, I still remember this great lady. She commanded respect, enjoyed life and cared for her descendants.

My great grandmother was a distinguished person. Her first name was Marie-Antoinette, but everybody called her Ninette. She was born in 1910 and she was eighty years old when she passed away. She came from an esteemed aristocratic family which owned a little castle surrounded by vineyards, in a quiet village of southeastern France. All of her life was devoted to her community. She was very involved in church, where she used to play piano each Sunday. I remember her eightieth birthday; it was an important day. The villagers of "Saint-Benoit" had organized a party in her honor. I can always see how she shined during this special day. As usual, she was elegant. In spite of her advanced age, she was pretty. She wore a sophisticated classic tweed dress. Her head was covered by a large white sun-hat which matched perfectly with her shoes. She was eighty years old, but astonishingly her face wasn't marked with wrinkles. On the contrary, her skin was very delicate and pale. Her paleness was accentuated by her gorgeous carmine lipstick. She took my uncle's arm and started to greet each person in a very polite way. That day, I perceived how my great grandmother was well-educated and well-mannered. Furthermore, I saw how she was respected by everyone.

> I kept in mind the day when my grandmother asked Ninette to stop eating chocolates because the doctor said that was bad. She joked that she never tasted a bad chocolate.

My great grandmother always enjoyed life. As far back as I can go in my memory, I always remember Ninette with a smile on her face. And yet, she didn't have an easy existence because she endured two awful world wars and lost her husband early. Nevertheless, she always said that she has only one life, and that's why she would like to live it fully. I kept in mind the day when my grandmother asked Ninette to stop eating chocolates because the doctor said that was bad. She joked that she never tasted a bad chocolate. My grandmother gave up and Ninette continued to eat chocolates for the rest of her life.

My beloved great-grandmother was very caring for everyone. I remember two lovely days that are engraved in my memory. The first one is the day when I left for the university. I visited her to say goodbye. She gave me an envelope. When I opened it, I was surprised to see a check. I wouldn't accept it because it was a large amount. She said that I will study better in a

comfortable place. Today, I know that she did the same things for my cousins and my siblings. The second day is the day before she passed away. I visited her, after several months abroad. At first, I had a hard time recognizing her. She was so weak, her hair wasn't combed and her eyes were empty. Her smile was gone. Then, my grandmother told her that I came back to see her. She turned her head in my direction. With a smile, she did not say anything but my name. However, I felt that she was happy to see me. Soon, she left us again; her eyes were empty once more. My grandmother asked her what she was thinking about. She whispered: "I am thinking about all of you." The next morning, she was gone eternally. Today, we miss her so much but we know that wherever she is, she is caring for us, such as she used to.

As tree roots, our ancestors help us build our personality. Personally, I am glad to have had the chance to meet my great grandmother. She was a well-respected person who enjoyed life and cared about her family. I would like to transmit the same life philosophy to my descendents as she did for me. So, she will continue to live on in our lives.

****

Marilyne Marion *came from a little village in the Southeast of France near Lyon. Before she came to the United States, she earned an Associate Degree in Science. She arrived in Minneapolis in April 2008. She learned Standard American English in Kaplan one year and finally decided to transfer to NHCC to pursue a degree.*

The Test for A Lifetime

By Chuan Wang

I took my National Matriculation Examination in 2007 when I was in China. The examination lasted for three days, June 7 to June 9. It was so important in my life that I can still clearly remember those three days. I clearly remember how I waited outside the examination room, how the examination went, and how my parents reacted when I came home from the first day.

I was hiding from the rain when I was waiting outside the examination room. It was raining heavily. The sky was very dark because of dense clouds completely blocking the sun. Lightning and thunder made many students become even more nervous. I saw some friends were also waiting in the hall, so I went over to greet them. I thought maybe staying with my friends could reduce my stress. However, it made me become more stressed because none of us said a word. We all did not know what to say to each other. We just leaned our back against the wall and looked at the sky silently. We were waiting for teachers to come and unlock the door of the examination room. We knew our fate would be determined in the next few hours. Whoever succeeded would be qualified for higher education, and whoever failed would have to give up their college dream.

We were waiting for teachers to come and unlock the door of the examination room. We knew **our fate would be determined** in the next few hours.

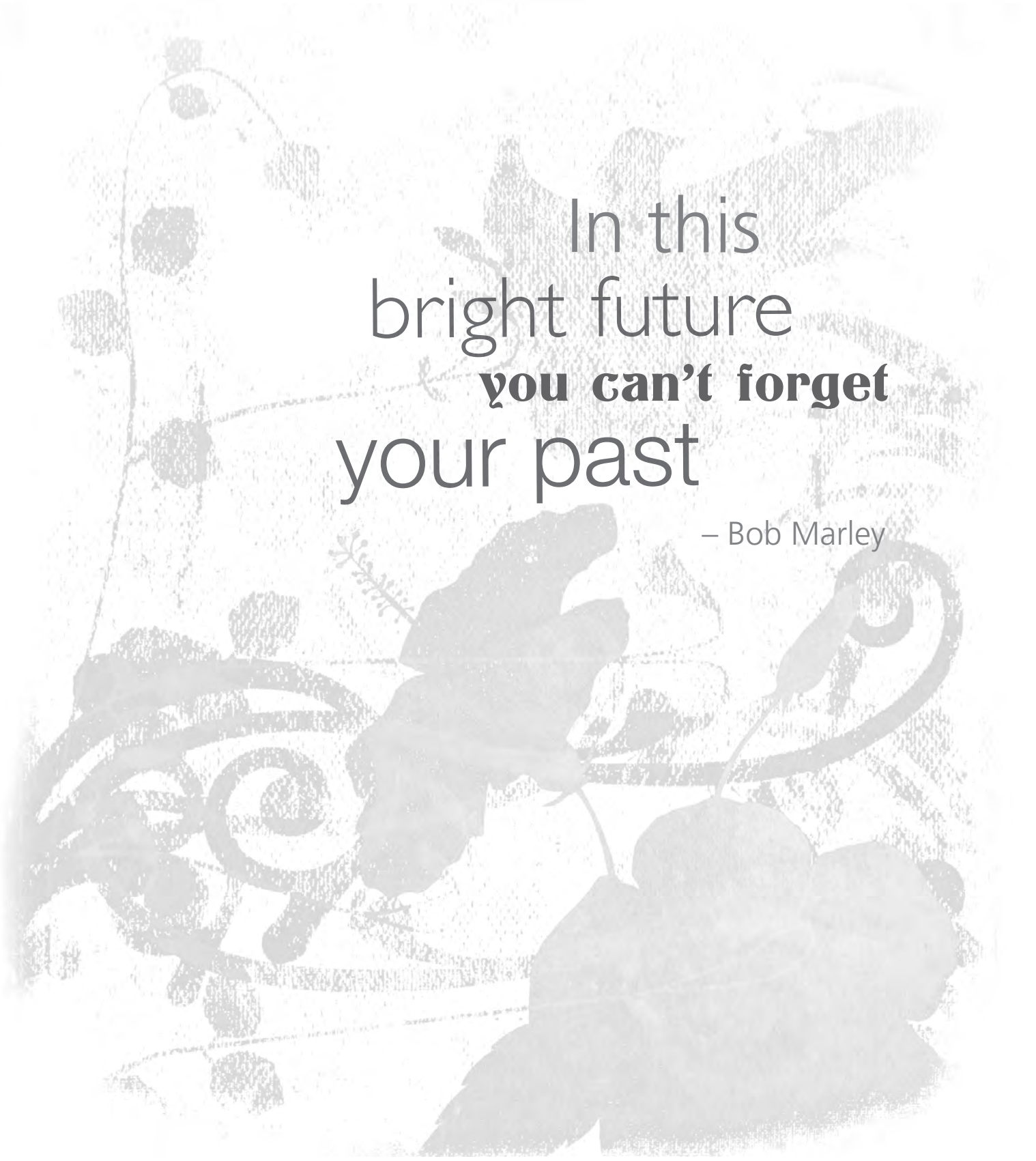
About twenty minutes later, a teacher arrived and unlocked the door. He had a big sealed paper bag in his arm, and I knew the test papers for the exam were in it. I followed the teacher and went in the room. I found my seat with the instruction from the teacher. I sat down and put my stationary tidily on the desk. I closed my eyes and had a deep breath to calm myself down. I could feel the wind blowing on my face though the windows. The teacher checked every student's ID cards carefully one by one. After all processes were done and the bell rang, the teacher opened the sealed bag and handed out the test papers. It was the first examination that I took for the National Matriculation Examination. The first subject was Chinese, and the test would last 160 minutes. Because I calmed down after I had my seat in the room, I concentrated well on answering the papers. Time passed quickly as I completely concentrated my mind on the test. All the students were answering questions quietly, so the only sound I could hear was the sound of the rain.

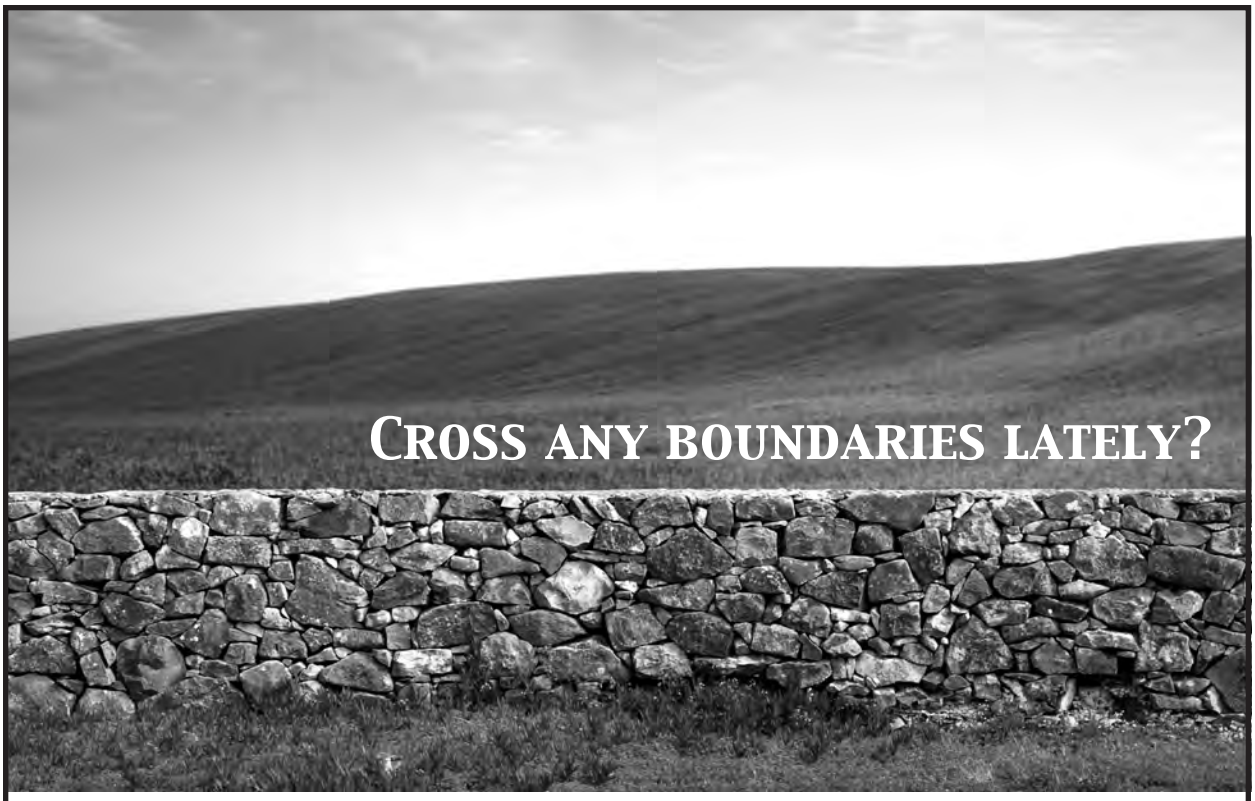
The first day finished much faster than I expected. Every thing went well with the Chinese test in morning and the English test in the afternoon. I was surprised that I had already finished the tests for the first day when I reached home in the afternoon. Supper was ready, and my parents were sitting by the table and waiting for me. They did not wait outside the school gate like what other parents did. They did not want to put too much pressure on me. I told them that I was fine with the two tests during supper, and they just smiled and said, "Good job." They did not ask me more about the tests as they usually did. They just wanted me to do the best I could without having any unnecessary pressure.

I did not let my parents down, as I had successfully finished all my tests in those three days and was accepted by a four-year university. How I did in the National Matriculation Examination does not affect my study in the U.S. now, but those days still feel like yesterday for me. I truly succeeded on the turning point of my life.

****

Chuan Wang *was born in Nanchang, China, on Oct 31, 1988. He was the only child in the family as he was born in a one-child policy environment. His father is a businessman, and his mother is a biology teacher. His family moved to Shenzhen in 1993, where he grew up and received his education. Before he came to the United States of America, he was a college student, majoring in Optical Electronical Technology in Shenzhen University. In the summer of 2009, he immigrated to the U.S. with his parents and is now studying at NHCC with the intention of majoring in accounting after he finishes his ESOL courses.*


In this
bright future
you can't forget
your past
– Bob Marley



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