



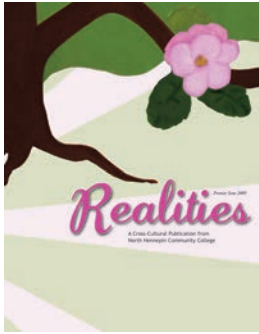
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North Hennepin
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Sixth Issue 2014



Realities





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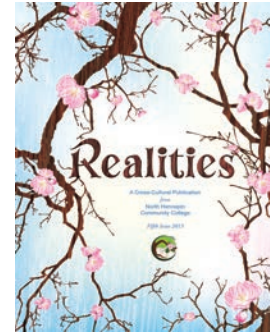
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Realities

*A North Hennepin Community College Publication
of Student Writings for Sharing of Cross-Cultural Experiences*

Sixth Issue, Academic Year 2013 – 2014

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Founders

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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.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is, in so many ways, made up of language. It's not always a verbal language, spoken or written, but the language of touch and light and connection between all things. And while the language given within comes in the form of words, it truly is the language of connection; what is communicated in these pages is more than the words on the page, more than the sounds they make on the tongue when read aloud, more than the ink and script.

This is the language of lives. This is the language of courage.

If there could be one word in the English language that would be so bold as to claim witness over each piece in this edition of *Realities*, it would be that word: courage. Even if they never intended this, the writers show their courage in the way they have interacted with the world and the people who call it home. Courage in opening up to someone new, courage in listening to the stories of others, courage in (re)discovering who you really are and where you've come from, courage in confronting demons, courage in reliving the past, courage in tackling new philosophies, courage in trying to become better.

In Minnesota-raised author Kent Meyers' essay "Birds Against the Glass,"¹ he notes, "It's about letting the world enter you, letting yourself come into relationship with it, taking the time to be changed by it. But it's not just roses, and it's not just things that are pleasant."

The essays here, written by students at North Hennepin Community College, let us, the readers, come into relationship with the writer and with the world. They show the writers as they have been changed by the world and how they have changed the world, and, yes, they let the world enter us all. But, as Meyers says, "it's not just roses." There is darkness and pain in these pages, but do not be afraid for there is also light and breath and hope.

And here we come back to courage, for beyond the courage we see in the writing is the courage of the writing itself, the courage to open oneself up to the world and say, "See? This is me. This is my life. Come take a look."

We thank these students for sharing their courage, language, and lives with us, and we hope they inspire further courage in you, the reader, as they have done for us.

Sincerely,

Brian Baumgart and Karen Carr

¹"Birds Against the Glass" is included in Meyers' memoir essay collection, *The Witness of Combines*.



MY DARLING ANNA

By Vicki Richardson

In the spring of 2004, on a very frigid afternoon, my daughter Cheyenne and I found ourselves navigating the winding streets of Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Driving through the hilly slippery streets, we intently searched for addresses above the doors of beautifully decorated homes, heavy still with evergreen branches and huge hanging red-ribbons commemorating the Christmas past. We were feeling quite anxious as neither of us had any idea of where the house we were fervently looking for might be cradled. Hitting a patch of ice instantly commanded our eyes towards the street and we gently came to a halt as our car and a fresh snowbank became acquainted. We chose to sit for a few minutes and regain our composure. As we did we thanked the Lord for our safety and then quickly added our petition for finding the house with the missing address. Shortly after saying Amen, we looked up and there was the house directly in front of us. We parked our car and jumped out quickly, knowing we were already twenty minutes late for our International Student Association meeting.

I could feel the excitement in the air.
Barb grabbed my wrist and pulled me
toward a winding staircase.

This large home had a winding brick entrance which slowed our feet down slightly, but hadn't a chance to slow down our excitement. Today we would look through names and pictures of Exchange Students from all over the world, and choose our very own exchange student who would live with us for this entire school year. Cheyenne, my youngest daughter, would have a sister today, and before the sun would go down. I pushed the door bell, and a cute, chubby, black-haired woman with a huge toothy smile answered the door. She made us feel as if we should know her. She introduced herself as Barb, and we reciprocated instantly as she wrapped her loving arms around us and giggled. Immediate laughter coupled with party sounds of commotion along with barking dogs filled the entrance of this home. I could feel the excitement in the air. Barb grabbed my wrist and pulled me toward a winding staircase.

The further down the staircase we went the louder the voices became, and as I hit the bottom step I felt as if I were walking into a family reunion, although I knew that Cheyenne was the only person that was known to me. Barb shouted out, "Hey everybody, here's a new family," and a very loud "Welcome" was shouted out to us by everyone. Suddenly we were surrounded by food and beverages, and large packets with young people's pictures on them. Barb handed us a few packets and told us to take our time and read through all the information. I immediately realized these packets held the lives and family stories within their manila borders. Our journey was about to begin.

Somehow we found an open spot for two people. We hugged each other and began opening our first packet. It was amazing to us, that in just a few moments of reading a few lines about a person you could sense whether or not they would fit into your family. At first that was a little awkward, but soon it became exciting as the realization that these students were looking for a family that would fit them too and were probably just as excited as we were. We both sensed such accountability as we took our time. I thought about the tables being turned, about Cheyenne being the exchange student going to live with a family she didn't know for one entire school year. I wanted to make the best decision possible, for all of us.

Cheyenne squealed as she read about this drop-dead gorgeous boy from Spain, and then heaved heavily knowing we could only have a female live with us. It was just the two of us and the only men that are allowed in our "casa" were Alex and Coto, our two male felines.

There were hundreds of potential exchange students to read about. We took a little snack break and introduced ourselves to some new friends. For some of these people this was the fifth and sixth time that they would be hosting an exchange student. As they spoke of their past exchange children, tears would well up in their eyes as they reached for their wallets to show off pictures. I knew at the opening of the wallet that we were in the right place. After finishing our snacks, we got down to business. We had about twenty pages that had just been passed on to us, and as I shifted though about ten pages, I lowered my head and prayed for guidance.

Suddenly my heart jumped. Anna, age sixteen. Pollen, Germany. Avid volleyball player, swimmer, athlete, honor student. Lives with mom and dad, and a younger sister, Tina. Has no church affiliations but will attend church with host family. Hobbies: hiking, swimming, cooking, and the arts. Cheyenne and I read silently. Could this be our girl? I turned the page and these fun family pictures jumped out at us. Anna had put a circle around herself for identification

purposes, which made me laugh out loud. One picture was a skiing vacation with her family. Another was of them all visiting a castle on the Rhine. There was her home, which was brick and full of foliage climbing up the front of the house, and yet another showing the back of the house with an immense vegetable garden with bunnies eating the lettuce. Her humor started to come out of the pictures, as did her love for family. In one picture she was standing with her mom, dad, and sister, and they were all snuggled close to her aged grandfather who was sitting in a chair. That did it! I had tears rolling down my eyes as I turned to Cheyenne, who was whispering, "I think this is my sister."

We took her information packet and found our happy host, Barb. Both Cheyenne and I started talking at once saying the same things and laughing, knowing this choice would change many lives forever. Barb just smiled, acknowledging what she had seen in other families countless times. What a gift, what a responsibility. We signed on the dotted line, and the process began. We were so excited to get home that our good-byes to our new friends were done quickly.

We were given Anna's email address, and as we walked towards the car Cheyenne started speaking out her first message to her new sister, and I smiled, as I too started writing an email in my mind. The next thing we knew we pulled into our driveway, forty minutes had passed, and our email wasn't finished yet. Once home, we rushed to the computer and giggled and hugged our way through our first communication with our Anna.

Sleep came hard to us that evening, as we kept waking each other up with plans of how we could make Anna's arrival breathtaking. We still couldn't sleep, so up to her empty room we went. Our imagination was filling the room. We would paint the bedroom and get a green duvet, because that was Anna's favorite color, or so she had told us in her packet information. Then we'd spray paint all of the picture frames, and have all of Anna's family pictures that we had been given blown up and framed for her bedroom walls. I wanted her to open her bedroom door this fall and squeal, knowing we cared enough about her to plan big for her arrival.

The next day was Monday, so of course I was off to work as Cheyenne was off to school. Our European email was forgotten for the day. Back at home that evening as I started dinner I heard Cheyenne talking out loud from the lower level of the house. I smiled, wanting to give her some privacy and some alone time with her new sister's email. Skype had not been around yet so communication was slow, but laughter so filled our home that evening we were hardly hungry for food.

Every evening from then on we sent a short email sharing our daily activities. Later on, Anna would tell us how this communication opened her expectations and negated many of her fears, along with showing her family just who she would be living with. I wanted her family to feel secure with us, so we too sent pictures of our home and extended family. We were becoming family though the Internet.

Our preparations were begun in January. Anna would arrive in August just prior to the school year starting. I went down to the school district and enrolled Anna at Park Center High School. Only five exchange students could enroll each year, and she was number three. As I sat there, registering her, I read through her transcripts. She was an honor student. She was captain of her volleyball team, and they were the champions of that area. Knowing this, I asked about the volleyball team at Park Center, and was advised to call the coach. After I finished with my enrollment paper work, I went over to Park Center to speak with the coach. I was informed that most of the team had already been chosen, but that Anna could try out in the fall. I emailed Anna about the tryouts that evening and she responded with great excitement. She shared that she had been sad about not playing volleyball while she was in America. I believed in that very moment God was opening doors for Anna to have the best experience possible while she lived with us. I smiled to myself, wondering just how God would unfold his plans for all of us throughout this school year.

I knew her face,
as I had studied it for months,
loving it, cherishing it.

Summer was upon us and presented itself with the busyness of outdoor activities. Anna would email that her family loved to swim and ski, and that they sunbathed and grilled excessively during the summer months. Our family lives were so very similar.

Our emails were changing, becoming more intimate. We would find ourselves sharing very personal feelings, which we only did with family. God was creating a family unit for us. The excitement of actually seeing each other face to face grew and grew. Cheyenne and I became obsessed with Anna's arrival, and she in turn would write how her family was having trouble with letting her go. Not that they didn't want her to experience this, but that the realization of one entire year apart was setting in. I called her mother, and even

though we could not understand each other's language, we cried together somehow knowing our love for Anna would make things okay. I realized I needed to learn some German to keep her mother informed of Anna's life here, and strangely enough Anna's mother voiced the same intentions. All would be done for Anna and her comfort for the next year. What a great feeling to know that when you put someone else's needs before yours an unbreakable bond forms. Years later, Anna's entire family would come to spend the summer with Cheyenne and me, which would be totally lovely. I was able to greet her mother in German, and her mother greeted me in English. What a blessing!

But back to Anna's arrival. I can try to share in words how I felt standing at the Minneapolis International Airport holding my handmade sign with "Anna" on it, but it's almost too intimate. Neither Cheyenne nor I could eat dinner that evening; we were just too excited. My knees were weak as we read on the arrival sign that her plane had landed. I started to cry, as I am now remembering this wonderful event.

We walked over to stand in front of the arrival door. People were seemingly coming out of the walls, walking down the stairs and coming down the escalator. Anticipation was growing. I knew her face, as I had studied it for months, loving it, cherishing it. All of my senses were on high alert. Cheyenne was pacing back and forth, holding her own "Anna" sign, jumping up and down as she watched the crowd intently. She kept whispering "Anna."

And then. There she was!

We ran into each other's arms, dropping luggage, purses, all pretense. Our weeping was taken over with laughter and then back to weeping. The three of us blocked the doorway unintentionally and were asked to move. We did move but as a threesome. Anna tearfully spoke with such a strong accent that Cheyenne and I had to tell her to slow down. She in turn told us the same. Laughing, we headed to the baggage counter to pick up her luggage, and headed to our family home.

Arriving home, there was a phone message stating that Anna could try out for the volleyball team at 7:30 the next morning, which would give her no jet lag time. While I listened to the voicemail I heard Anna cry out "I love it" as she entered her bedroom. I cried tears of joy. My desire to bless my daughter was accomplished. We never slept that first night, and even though she was exhausted the next morning for tryouts, she made the team, first string. Through-

out the tryouts she would glance up into the bleachers where Cheyenne and I were sitting supporting her. Anna would wave quickly and then volley.

I had tried to prepare myself for this, but all attempts to hold back my tears failed.

My entire family would become Anna's support system. We would attend all of Anna's events throughout the following school year. She would graduate with High Honors from Park Center High School. I remember watching her walk up to receive her diploma, and a vision of her staying up half the night transposing her homework into German, doing the homework and transposing it back to English would come to mind. Her efforts paid off. I was a proud mom. Our family filled an entire row at the Target Center that afternoon at commencement, as we tearfully stood up clapping as she received her diploma. Her usual glance gently towards me as she walked back to her seat. Of course she had a huge graduation party, which was a joyful celebration of a very successful year. As I cleaned up after the party, my heart dropped. Just two more days with her and she would return to Germany. I had tried to prepare myself for this, but was unsuccessful and all attempts to hold back my tears failed. Upstairs, Anna and Cheyenne were also crying. I joined them as that is what families do.

Packing began. The inevitable known. The pain of good-byes. We all worked hard at taking care of each other's emotions. We gave each other space, and privacy. It was very painful. I placed love notes under clothing in her suitcases, wet with tears. Unbeknownst to me, she had taken ten pennies and handwritten words of love representing her ten months with us. All three of us did acts of kindness for each other that day.

Leaving our home was quiet with the exception of sniffles. Cheyenne and Anna sat in the back seat holding each other closely, kissing and hugging. We understood whatever we experienced together during this ride would have to last us a long time. We went up to the ticket counter in silence. We left the ticket counter and headed towards security. My heart was so heavy. I wanted to say so much, but the lump in my throat constricted my voice. Would she know how I loved her? Loved her as my own. Did she know how everything done together would be a life memory for me? Of course she knew; she was my daughter. We held each other as long as we could until

she had to depart. I watched her till she started to round the corner. She hesitated and, turning towards us, threw a kiss, her face pink, which was usual for her when she cried. We all touched in the air hundreds of feet apart. She was gone.

I whispered, "Alverderschen, my darling." I lovingly turned towards Cheyenne and we walked arm in arm back to our car. Once again we found ourselves talking so fast we could not hear each other, but this time talking about our wonderful year with Anna.

Vicki L. Richardson is a student at North Hennepin Community College just outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Vicki has published in the Realities in 2013. Vicki is known for sharing joy with whomever she meets. She is working towards her Master's Degree in Theology, but don't tell anyone.

BULLETS AND BROTH

By Patrick W. Marsh

We're in a sliver of a yellow kitchen on a midwinter afternoon. The oven looks like a makeshift forge, with four cauldrons brewing simultaneously like potted steel suns. Steam billows between their boils, which is painfully sucked up by the wheezing oven fan. It sounds like an overworked horse grinding against an overgrown field.

The whole family is over.

There is no place to stand outside the kitchen. Every chair, nook, cranny, spot, space, room, surface, and counter has been spoken for or occupied. Everyone is laughing, speaking in Hmong or English, and passing around a few nearly airborne babies to be smile-cuddled. The kitchen buzzes apron-wild with Hmong mothers and their daughters. It's a dark-haired stream of strong and chatty women, who text while cutting, hacking, slashing, skewering, peeling, and dicing. The winter windows look choked against their squared panes in patterns of desperate heat. I'm sweating. I can taste soy and onion. It's strong enough to see in the corner of my eyes.

The family is making Phở.

Rice noodles, onions, eye-of-round, bullion, tripe, beef brisket, chicken, and a dozen other things that I can't see, all dropped in the frothing surface of these shackled volcanos. I'm in the back of the kitchen. I can't move one way or another. A smiling grandmother hands me a jade cloud of cilantro. She doesn't speak English, but she smiles and nods.

"She wants you to pluck it," a little girl says, from behind a forest of knees.

It's damp, dripping onto my feet. I find a beam of white counter space next to the sink. I start to pluck the cilantro like verdant petals, making piles on an overused dinner plate of beansprouts and basil. Pretty soon, the plate's taken away because I don't move fast enough. They give me limes to cut next, but I don't get the wedges right. My hands are big and clunky with the knife and inch of space. Pretty soon, I'm discharged from the operation, and I'm left to watch.

The winter windows
look choked against
their squared panes
in patterns of
desperate heat.



The grandmother speaks in Hmong between chops, about how far the broth's come, but it's still not as good as how she used to make it in the refugee camp in Thailand. The little girl translates for me. She can't be more than six, and her hair is messy-tangled like an overactive doll. She found my knee and clamped onto my jeans. She wants me to pick her up. She's tired of walking into everyone's thighs.

The grandmother talks and everyone listens. Even the water seems to silence its bouillon-boils.

The bullets biting the jungle in snapping bark and broken leaf, chasing the Hmong like sideways phantom fangs. The opium dropped on the tongues of screaming infants, sleeping away to silence or death so mortar trails wouldn't target their cries. Crossing the Mekong River against a mud-rapid of froth, with dark pockets ready to swallow you up like a suctioned nightmare. The dust-dirt squares of space in the refugee camp, where the tallest tree would be a place to paint the far horizons with dreams.

Phở survived the wandering gunpowder and choking gravel, the cholera and dysentery. Now, its steam stains the walls, which have the same faded photographs of the camp and mountains. They look alive with creeping clouds and mossy peaks, like heaven was taunting them by dropping so low over their dark ranges. Now, Phở has crossed continents, mountains, rivers, oceans, roads, skyscrapers, valleys, and fields, to a warm kitchen with bumping shoulders and laughing elders.

And now, it leaves an outsider wondering how pathetic he was for not plucking the cilantro right.

Patrick W. Marsh is a writer currently pursuing a BA in English and creative writing. He currently lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota – within walking distance of multiple breweries and pubs. His poems and stories have been published in Calliope, Quail Bell Quarterly, Parachutes, Under Construction, Dagda Publishing and others. His debut novel Beware the Ills was self-published in July 2013. His apocalyptic-narrative blog The Greenland Diaries is serialized and published twice a week. He currently spends his time writing, studying, and trying to beat Street Fighter II Turbo on the highest difficulty setting available.

MY NAME MY TRIBE, MY TRIBE MY PRIDE

By Motunrayo A. Fakuwajo

Our fathers before us
believed that people
live out the meanings
of their names.

It is a new academic year and we will now be offering language courses which includes Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa in school to help us learn and know more about our culture which is disappearing at a fast rate amongst children and youths,” announced our headmistress. “Taking these language classes which will not only be a prerequisite, it will also help you to understand more about your traditions and culture,” she explained. These classes helped me to love and accept and never lose sight of my identity as a Yoruba lady. These classes helped me to establish the meanings of my name in relation to my tribe.

I would be taking the Yoruba class with my new primary one class members. When the bell rang for change of period, our math teacher, Mr. Mike, who was also our class teacher, left the class for a young lady who introduced herself to us as Omidan Aina.

“*Omidan* means Miss and *Aina* is given to a female who was born with her placenta wrapped around her neck when she was born. *Aina* is for female while *Ojo* is for male in Yoruba culture,” she explains. “Let us get to know one another by sharing our names and the meanings of the names if you know the meaning of yours,” she continued. Some members of the class were able to say their names, but most of us didn’t know the meanings of our names, so she asked us to go ask our parents the meanings of our names or the reasons behind our names. She taught us the twenty five letter alphabet in the Yoruba language.

When I got home that afternoon, I was glad to see that my grandmother had come from the village for a visit. I love my grandmother because she is always so sweet and polite to everyone. I love her even more because she tells us wonderful stories and knows the right answers to everything. My mother calls her the wise one. Something that fascinates me about my grandmother is her smile. She smiles beautifully, exposing that crisply white set of teeth that look like they’ve never been touched by palm oil as she smiles. I like watching her smile. I like how her lips gradually move into a curve and gently move into her beautiful eyes. She calls them “aged eyes”; I call them honest eyes. The kind of brown eyes you can look into at any time and know that no matter what the world brings, you can trust them to be loyal to you. Eyes filled with love and compassion.

In the evening when she was ready to tell me and my brother stories about the wise tortoise like she always does, she sat down on her chair, holding my brother Adeolu in her lap and resting his head against her ever warm and soft bosom while I sat on the floor on a mat. Her lap used to be my spot before my brother came. But when she explained that she used to sit down on the floor to listen to her grandmother tell her stories when she was a kid too, I liked that we shared something in common from when she was a little child. She sang some songs while my brother and I clapped. “*Alo oo*” is the way stories are started in my tribe. It means story; it is how she always started but that day she started differently.

“Names are wonderful things. Our fathers before us believed that people live out the meanings of their names. As such our parents put considerable effort into giving a baby a name. Their belief about names is conveyed in a very common adage, *ile ni a n wo, ki a to so omo l'oruko* (one pays attention to the family before naming a child). This is how it was done in our tribe back in the old days. But things are changing now. Religions brought their own names, the rise of civilization also brought with it names from the white man's land,” she said, looking just a little grim. Looking back now, I think my grandmother was really accepting of the religious names because she also allowed the Bishop from her church to give her a new biblical name when she was baptized.

“Are you sad about it?” my brother asked. Smiling and rubbing his head, she answered, “No, my son. I'm not. The world is changing and we all must change with it.”

“Is it because grandfather was a king before his death that we all have Ade in our names?” I asked my grandmother curiously. “Yes, my dear,” my grandma said, smiling with pride. “Good to know you are paying attention. *Ade* means crown so anybody with a name that has Ade is from a royal home,” explained my grandma. “Parents of a new baby must consider the tradition, history, and/or religion of a child's relatives or the season when choosing a name for the baby. Worshipers of Ifa will have names like Ifaseun (thank Ifa). We also believe that some kids come with their own names. These names are called *oruko amutorunwa* (a name brought from heaven). For example, twins.”

Feeling very proud of myself, I said, “They are called *Ibeji*. *Taiwo* and *Kehinde*.” My grandma clapped for me. “Good girl. *Taiwo* is believed to be the first one to come on earth but Yoruba's believe that *Kehinde* is older than *Taiwo* even when he or she came out last.”

“Wow!” I said, surprised to hear this. “So what are the meanings of my names, *Motunrayo Adeola Abike*?” I asked my grandmother.

“Your name *Motunrayo*, depending on how it is used, can mean *I've been blessed once again* or *my joy has been doubled*, *Adeola* means to have a grandiose crown, *Abike* means the one born to be loved and pampered by all,” she explained. I was happy to learn about the meanings of my name.

To my parents I was not just a source of blessing. I am a double source of blessing. I am a beautiful princess, born to be loved by all. I love the meanings of my names and I promised to thank my parents for the beautiful names they gave me. Still a little confused, I asked, “What about names like Emmanuel, Deborah, Chioma, Koffi, and Ryan. Do they have meanings too?”

“Names like Emmanuel, Deborah, Elizabeth were introduced to us when Christianity came to our land. Chioma is a female name amongst the Igbos. Ryan is a western culture name that is now rampant amongst our people in lieu of our indigenous names. Kofi is a name for male kids in Ghana. I'll ask Mama Adjua when I go back to the village and I'll tell you the meaning when I'm next visiting.” My brother yawned.

“It's really late and I think you should go to bed now. I'll tell you a story about the greedy tortoise tomorrow.” The glowing moon which stood out in the middle of the blue and white sky when we started was now gently and lazily peeping out, having been covered by blue clouds. The wind blowing gently made a soft rustling noise as it went through our neighbor's mango tree. The sound was soothing to the ear and the slightly cold breeze was comforting to the body and soul. She pecked us both and took us inside to meet our mum who tucked us in for the night. I hugged my mom and thanked her for the names she and Dad gave my brother and me.

“I learned from Grandma and my teacher how wonderful our names are, and the beautiful ones you chose for us will stay with us for the rest of our lives. Our names make us who we are. It is our pride. It is our heritage,” I said to my mom as I lay my head on the pillow for sleep to engulf me in its beautiful arms.

No biography submitted.



CUTS THAT RUN TOO DEEP

By Maylynn Chang

When I was thirteen, my family shattered like glass when my father kidnapped my sister. At first everyone thought it was a kidnapping with no reason behind it, but that was before I opened my mouth and horrified my mother and the world. I was placed in a room with a single table that seemed to go on for ages as I waited for the police to take my statement. I can picture the exact way the man's eyebrows furrowed like a caterpillar about to move as I told him the abuse my father put me and my siblings through and how he had raped both me and my sister. From that moment on, I felt like a seagull floating on an ocean of anger, shock and sorrow as my siblings and I were separated into different homes.

I fell down into an abyss of rage,
longing, and eternal sorrow.

Through trying to cope with what had happened to me while growing up, I struggled with how to handle the stress of it all. I remember lying in bed in my aunt's house watching the sheet that covered the window dance side to side in the low breeze as the sun beat down onto my face. Tears ran down my cheeks and this knot kept tightening around my heart. I wanted room to breathe. I needed space to move, but everything was closing in on me. I reached up with my trembling right hand and clawed slowly down the right side of my face. I could feel tears and skin build up underneath my hard nails, but I didn't bother to clean them out. I scratched again and again and again. I bit my lips to muffle the cries that wanted to come out from the pain, but this was my pain and my pain alone. Somehow, with each rake of my nails, I felt that knot that was constricting around my heart begin to loosen. It was my self-inflicted pain that helped me breathe and with each breath I felt like I could move on from what had happened to me. The realization was astonishing. I couldn't believe it, but it didn't last long.

I had only lived with my aunt for a month and a half before she could no longer stand me. I was kicked out and placed in a shelter where they watched me like a cat does a mouse. I could no longer scratch at my face for relief and was forced to endure my stresses painlessly. I was only there for two and a half weeks and I felt

like I was in hell all over again. My mind went insane and my body began to shut down on me. I was no longer me, but a bystander watching my body move on its own through life. When I was finally placed into a foster home, things only got worse. They didn't care that I was struggling with life and whether or not it was worth living. They kept me there for the paycheck that came every month and they weren't shy about sharing that fact.

I wear my scars as a reminder of the past I lived.

With no help and no supports to keep me up, I fell. I fell down into an abyss of rage, longing and eternal sorrow. The further I fell the more desperate I became to try to hold onto the life I once had. Then there it was: a shiny piece of silver metal as sharp as a knife and as small as my thumb. A razor that shined in the midst of all the darkness and with one swipe it took me out of the hell I was living in and back into reality. It was like a cure to cancer, the answer to all questions in life; it was my way out of the abyss that sucked me back in every second of the day. But soon after my new discovery, I was placed into the hospital where I was locked away from the world.

Months passed as I waited in my secure cell. The doctors gave me medication to help stabilize my conflicting emotions that screamed at me to carve another line into my arm. Though I felt as if I was going crazy, I also felt as if I was actually making progress. I had finally got the help I needed and when everything started looking up I was accepted into another foster home. My first thought was that it was going to be the exact same as the last one. Thankfully, I was wrong. I was continually getting the help I needed and was able to rebuild the life I had before. I even was able to see my other siblings after a year of separation.

For two years I went on like this, but what I didn't understand was that I couldn't rebuild the life I had when I lived with my parents and siblings. This was a new life. A new beginning and the more I tried to go back in the past, I couldn't move forward. At this realization, I resorted to cutting as therapy. I was hospitalized again and put on more medication. My life was nothing but the hospital, pills, cutting and depression, until I decided it was enough. I stopped everything I was doing. I got out of the rut I was in and took a new path. I refused to take any medication. I returned to living with my mother and the one brother who had stayed with her. I tried my best to stay away from anything that would even make me think of cutting. I turned my attention to reading, writing,

cooking, cleaning and school. I forced myself into a schedule that was nothing but work all the time so I wouldn't have time to think about the welling emotions inside of me, and it worked. I was exhausted and overworked, but I didn't harm myself for almost half a year. Then I met the person who stopped my world and blew my mind.

He was a student who had been in my classes since freshman year. He was the one that knew everyone in the entire school and was adored by them. He was also one of the ones who hardly ever did his homework. One day he approached me and said to me, "Why are you always by yourself?" The question bewildered me as I stared at what I thought was a perfect smile. Here stood a man who knew everything about everybody asking me why I was so isolated. I laughed and walked away. He followed and interrogated me like the police. Before I knew it, he had dug his way under the solid walls I put up against the world and into my heart. He listened to everything I had to say, never putting me down or pitying me for what I did or had happened to me and always held his arms open. I have cried all my fears into his arms and bore the truth of everything to him and still he stays by my side. He loves the way I hold myself strong despite everything and wear my scars as a reminder of the past I lived. In all these years of struggling, I've moved forward the most since meeting him than I ever did by myself. To this day he still stands by my side as a support, a friend, a lover and a complete miracle.

Life is a gift, an honor and a beautiful wonder. Life is also painful, a struggle and hell itself. We strive to live a life where we are successful and happy, and to do so we work for it. People put their heart, sweat, blood and tears into making a life they love; however, there are also people who don't work to get anywhere in life and spend their lives with open hands. I believe that the only way to get anywhere in life is to pick yourself up, dust yourself off and begin the journey that is your life despite the obstacles that stand in your way.

Maylynn Chang comes from a family made up from friends. She has lived all around the Minneapolis area and now resides in Brooklyn Center. Her mother is Hmong from the lands of Laos and her father is white from America. Though she lives with her mother, she does not speak her native language or any other. She feels as if she lives her life to read and write stories of fantasies that will never come true. She constantly finds her mind away from the real world to instead be immersed in fiction from time periods long past us as well as in front of us. She is currently enrolled in North Hennepin Community College and so far has finished her first semester in pursuit of the field of Histotechnology.

SIDE BY SIDE, YET DIFFERENT

By Maylynn Chang

My world shattered
and the concept I knew
as family was snuffed
out like a candle.

Family bonds are the most important connection to a human being. The people in your family are the ones you grow up with and learn from. As people, having that kind of bond shapes them dramatically. You learn to love and to handle different personalities, and you will always have someone throughout the years. However, there are times when a family member will not stick to those guidelines. Sometimes powerful events will happen that can either strengthen or wither that important bond between you and another family member.

Six years ago, my sister – who I had shared so much life, love and pain with – chose to step away from our family. For years both my sister and I had endured being raped and abused by our own father. No matter how hard we tried to tell someone, we were always beaten down again. Every day we'd be abused, but when the sun fell and the stars kissed the night sky both of us would comfort each other. We knew that one day the hell we were going through would end. We promised that until the day we were strong enough to fight back, we would suffer our pain together. I had always looked up to her for being so strong and teaching me to be strong myself. She was the one who taught me to get back up when life kicked me down. She was the one who taught me to think rationally before doing anything. She was the first person in my life who showed me there was light in the darkness that surrounded us. But then, one day, she gave up. We had endured so much together while growing up that I couldn't believe it when she threw it all away. The day when she decided to walk away was the day that my world shattered and the concept I knew as family was snuffed out like a candle.

In February 2007, I stood and watched as my sister smiled and walked out the door with the monster that hurt us all our life. Tears had filled my eyes as my throat squeezed shut. "Why?" I wanted to cry. "Don't leave!" I wanted to scream, but in the end I just watched her walk out of my life. My world crumbled right before my very eyes. My body became numb as my mind focused on why she would leave with the person who caused us so much pain. Why she would leave when she said we would stay together always. I felt lost without her. Nothing made sense even as my mother called the police saying my father had kidnapped her. I soon found out that she left because she was about to give birth to our father's child. Again all ground I stood on was swept away with the news of my half-sister and cousin about to be born. From that day forth nothing was ever the same again.

After my sister gave birth to my new half-sister, we were separated into different foster homes. At first I wanted to spend all my time with the sister I looked up to, but I soon realized she was no longer the same person. She no longer tried to comfort me, but instead turned me toward a therapist. She didn't even give me the time of day or even look me in the eyes and say my name. I soon retreated from her and within a blink of an eye three years had passed until I saw her next. I had gone through a lot of therapy to help me to the point where I could see her again and when I finally did see her, she was a completely different person. She was no longer the type of person who would isolate herself and keep everything inside like when we were young. Now she was a brand new person who was outgoing with her work, a woman who spoke her mind and indulged in partying with many friends. It took me another year to accept this loud, crazy, animal-loving woman as my sister and even to this day I can hardly believe she is the same person I went through hell with.

Now six years later, she lives a life of her own training horses and caring for small animals. As a girl, she taught me to be strong, and now as a woman she shows me that it's okay to let loose. Despite the time we spent apart and the new people we have become, I still learn from her. Now that she's back in my life again, I'm starting to understand the true meaning of a family member: someone who always comes back no matter what.

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MEMORIES OF THE PLACE I LOVE THE MOST

By Vameni Ambrose

“There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find ways in which you, yourself have altered.” – Nelson Mandela

We do not realize that places do not change; however, people change over time. Some changes can bring memories which are either positive or negative, yet we cherish the memories and should learn to adapt to changes in life.

Two years ago, when my sister and her fiancé told us that she was planning to get married in Sri Lanka, family disagreed at first. She had been there in 2010 and thought it would be best to have the traditional Hindu ceremonial wedding in a city where we grew up. My parents were so happy, yet not thrilled with the idea. Sri Lanka had suffered through a political war and it was just then the country called a peace. I was so against the idea as I remembered what we had gone through before migrating to Canada. I tried my best to talk her out of it, but I failed in my master plan. I even pulled out an excuse that I wouldn't get a chance to come due to my work and not having enough vacation time to travel, yet it was my sister's wedding. I could not miss it. The year of 2011, after twenty years, we flew to where we were born.

As we walked out of doors from the airport, the humidity hit us so fast that we looked at each other with regret. The salty smell as we exited the airport which was near the beach and the noise level were really a shocker. I wondered if it was the same place I grew up in. As our uncle drove us to my childhood house, I kept asking why the roads looked smaller and narrower. I thought it would take us five hours to reach home, but it only took us two hours by car. I wondered if the country had decreased in size. As we were taken to the city where we grew up, my uncle pointed out some of the war zones and where people were buried. I saw tears in my dad's eyes as my uncle was telling us the horror stories of the war, death, and the shooting of innocent civilians. I almost could smell the death and taste the fresh blood as if I had been there during the war. I remember my heart felt heavier as I listened and looked around as a kid at candy store – eager to learn what I have missed. I was happy to be back to the land I was born in yet the scenes of dry, warm, open land was not what I remembered. Many houses were destroyed due to war. Many who could not rebuild a house lived in small huts made out of clay. The few who could afford it, renovated

the houses that were falling apart due to bombing. Luckily, our house was saved but we had to renovate the windows that were shattered when the neighbor's house was bombed. I couldn't help but remember the times we hid for many hours in bunkers underneath the ground from the sounds of helicopters or bombing. Some days, we left our house and ran to the nearest Hindu temple where we felt safer. Maybe it was the belief that we wouldn't be attacked at a sacred place where God lived. The thundering sounds of helicopters flying and shooting bullets and throwing bombs at cities and civilians. Even though the war zone was miles away from our city, it felt like it was happening in our city due the size of the country.

We often forget our roots and
the struggles we have faced.

When the car stopped, I saw my grandfather, standing by the double gate for us. He did not look eighty; rather he looked one hundred. He had almost gone bald but whatever was left of it was greyish silver. He was wearing a plaid shirt that I had sent him a year ago but it was too large on him. His old trousers were hanging baggy so he had belted them tightly to keep them from falling. I did not remember my grandfather this way when I left the country. He always wore light color shirts and dark trousers and matched his socks and his gold tone watch. It made me tear up when I saw him. Almost angry at my father for leaving him behind. My grandfather was adamant that he stay behind when we left the country. He refused to leave his house and wanted to be buried in the country where he was born and raised. He was in tears as he saw us after twenty years. He hugged us so tightly and told us that he was so glad to have us and his wish had come true to see us before he passed. I scolded him for talking nonsense and told him that he would live for another twenty years to see his great grand kids. As I entered the house, I couldn't stop my tears. As I walked in the front living room, the mixed smell of incense and milk rice (a Sri Lankan dish) filled my nostrils. I could taste the spice level from the smell of the coconut sambol (another Sri Lankan dish) and it gave me heartburn. I heard the maid grinding rice flour on a big wooden

pestle and mortar. I remember passing the first room on the left of the living room and wished my grandmother was alive. She was a strong lady who held the family together, taught us English when we were little, made us the yummiest treats and food that we still craved. She died the year before we left Sri Lanka when we were little. I was close to my grandmother as she also favored me since I was the first grandchild in the house. I always admired her as a small child. She spoke fluently in English, so I would bring my school friends to show off. She also participated in local community activities and organized a women's club and a women's help center. She was known for her helpful heart, soft spoken-ness, and wise words. I felt her presence of welcoming us as I sat on her bed. I felt the yearning to hug her and cry with happiness; instead I smiled and whispered that I missed her as if she could hear me.

After two weeks, wedding ceremonies and visiting places and relatives whom we hadn't seen for years came to an end. I regretted the time was short as we had to get back to our normal lives. My visit back to Sri Lanka brought back memories and taught me that life can be enjoyed in simplicity. As we are accustomed to life here, we often forget our roots and forget the struggles we have faced. I must admit as a normal, middle class, career thirty year old, I want a big house, fancy things and a luxurious life. However, my visit back has given me the realization that life can be enjoyed in smaller, simpler ways as well. People in Sri Lanka have faced many struggles and still continue to face them as the country is improving. I learned to appreciate my life and not take life for granted as we are lucky to be living in a country of opportunities. I have realized that the house we lived in, the city where we grew up, and the country did not change at all, even after long years of turbulence of war. Over time, people change; however, the memories and where we came from do not change.

No biography submitted.



A TYPICAL MORNING IN CHEMISTRY LAB

By Spencer Tye

Life is tough, especially when it's paycheck to paycheck. The stresses of maintaining your social position in the workplace, a necessity if you happen to come from lower or middle class origins, only adds to this. But, much of this difficulty pales in comparison to tossing in fulltime college attendance. Scholarships and financial aid help tremendously, but only in the prevention of crippling debt. The true struggle comes in the expectations of attendance and sometimes even attentiveness. With this expectation placed upon students, likewise, one is placed upon the school and its faculty. Students learn to trust and depend on their teachers. I can imagine this is its own source of stress for professors, who may or may not have experienced raising a child, but certainly aren't used to having thirty or more young adults depending on them. This dependence is magnified when professors form bonds of mentorship with their students which I know I've benefited from personally.

Time and effort invested
into academics is often an
emotional investment as well.

It's easy to imagine the weight of responsibilities placed on faculty, but not always on students. A typical morning in the lab is what's expected in my chemistry class, but it can certainly turn atypical. Time and effort invested into academics is often an emotional investment as well. I can recall an incident in my class that exemplifies this. It was not notably profound to me at the time, but writing the lab report for it later that night illuminated what was buried beneath the skin. Taking an average of fifteen credits a semester has made insomnia and I acquaintances, but perhaps three or four hours of sleep a night was getting to me. Perhaps the stupor of exhaustion in which I placed myself was responsible for the lack of mental barriers suppressing emotional expression and a child-like need to continuously exaggerate a tall tale...

The Observation of the Iodine Clock Reaction to Determine a Viable Concentration of Reagents

Abstract

The class was provided with five chemical compounds and instructions to determine which combination of reagents could be used in an iodine clock reaction with starch as an indicator. Much of the class eagerly awaited the chance to approach the cart sitting feet from the professor's desk, on which laid the reagents specially prepared by the professor himself. Had these students just started their semesters, they may have pushed their way to the cart, even fought to be the first to bring the chemicals to their lab partners, but this was no community of amateurs. The elected ambassador of each group procured the reagents with a well-defined air of professionalism; the experimentation had begun.

The class spent a great deal of time combining chemicals to find the ideal mixture. Every combination was tried. Convinced that complexity held the answer, some even attempted mixtures of three reagents. Among the wave of disparity enveloping the students in its undertow like a suffocating layer of cellophane wrapping a murder victim, the professor sat upon his stool, a throne of both wisdom and threatening authority. Elder students repeating the class, having failed it the year before, gazed in bewilderment at the mixtures they had used last semester that now failed to provide any promise of usefulness. The minutes continued to pass and many expected some of the more experienced students, veterans to the science, to find the answer and share it with the community, but soon a tipping point was reached.

In seconds, the class descended into pandemonium and the once thought unbreakable bonds of camaraderie were on the very verge of tearing asunder. It was at that moment of sheer terror for what doom may approach that the authority revealed its hand. The reagents were duds, a cruel jest of the establishment. "Left out too long," some said. It was of no surprise to others. The younglings, having been born into the establishment and never knowing anything but, continued their labor in silence.

Groups of seasoned veterans mourned with the elders of the community for time lost. Too many winters in the Scandinavian wastelands known by the common tongue as Minnie Soh'tah left them weary, downtrodden, and reliant on mystical concoctions of strong beans from the southern kingdoms to rouse them from their slumber. A totalitarian source of consternation was not a modern development to them, but many were swiftly approaching an end to their vital thread.

The young remain optimistic, blissfully innocent to the horrors of adulthood, a constant struggle with Mother Earth that fills the soul with dread. Dread for the moment we must shed this mortal coil, seldom of pleasant means, but of the teeth or exposure. First sons were coming of age and ready to accept the responsibilities of their Father's keep. Those approaching their thirtieth winter knew this time was near, the time a simple sneeze would usher exile into the wilderness by their own loved ones from fear of spreading death. Yes, for them 'twas a devastating loss, another trial by fire. True reagents were supplied, but they will never forget. They will never forgive.

Spencer Tye is in his second semester and entering into the MLT program. He enjoys spending some of his free-time writing but spends most of it reading and learning to expand his knowledge in scientific fields such as physics and biology. Idolizing Richard Feynman as a child, he once aspired to a career in theoretical physics, but would very much like to become an astrobiologist now.

THE LESSONS OF LIFE

By Khuong Doan

I am now not who
I was two years ago.
I have changed.

Spring break! Many of my friends are on their way to escape the freezing spring in Minnesota in order to find themselves lying on a beach under warm sunlight. Some are enjoying the break by breaking their banks at the Mall of America while others choose to lie in bed watching their favorite TV shows all day long. “Time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time,” I recall a popular quote of Marthe Troly-Curtin. The quote perfectly gives me a sound reason that allows me to kill my spare time at a local Starbucks coffee shop close to my house. I grab a venti blended Caramel Frappuccino in my hand and find a favorite spot in a quiet corner next to a big wall of windows where I can enjoy watching snow falling down to the ground slowly. Caffeine in coffee quickly gives a jump-start to my nervous system; it then boosts my feelings and activates my memory. Shortly, I am falling in a daydream. My mind drives me back to the past when I first came to the U.S. two and half years ago. In the midst of sorting out my own memories, I surprisingly find many differences between my current identity and my past identity. I am now not who I was two years ago. I have changed not only in my interests and habits, but also in my personality, traits, and life perspectives. Eventually, my memory stream stops at two events that may be considered as two main milestones in my life from which the root of my internal change is found.

The first milestone was at the time I moved to the U.S. two and half years ago. I call this part of my life “Journey to the West.” This transition marked the beginning of a new phase in my life where most of my personal changes took place, and to be honest, it was not a pleasant experience at all. In fact, I seriously underwent cultural shock. At best, it is hard, and at worst it is almost impossible for anyone to move to live in another country – especially a country possessing a vastly different cultural orientation compared to the home culture. I was raised in the Vietnamese culture referred to as collectivism that has distinctive practices sharply contrasting with American culture – referred to as individualism. When I came to the U.S, I pictured myself as a stunted 26 year-old man deprived of education, social experience, and even basic knowledge of daily life. While struggling to adapt to new surroundings and traditions, I realized the fundamental role of language in daily activities; it was the foundation of a community, and a society could not function without it. Indeed, English was the largest constraint that blocked all my pathways to American society. Because of my incapability of conversing in English, I had to totally rely on other

people for all English-related issues including very basic activities such as shopping for my personal items. This dependency caused me substantial frustration and depression. In addition to these difficulties, my background in Vietnam somehow put more pressure on my shoulders. Before moving, I had worked as a site supervisor for one of the largest construction companies in Vietnam. It was really a good position for a civil engineer to start his career path; therefore, I considered it as quite an accomplishment. Nevertheless, America did not seem to honor my professional experience. As a result, a 26 year-old independent man became a useless person. Being useless made me so depressed and stressed out for a long time, and it then resulted in eating and sleeping disorders. Fortunately, when I hit rock bottom, and I had nothing else to lose, I suddenly had no fear and became stronger than ever. I told myself that I did not move to U.S in order to become a loser, so I decided to start all over, and that decision turned my life around.

North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) was a starting point that I deliberately chose to begin my new life because I believed that excellent training was more likely to enable me to gain success. In some respects, I somehow experienced the popular term “American Dream” while attending college. People usually say that America is a land of opportunities, and it provides all runners with fairness and freedom to compete for prosperity and success. Those properties are partly reflected in the country’s educational administration. The educational system is designed to encourage and assist students to accomplish their academic goals, so school-related processes and policies are approachable. Financial aid and other support are also available for a variety of students in various conditions; therefore, everyone has the ability to access education. I believe these distinctive features bring America the top rank of education in the world. I appreciated it and took advantage of becoming a member of the U.S. educational community.

In terms of psychology, motivation and ability are two principle elements of conducting an action. In this case, I had both motivation and ability for learning, so I was dedicated to pursuing education. I selected North Hennepin Community College, a local accredited school, to restart my academic journey. Until now, I usually state to my friends that NHCC is my favorite school in the U.S. ever. This is the truth. Although NHCC is just a small regional college, it offers its students sufficient facilities, resources, and services to become successful. Indeed, the school does not only show students what to learn, but also how to learn effectively and efficiently. Many learning workshops held during a semester teach students about time management, stress management, procrastination-avoidance techniques, and many effective learning tips. By attending workshops

and doing practice, I learned how to prioritize school and life activities effectively and also mastered the method of using various avenues and techniques of inquiry in approaching a problem. The school curriculum also gave me a broad range of knowledge so that I was able to analyze my needs, spot my deficiencies, and then address them.

I figured out that positive attitude
could change everything.

Besides academic improvement, the period of learning contributed to my personal growth as well. While facing troubles deriving from school, I experienced the power of positive thinking. I figured out that positive attitude could change everything. When I encountered a difficulty, a chronic problem, or disturbing news such as bad grades and tough assignments, I looked at the bright side so that I could motivate myself to step over bad things and go forward. I always kept in mind that things were looking up. In doing so, it resulted in changes in my personality as well. I became a sociable man and was able to socialize with people. I tried to make as many friends as possible such as classmates, instructors, school staff, or even acquaintances who I just met on the hallway or in the parking lot. At that time, my English speaking and listening skills, coupled with the heavy Vietnamese accent were big obstacles that restrained me from communicating with other people; however, my positive thinking encouraged me to talk and motivated me to willingly learn from my mistakes. My father taught me that everyone I met in life could give me a certain lesson, and his perspective worked really well in this case because every American was able to teach me a bunch of English. In applying my father’s lesson, I perceived all people I met in school as my English teachers, and because there was no harm in asking, I was not afraid of asking them questions whenever I had concerns. The more I interacted with people, the more friends I made, and the more confident I felt.

Three semesters of hard work culminated in straight-A grades, and I became a member of the Phi Theta Kappa and the Honors Program. This success was attributed to right learning methods and non-stop working. However, there was a flaw in my perception of learning. At the time, I perceived learning as my obligation that I did not enjoy doing but must carry out. My principal goal was to get a good paying job, and earning a degree was just a necessary qualification for the job; therefore, learning was inevitably a must in order to

meet the requirement. Literally, learning was not on my list of desires. Hence, during the learning period, I did not feel happy even though I had accomplishments afterwards. Instead, I felt exhausted because of long-term sleep deprivation, continuous headaches, and a digestive disorder caused by acute anxiety and intense stress. In addition, since I arrived in the U.S., I was obsessed by the thought of returning home where I used to be full of joy. I tried my best to learn only because I was looking forward to the day when I would come home in success. Eventually, the long-term unhappiness coupled with the desire to return home went over the top, so it drove me to take a break to visit my loved people. For that reason, when Minnesota entered its summer in May, 2013, I took a trip to Vietnam.

I did not feel obligated to learn anymore; instead, I desired to learn and made it my enthusiasm.

The Vietnamese trip was the second main milestone, and I call this part of my life “the pursuit of happiness.” I had been waiting for almost two years to go back to the place that I thought about every single day; therefore, it was reasonable for me to have high expectations for the trip. However, it did not happen like it was supposed to. The reality was not consistent with my perception of it. I found myself lost in my home country. The culture, traditions, surroundings, lifestyles, even the language in which I grew up had become unfamiliar. It was odd that I did not feel comfortable in my beloved place. It soon became apparent that I held onto the past, so my perception of home was based on past memories that solely existed in my mind. In principle, everything at home remained the same as it had been. In fact, the problem fell into my internal changes. Perhaps, individualistic practices best suited my true identity, and the American lifestyle had gradually been absorbed into my personality without my awareness. It led to changes in my attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives toward the dynamics of life. Because I lacked the sharing and empathy of collectivism, I did not feel that I belonged to my home place anymore. Hence, I did not find contentment as expected, but loneliness.

From that moment on, I learned a real-life lesson that I should stop holding onto the past and waiting for the future, but start living in the present. This critical experience later improved my life. The life experience reminded me of Dale Carnegie’s saying in his famous book *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. “We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today.” I also recalled a portion of Kalidasa’s poem that was cited in the book:

“For yesterday is but a dream
And tomorrow is only a vision,
But today well lived makes yesterday a dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.”

After two months, I came back to the U.S. and started living in the present. I stopped being obsessed with old memories; instead, I appreciated my new surroundings. I also did not wait until all my goals had been accomplished to enjoy, but instead I relished current activities. I began to have fun with new surroundings by getting involved in American-characterized activities such as going fishing and camping, jogging around beautiful lakes, playing outdoor sports at local parks, and having barbecues with friends. I also signed up for a gym membership to work out routinely. These activities did not distract me from my academic goals, but they helped refill my power that had been drained by learning. In fact, the most wonderful effect that living in the present brought me was the joy of learning. I did not feel obligated to learn anymore; instead, I desired to learn and made it my enthusiasm. In doing so, I studied a textbook like a child reading her beloved bedtime storybook, and when writing an essay, I felt excited as much as a Facebook addict writing his status. Living in the present literally brought me happiness and contentment. Perhaps, that is a reason why present also means a gift.

It has been a while since I stared out of the glazed curtain wall and was lost in a daydream. It is time to come back to the present. There is a lot of work ahead waiting for me. Carnegie’s message about stopping worrying about the future does not mean that I should not plan for it. Cultural differences and language barriers still challenge me every single day; however, I believe that life is still beautiful as long as I think positively and live contentedly.

Khuong Doan is from Vietnam. He moved to the U.S. two and a half years ago and visited his home last summer. He has been only in 2 countries: Vietnam and U.S. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering in Vietnam and worked for some years in the construction field before moving to the U.S. He enrolled at NHCC in the spring semester 2012. He already had experience in construction, so he chose to pursue Construction Management degree and will graduate with an A.S. degree in CM in May 2014 and then transfer to the Moorhead University to pursue a B.S. degree. He likes to play many sports, but he just has enough time to work out at the local gym. He likes traveling a lot, and he hopes to go around the world when possible. He also likes reading books and listening to instrumental music. He really likes making friends with people in various cultures, but it is easier said than done because of human nature coupled with cultural boundaries.



DEADLY AND DELICIOUS

By Gabrielle McCabe

Visually, the pizzeria lacks appeal. The single-story concrete structure, covered in burnt orange stucco, resembles a sad looking piece of cubed cheese. No sign hangs on the front of the building, or on the barren windows. I can only assume the pizzeria gets most of their business from locals who walk past the storefront and peek in out of curiosity because there is no other way of knowing its function. My sister discovered the pizzeria in such a way while walking her dog in the alley behind her home in New Jersey. To this day, neither she nor I have any idea what the pizzeria's name is, or if a name even exists. Over the years, my family resorted to calling it "The Pizza Place" to remedy this problem. Inside, three or four small tables, each only big enough for two people, sit in the front part of the shop. No actual pizza-eating occurs at these tables. Their only purpose is to provide a place to sit while you wait for your pizza to bake. The walls, painted a dull blue, have only one decoration: a giant film poster for the movie *The Godfather*. At the back of the narrow shop, a

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large glass counter sits with a brick oven behind it. Here, customers can place an order then sit down at one of the small tables as they wait for their pizza. While waiting, one may engage in the art of people-watching. All types of people come in and out of the pizzeria but the employees, alleged members of the Italian mafia, are whom I find to be the most fascinating.

I technically have no proof that The Pizza Place is run by members of the mafia; however, time spent in the pizzeria has led my imagination to create highly probable stories that would support such accusations. Adjacent to the front counter, a thick red curtain hangs over the entryway to a mysterious back room. On occasion, one of the employees enters this room and the curtain pulls to the side just enough for me to get a glimpse inside. The first time this happened, I saw the largest mass quantity of uncooked noodles I have ever seen. Boxes of spaghetti noodles were stacked to the

ceiling on every wall, leaving a fairly large open space in the middle of the room. This led me to wonder why an establishment that clearly only sells pizzas would be storing so many boxes of uncooked spaghetti, and, more importantly, what lurked behind those boxes? My suspicions grew even more upon my next visit when I again caught a glimpse into the back room, this time through means of casual surveillance while getting a “sip of water” from the drinking fountain to the left of the back room. What I saw inside surprised me; all of the spaghetti boxes were gone and the emptied room only contained two things: a big wooden desk sitting in front of a highly cushioned red chair. Using my advanced deduction skills, I have theorized that this desk belongs to the owner of The Pizza Place, a mob ring-leader.

I find it likely the pizzeria’s owner, commonly known as “Big Papa,” has dealt with a lot of hardship in the past. As a first generation Italian-American, Big Papa wanted to make his parents proud and support his family. In his early 20’s he opened up The Pizza Place with a sincere desire to run a family-friendly business. After five years, it was clear to Big Papa that the pizzeria’s unfortunate location in a back alleyway was driving his business into the ground. Desperate to support both his parents and his new wife and children, Big Papa made a phone call to his cousin Tony. Big Papa knew Tony worked for the Italian mafia and wanted to know if he had any quick and easy “business opportunities” that might help him out financially. Tony eagerly accepted his cousin’s plea for help and within the year the two young men were business partners in an opium drug ring. Middle Eastern suppliers would ship opiates to the pizzeria, disguised as uncooked pasta noodles. Big Papa and Tony would then distribute the drugs via “pizza deliveries” all across western New Jersey. The two cousins felt as close as brothers and trusted only each other. For this reason, Tony’s death (the result of an altercation with suppliers) deeply affected Big Papa. He emotionally distanced himself from his wife and kids and delved even deeper into his business. Eventually, he employed his four sons at the pizzeria, expecting they would follow in his footsteps as mafia members.

The four brothers, though all equally burly, have drastically different personas. The two eldest, Joe and Vince, are fraternal twins. Joe, the eldest by 6 minutes, trained for 5 years with the Italian Assassin Bureau after graduating high school. During this time, Vince shadowed his father at work, quickly picking up the tricks of the trade. Between the two brothers, they have killed sixteen men and neither has been convicted or tried for their crimes. Pooki, the next eldest, is quite the ladies’ man. The result of a night of passion between “Big Mama” (Big Papa’s aptly-named wife) and their Argentinian

mailman, Pooki takes pride in his good looks and smooth dancing skills. The truth about Pooki’s biological father remains a secret to everyone except Big Mama. The youngest son, “Lil’ Tony” got both his name and energetic spirit from his father’s cousin. I have deemed him the good one of the bunch because he always gave my young niece a cookie while we waited for our pizza. He dreams of being anything but a mobster: pastry chef, astronaut, clown, etc. He, unlike his brothers, could never kill someone, but remains in the mafia due to family pressures. Each day, Lil’ Tony and his brothers work in the pizzeria, making periodic deliveries to clients, some buying pizza, others drugs. Regardless of this family’s shady activity, however, they somehow manage to make insanely delicious pizza. There’s something special about it. Thin, homemade crust topped with mozzarella cheese and tomato sauce, baked to perfection in a brick oven and sprinkled with a special blend of spices. Each slice combines a perfect ratio of cheese to crust and leaves your mouth watering. If I ever did discover sound evidence of The Pizza Place’s mob activity, I wouldn’t say a word, for fear they could no longer make such delectable pizza if exposed.

Gabrielle is from Champlin, MN. This is her first year at North Hennepin. She loves laughing, eating pudding, and Bill Cosby.



DEVIANT

By Shannon Haver

You're fourteen the first time someone shouts "dyke" at you. Panic rises in your throat as you wonder who told him, when you still haven't found the courage to admit it to yourself. You leave school early that day, the middle of your back sore from where he threw an empty Gatorade bottle at you. It's winter, and your house is seven miles away, but you keep walking. The cold wind whips against your face and reddens your cheeks.

"I'm not gay," you whisper to yourself. You repeat the mantra in your head until you finally make it home.

You're sixteen the first time you fall in love. She has long hair, tanned skin, and a beautiful name. You hate yourself for loving her, disgusted by the thoughts that cross your mind whenever you think of her. You're terrified she'll find out, of what she would say if she knew, so you cut her out of your life.

You're seventeen the first time you force yourself to have sex with a man. You think perhaps it will fix you, to do what all the other girls are doing. You have to consume enough alcohol so you can't see straight to do it, and it's the worst experience of your life. His body is too heavy on top of yours and his beard scratches your face. Everything about it feels wrong but you don't tell him to stop. He's rough with you and you're glad, because deep down you think you deserve it for being a deviant. You throw up as soon as you get home that night. You fall asleep sobbing because it didn't work, he didn't cure you of this disease.

You're still seventeen the first time a girl kisses you. Everything in your body freezes in that moment. She pulls away and gives you a small smile, and you bolt. Your heart is beating fast as you push your legs to run faster. I'm not gay, you think. You repeat the thought over and over but you know it's not true, you've known since you were fourteen. You wonder if you'll always run away from this. That night before you go to sleep, you allow yourself to think of that kiss, but only for a moment, and butterfly wings brush against your rib cage as you drift to sleep.

You repeat the thought over and over
but you know it's not true.

You're eighteen when you finally admit it to yourself. You're standing in front of the mirror in the bathroom. The fluorescent lights make everything look harsher. "I'm gay," you whisper to yourself. You don't burst into flames. You don't tell anyone else.

You're still eighteen when your parents find out. It's months later and they catch you with a girl. Your heart is pounding in your ears. You're terrified of what they'll say. Will they throw you out? Disown you? Send you somewhere to cure you? Your mother simply smiles and shuts the door. Later that night, after your friend is gone your mother comes down to your room. She sits beside you on your bed.

"I'll always love you," she says simply. She pats your knee gently and leaves you by yourself to wonder what you were so afraid of.

No biography submitted.

NOTHING COMES EASY

By Stephannie Knutson

We could always count
on kind words and
generous help from
neighbors and friends.

Growing up on a small family farm in central Minnesota, one would think I would have been used to hard work, disappointment, and all of life's other problems. All throughout my childhood my parents struggled financially, working crappy jobs to provide for my two older brothers and myself. We all had to do our share of work and we all had many other sacrifices and defeats. I can still remember when I was about eleven and I was very sick with a cough that would have knocked a heavy weight boxer to his knees (I think I had the respiratory flu). I told my mom I was feeling very sick, and I needed to see the doctor. My mom hesitantly, with worry in her big brown eyes, informed me that we did not have health insurance at the moment. My mom proceeded to question me further and asked, "How sick are you really?" I then carefully down played my illness to my mom because I knew going to the doctor would have been a devastating set back to the family's financial stability.

When times were bad they were really bad, and when times were good they were really good. Being neighborly and helping others was also just a way of life on the farm. We could always count on kind words and generous help from neighbors and friends and vice versa.

One scorching hot July afternoon, my dad, my two brothers, and I (my mom was at work) had been bailing the most green, fresh smelling hay that I had ever smelled. After hours and hours of extremely exhausting work, with sweat drenched clothing clinging to our rapidly dehydrating bodies, I noticed the most horrific sight in the north sky that any farmer could ever imagine. The sky had suddenly, out of nowhere, turned an ominous shade of black, grey, and green, along with thunderheads that clearly reached to heaven itself. The violent sky also had lightning bolts that looked like Zeus himself was throwing down in a rage of anger. As my dad and brothers frantically tried to finish bailing the hay, I was in the yard with the already bailed hay on the hayracks. I desperately tried to pull as many hayracks into the shed to get them undercover and safe from the imminent storm. As my heart raced faster than a racehorse at the Kentucky derby, I had no clue how I was going to get all of the precious hay to safety. Then to my astonishment, I saw it. A red and white pickup truck filled with five neighbor guys raced down our driveway and left a dust storm of gravel behind them. The neighbors had known we were bailing hay that

day, saw the approaching storm, and came to help. They hurried to help us get the hay safe from the violent storm that was about to release its fury upon us.

Despite my down-to-earth upbringing I found it hard to mimic the loving, hardworking, everyone helps everyone life, that comes second nature to good farm folks, while I was living in an apartment in the “big city.” For years, my husband Eric and I had desperately been struggling to find a house to buy. The housing market had over inflated the prices so badly that financially it was not feasible for us. Those years in the apartment were the most horrific years of my life. As each year passed, I became different. At first I thought the small twelve unit apartment building was a dream. I in no way wanted to live in a big apartment building. We had a small kitchen, a fairly big living room, two average sized bedrooms, and a tiny bathroom. In the beginning, I thought the building was very nice; it felt like a small community. However, within a few months’ time things quickly changed. Those “nice” neighbors turned into nosy and smothering people who questioned us about everything. They insisted on knowing why we had been out so late and where we had been the night before. We couldn’t even have friends over without the neighbors needing to know all of their names, where they lived, and what kind of car they drove. It was as if we were always being

I don’t think he realized what kind of a hot tempered German woman he was truly dealing with.

watched and scrutinized. I did not want to see or talk to anyone at the apartment building. I never wanted to go outside (which for a farm girl is very odd) and I began to gain a lot of weight. I started to feel very non peaceful in my life and became a person with a hardened heart that no one could recognize, including myself. I cried uncontrollably each day. I pleaded desperately with my husband to let us buy a house, any house. I just needed to get out of the apartment before I completely lost the real me. Although Eric was just as unhappy as I was, he remained strong like iron ore and refused to let us make a rash decision just to get us out of the apartment. He reminded me that we needed to wait to find the right house for our future.

In November, while Eric was deer hunting in Hallock, Minnesota, I noticed a potential house. The house was a small Rambler with a detached garage on 2.5 acres, which had a perimeter of pine trees.

At first I just kept looking at the house online daily and noticed that within two weeks’ time the price had dropped twenty thousand dollars. A week later Eric arrived home with antlers in hand. By that time, the house had dropped another ten thousand dollars. We went to see the house the next day with our high strung realtor Chuck. As we arrived, the little Rambler looked like Miss Universe next to the sad looking detached garage. As we entered the house, it was apparent that no one had lived there for a very long time. A foul smell came over us, which we isolated to the basement in a small area of the laundry room. A dog had apparently urinated on a section of the plywood. Back up on the main level was a small kitchen with a sliding glass door looking directly to the beautiful big back yard. The counter tops were baby blue. The half wall that separated the kitchen from the living room had been feather painted baby blue and pale pink. The sheet rock on the tall wall in the kitchen had a huge chunk missing at the bottom of the floor with insulation peeking out. The living room was fairly big for that size of a house and it had a giant window facing the south which let in amazing natural light. As we headed down the hallway to the three bedrooms, I began to realize that aside from the smell and the daddy long leg spiders that lined the corner of the doorways (which required me to duck under), the house was nice and just needed some cosmetic work. We gathered back in the main living area where Chuck looked at me and said, “You guys don’t want this piece of shit.” Eric and I looked at each other and we both knew Chuck was wrong! “I don’t think it’s that bad; I kind of like it.” I said to Chuck excitedly. Chuck’s eyes grew big and he began to stutter and fidget. We put in an offer the very next day on the house. Even though Chuck explained the house was a short sale, (meaning the sellers and the bank had to agree to the offer), and sometimes it takes a while to find out whether or not they would accept our offer, we were still willing to take the risk. Months went by but we remained hopeful, dreaming of how we were going to fix the house up.

Those months of waiting were excruciating. Little by little I was dying inside. The walls of the apartment were closing in on me, as if I was trapped in quicksand and could not free myself. At times I honestly wondered whether or not I was going to survive. In April, I had noticed the house was placed back on the market. I could not believe it; we had been waiting for month and had heard no news. How could the sellers relist the house? Chuck’s day did not go well for him after my emotionally charged phone call. He gave me some fluffy, bullshit answer as to why the sellers relisted the house on the market. Poor Chuck, I don’t think he realized what kind of a hot tempered German woman he was truly dealing with. I explained to him how unethical I felt the situation was and that I would be calling the realtors association everyday if I needed to.

Within twenty minutes Chuck called me back and said that the sellers accepted our offer, but the bank had to agree. Once again we were in a waiting period. To help pass the time, Eric and I started bicycling and that quickly became my favorite hobby. I finally started to feel a little better and I began to lose weight. Everything seemed to be looking up for us. The bank finally came around, but they wanted more money. Of course the bank wanted more money, what bank doesn't? Even though it was quite a bit more money, we agreed to the bank's terms. Once again everything seemed to be on track. I guess I should have known better. Our bank's house assessor came back with a house value of about forty thousand dollars less than the seller's bank was requesting. Well that was it, we could not get a loan on a house for more money than the house was worth. I became sick to my stomach. All of my dreams had disappeared. I could barely force myself to remain in that life sucking apartment anymore. However, like the old saying goes, "It's not over till the fat lady sings." The seller's bank realized that no other bank would give

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a loan for the amount they wanted for the house and verbally accepted our offer; but again we would have to wait for the official word.

Chuck called me Thursday, June 18, at four in the afternoon. He informed me that we would be closing on the house the following morning. Chuck explained that I needed to get some paper work to our bank within the hour or our deal was off. I had no warning, just a last minute phone call. My stomach felt like a string twisting in the wind. I was not going to let myself believe anything until the papers were signed. The next morning, to my pleasant surprise, closing on the house went without a hitch. As Eric and I arrived at our new house it felt very strange and unreal. Although there was an enormous amount of work to be done I could only focus on one thing, the overgrown lawn. The grass was waist high and could have been mistaken for a wheat field ready for harvest. We did not have a riding lawn mower yet. I could not wait and I began to push mow the lawn. After hours of mowing and stopping to empty the bag every few minutes, I had only a small portion of the lawn completed. I had no clue how I was going to finish this impossible task, but one way or another that damn wheat field was getting chopped down.

A very nice neighbor had listened to the poor little push mower mowing all day and offered me his old riding lawn mower to borrow. I hesitantly accepted. I did not want to break his mower. Who knew what I was going find in the back yard? I continued mowing with the borrowed mower. Despite my best efforts I was not able to finish mowing that day. The next morning I eagerly continued to mow the lawn. As I was mowing the backyard, I noticed storm clouds begin to build in the recently blackened sky. The wind had started to whip up, and my heart began to race. I absolutely needed to finish mowing before the rain came in. I could not stand to look at the lawn in that condition anymore. I mowed as fast as that poor, tuckered out, orange mower would let me. I frantically kept looking up at the sky, desperately needing to finish. As I drove the mower like a crazy maniac during a NASCAR race, I saw the most amazing sight. Our next door neighbors Rob and Alma (who own a lawn mowing company) were each on a mower and began to mow our lawn along side of me before the rain came. In that moment, the peace within my soul that I had so desperately needed to get back had been returned to me. I knew I was finally home.

Stephannie Knutson lives in Ramsey, MN with her husband of seven years and their two and a half year old son. She loves flower gardening (some say it is bordering on obsession), bicycling, fishing, and listening to music. She is originally from a modest farm in Little Falls, MN. Growing up in the country she never imagined she would have ended up living in "the cities" but she came here to find a sense of security with a big company. She worked for Medtronic (a medical research company) for ten years. Last July her life changed drastically. Her job was eliminated and she was left to start life all over again. She decided to try to turn something as terrible as losing her job into something positive and enrolled in college to further her education. She hopes to achieve a degree in nursing and further her knowledge while embracing her past experiences.



CHEW AND SWALLOW

By Jeffrey M. Stock

As I'm chewing my food I count the number of times I chomp. Actually the counting doesn't start until I'm on about the fifth chew. This is a new practice for me. I get to the tenth chew, while barely giving heed to the taste of the food, and I swallow it completely without the intention to. My goal is twenty chews, for now.

I've been trying to lengthen and slow my chewing because I know I eat mindlessly, devouring food without allowing myself to enjoy it to the maximum. I'm unsure why I have developed this habit, but it exists. I've read that the way a person eats is almost as important as what they eat. There is a way to eating healthily. It seems rational at least for me, since I've caught myself swallowing my food before it was properly chewed. This attempt is an attempt at mindfulness.

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a person eats is almost as
important as what they eat.

Following my next bite, I emerge on the tenth chew knowing my system has built the habit of swallowing around that time and I try to gracefully extend the time spent chewing. I am unsuccessful but my consciousness is aware that the counting could continue. I'll have to try again.

As I'm eating my meal, I flicker in and out of consciously giving an effort to this practice. My mind wanders. It's not necessarily an easy task to prolong when you're going to swallow, as I've found out. Habits have continually evolved since I started eating. First, was the intake of liquid, then the uptake of mushy nutrients, then I learned how to chew solid food always hearing chew it good which has somehow been forgotten and transformed into the mindless process of speed eating and chewing only to the point where I can successfully swallow. At this point, the act is embarrassing to myself. Persevering though, I give my best to healthier, mindful eating.

So I plunge further into my meal, even though my counting is still delayed by a few chews, I attend to the counting. As I approach the tenth chew I notice part of my mouth is getting ready to swallow while another part of me is trying to hold back so I can reach somewhere beyond ten. So I reach ten and “part” of my food gets swallowed. I’m one step closer to my goal. So I keep chewing the remainder of the food, focused on the counts. I almost reach twenty and I finish swallowing the rest of my bite. Not bad.

Now all I have to do, to accomplish the task of eating more mindfully, is focus on the texture, taste, taking smaller bites, breathing in between bites, extending the chews to thirty, and of course savoring the experience to its fullest. It may seem complicated but actually it’s supposed to be so very easy.

Jeffrey Stock currently attends NHCC and plans to study psychology at the University of Minnesota. He practices the healing art of Qigong daily and wishes for everyone to experience its wonderful health benefits.



FIGHTING FOR A DREAM

By Qiyue Ma

All the people around us, especially our elders, have a big influence on the way we're going to think, feel, and grow as individuals. They can even change our life.

I am apparently a positive girl who laughs a lot. Some of my friends even think that my attractive smile has the magic to make the surrounding people feel warm and be likely to make friends with me. My roommates always say that I am beautiful, optimistic, independent and confident. I am a person who really knows who I am; I study hard and even work for UDS as a part-time job. Some people around me think that all things are arranged in perfect order by me. However, most of my friends do not know that I had gone through a really tough time at the beginning of my life in America. But when I talk about that time, they are always curious what happened to me to make me change indefinitely.

My father works for the government and my mother has her own company. In my childhood, as the only child in my family, I felt sad because sometimes busy work made my mother spend less time with me. But when I am asked to describe my mother, I always say, "My mother is just like a ray of sunshine in my life."

My mother was a little chubby, but she never felt inferior. Instead, she was an optimistic and confident woman. Her humor and generosity brought her lots of friends. She loves and enjoys life. She might read books at home after work or travel with her friends during vacation. She's also young at heart and open-minded. So there is no generation gap between my mother and me. She is more like a friend than a mother to me. I can tell anything to her, such as adolescent troubles. When I started my high school life, I met my first boyfriend. I shared my joyful and sorrowful experience with my mother. When I told my mother that I broke up and felt bad, she just flew to my city immediately and took me to the park until I felt better. I was so moved and felt a strong love. Moreover, my mother never dotes on me. I prepared for my studying abroad by myself completely. In my eyes, my mother's life is happy and lighthearted. But something has changed my mind.

I realized it was so hard to study here the first time I came to America. There were various essays, labs and homework all day and such hard work made me dog-tired. Sometimes I even wanted to give up! But when I told my mother, she told me a

story about herself. She grew up in an inland city – Xi’an. She truly desired to live in a coastal city. She said, “Qingdao is my dreaming place. It is the beach, the weather, and the beautiful scenery that make me like Qingdao so much.” So when she filled in the application for university, she chose Qingdao University. But she failed. Then she chose to study in Zibo, which is near Qingdao. In the following years, she went to Qingdao every month. And she was determined to live there in the future. She told me that we could not have good luck forever, so learning how to face difficulties was important. “Life is struggling and we can achieve nothing without lots of effort.” After years of effort, my mother now lives in her dreaming place and bought a house by her own effort.

It is an inspiration that my mother has gone through so many difficulties. I never knew that my mother is such a dedicated woman before. The smile that always appears on my mother’s face makes me never notice what difficulties my mother has overcome. Her patience, perseverance, and the strong desire to achieve her dream

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motivates me, and I begin to think about what I really want and how I can succeed. I say to myself, “I realize that if I just merely give up at the beginning, I will not only let my family down but also lose my own confidence. But it is a big opportunity to have the chance to exchange to UMN and I have struggled a lot to come to America. I never consider myself a person who has no ability to succeed and I want to be someone just like my mother. Moreover, I believe in myself.” I gradually changed my mind and didn’t have the mind to give up any more. I smile more and take steps to fit into the new environment. Moreover, I have made many friends due to my optimistic attitude towards life. My friends even told me that my smile was like fire and made others feel warm and energetic.

Occasionally, some troubles frustrate me very much; however, I will show no timidity when I think of my mother. I have more confidence and know that what troubles me now is just what is supposed to make me succeed. A dream has grown in my heart, and I am determined to get a bachelor degree from UMN. I am ready to face all the hardship. I began to talk more with others and learn

more about America. For instance, I went to the Minnesota State Fair and learned much about the local culture, economy, and politics. I believe what I have done will help me integrate into the American lifestyle successfully and feel ease with so much work to do. I went to see NBA games with my friends, and the happiness that I gain from my daily life gives me great power for my studies. The hardship I have gone through reminds me that my mother struggled far from her hometown to pursue her dream and my firm determination urges me to work hard no matter what difficulties will appear.

No biography submitted.

UNTITLED

By Andrea Preciado

For centuries, America has been a country where many different nations come together as one, where immigrants come to find better lives. Some arrive on planes, while others are thrown into the desert to run for days, and others still are thrown into the sea to swim for their lives, all for a better life. These courageous souls come to the United States with a vision and a heart full of dreams, often only to be disappointed by reality. Both author Angela M. Balcita and my own cousin, Ingris Trejo, experienced the mistreatments and reality checks of the immigrant experience.

Balcita writes in her essay *The Americano Dream* about the steps immigrants take in their journey to America. She talks about how it all starts as a dream: “You dream of green lawns, big cars, and a house with many rooms” (222). People come to America in search of a better life. They have in mind a place where everything is good and everyone is happy. But reality hits them in the face when they arrive. “You find an apartment in a big city. The walls are thin, and you don’t like the way it smells” (222).

Growing up as a migrant from Mexico, I’ve personally watched how people dream of America and how it all does start with a vision. They immigrate thinking that if they come to the U.S. they are going to be rich and living lavishly. What they don’t realize is that immigrants have to work a hundred times harder than everyone else to get paid the least. In my own experience, my mother convinced me to move to America with her because she promised we would go to Disneyland. But no one told us about the cold nights I would spend alone in bed, scared to death while my mom was at work trying to make ends meet. That’s one of the harsh realities most immigrants have to face when arriving in America.

My cousin Ingris Trejo, unlike me, was born in the U.S., to Hilario Trejo and Carmen Sosa, both from Puebla, Mexico. They arrived in California in the early 80’s. They had crossed the desert in search of a better life for themselves and their only son at the time; later on, they had another son and a daughter. Like every other immigrant, they worked long hours at low wages. Ingris never got to spend a lot of time with her parents because they were always so busy working. She does remember the only time she got to spend time with her parents was when ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) was around. “When we heard ICE was around our

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scared to death.

neighborhood we wouldn't step outside the house. We wouldn't go grocery shopping. My siblings and I wouldn't attend school. It would be days before we left the house." She never thought much of it. She thought it was something normal, something everyone did with their families.

Immigrants have to learn the language and even then sometimes are made fun of or don't get helped because of their bad English. Balcita recalls, "The grocery clerk snaps at you. 'It's ham, sir, not hum'" (222). She also talks about how much immigrants struggle, being away from their hometown and their family. "Your father dies. He is thousands of miles away...and while you send what money you can, you wish you could send more. You wish you could send more" (223). It's not easy moving from a place where you lived all your life to a totally strange place where you don't even speak the language. With time, some get used to the life, become naturalized, and fit in and start a new life. But others can't get naturalized and still have to live a life behind the shadows of everyone else because of their legal status.

Ingris hated going to stores because people wouldn't want to help her and her family because her parents didn't speak English. Her family experienced a lot of discrimination and mistreatment because of their race. But she has never felt embarrassed of her parents or her culture. "They taught me how to be humble and to never be ashamed of where they came from." She always had to translate Spanish to English for her parents everywhere she went. Ingris was only a little girl so she didn't know why she always had to translate for her parents. She didn't understand why her parents didn't speak English like everybody else, or why sometimes people would look at them funny, or why she had to hide in the house for days. She had no clue what ICE was.

One experience in particular that made her perfect, naïve life come crashing down was in her first year of high school. She still remembers the exact moment the girl with the red T-shirt and khaki jeans came up to her. She stared at Ingris for a long time and then finally said with a smirk on her face, "Are your parents wetbacks?" Then, right after the girl said that, everyone that was near enough to hear started to laugh. "At that moment I felt like a bucket of water was thrown into my face. My heart was heavy with tears. I didn't know what a wetback was but I knew it had something to do with my parents. That immediately hurt me to the core. Because of the way everyone was laughing, I knew it wasn't something good." She went home that day to ask her mother what the word "wetback" meant. Her mother explained it meant someone who crossed to the United States illegally. Her mother explained to her that she and her husband

were both immigrants but her mother told her to never be ashamed of them. She told her instead she should be grateful they sacrificed so much to give her a better life. "From that afternoon on I wasn't the same girl anymore. I then started to look at people with color and the marks society had given them and people weren't just people anymore; they were immigrants, Asian, Black, White and Hispanic."

Discrimination has been something that has followed her throughout her whole life. She experienced it because of the legal status of her parents but also because of her race. "When I tell people I'm Mexican they automatically think I'm illegal in the United States." Society has put a label on Hispanic people where people automatically think that they're all illegal in the United States. Ingris feels like

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just because she's Mexican at school and at work they expect her to work harder than everyone else. "They have this crazy idea that if you're Mexican you like to work hard. I sometimes have to let them know that we are all supposed to work equally and that that's only a stereotype." It makes her angry because she knows how hard her parents work to make the minimum amount they earn. "It's not like they like working hard for a low pay. They have no other choice."

"One of the many concerns and fears immigrants have to deal with is the fear of being separated from their families. I feel like the government should have a better way to deal with these situations instead of separating innocent people from their families." With everything Ingris has experienced in her life, she wishes she could have a bigger impact on a change in this country. Ingris has watched her parents struggle and how much it has affected them to leave their families behind in Mexico. Sadly, they're not the only ones; there are millions of others just like them. She will never be in her parents' shoes and finds it difficult to understand their pain of being mistreated and abused for being from another place. One thing she knows is that she respects every immigrant in this country because it's not easy to move to a completely strange place. "I wish I had more power to change the world but I know I don't. But I know voice by voice we will soon be heard and I know vote by vote from the ones like me that can vote maybe soon there will be a change in the way the government views immigrants."

I've watched my own mother cry from being mistreated by other people in this country and it hurts to watch other people look down on someone you love. People have misconceptions about immigrants. They think they come to America to take jobs from citizens or to commit crimes; some come to run away from the poverty and ignorance of their small towns. By watching my mother I've seen how strong an immigrant can be; moving to a totally new place isn't easy. I've grown to have a lot of respect for them because, despite the obstacles they had to face to get here, they don't let anything or anyone stop their dreams of finding a better life. They are the real heroes. Like Balcita says at the close of her essay, "Always, always root for the underdog" (224).

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HOW AMERICA HAS TRANSFORMED MY LIFE

By Leon H. Toe

There are many changes that can happen in a person's life that are worth mentioning. Some of these changes are diminutive and cannot affect one's life to a large extent. Nevertheless, other events are very important and could change a person's whole life, such events include getting married, having a baby, a graduation, or losing someone special. For me, coming to America was the best thing that ever happened to me, and has changed my life forever. When I first arrived in this country, I realized that a tremendous transformation would happen in my life. America has enhanced the quality of my life, changed my cultural orientation of women, and the climate has affected me greatly.

Realistically speaking, America has enhanced the quality of my life by affording me quality education. The system of education is very sophisticated; classrooms are diversified and spacious, while the instructors are friendly and serve as mentors for students. Lectures and materials are logically and orderly presented. For me, this is

Other events are very important and could change a person's whole life.

a recipe and motivation for learning. In addition, for the short time that I have lived in America, I have been able to use more sophisticated technology in my learning process compared to the rest of my entire life. For example, I can use the internet to post assignments on D2L, and do other educational activities from the comfort of my home, or while I am on break at my work place, etc.

Furthermore, as an immigrant, coming to the United States has changed my cultural orientation. For one thing, it has changed my view of women in marriage. I used to believe that men were the sole bread winners for the entire family, while women took care of the home and did domestic work. However, I discovered that women in the United States are as independent as men. Without doubt, it is noticeable that American women are industrious, energetic and ambitious in all aspects of life; whether in politics, economics, military, medicine, academics or social life, they have

affected the nation in many positive ways. Some women have served as Secretary of State, and presidential candidates, while some are famous inventors and others are excellent public speakers. It seems like American women are in the forefront of leadership, and it is just a matter of time for the first female president to be elected. All these aspects have changed my understanding of women in marriage. I now believe that women are people with vast potential, and they should be allowed to maximize their skills to the fullest.

On the contrary, as an immigrant, the American climate has had an adverse effect on me. I arrived in the United States during the early winter season, and it was very difficult for me to adjust to the temperature. I have lived in a warm climate all of my life, and while there I could not imagine myself walking or living in the extreme cold temperature. I wore sweaters and socks at home to stay warm. Whenever I wanted to go outside, I wore double sweaters and jackets, but I could still feel cold. For this reason, I was always home. Most often, I had to stay home alone and almost died of boredom. One evening, I drove to a nearby Mexican store to purchase a phone card and I almost had an accident because the streets were so slippery that the car could not go straight and I finally got stuck in a pile of snow. The snow caused so many nightmares for me during my early months in the United States that I even thought of going back home because I could not imagine sitting home all day doing nothing but watching television and eating. This was not the America I had dreamed of. I felt entrapped by the snow. One day, I encouraged myself by saying if other immigrants could survive the cold temperatures why not me. I can do it; I will stay in America and make my dreams a reality. This is my second winter and am getting used to it. I do not wear double sweaters and jackets while I am at home. Moreover, driving in the snow is becoming much easier for me as I move around town.

To sum, coming to America was a dramatic event in my life; it has had a very significant impact on me. It has transformed my life dramatically by enhancing the quality of my life, changing my cultural orientation, and making me adjust to the climatic conditions. In short, coming to the United States is the best thing that has ever happened to me; I have discovered my true existence.

No biography submitted.





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