Realities

Ninth Issue 2017

A Cross-Cultural Publication from

North Hennepin Community College

Realities

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

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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.

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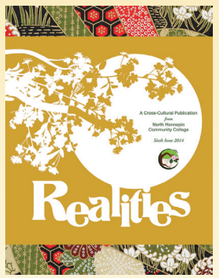
Seventh Issue 2015



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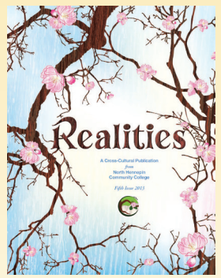

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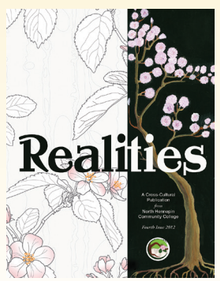

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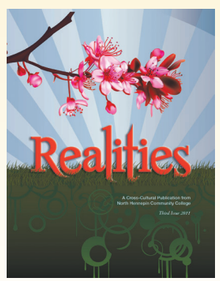

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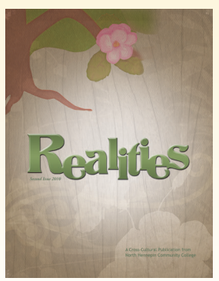

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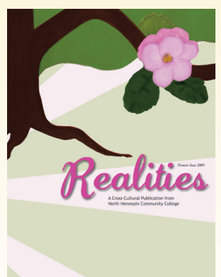

Premier Issue 2009

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Introduction

There are few dreams as intimate as those of belonging, of togetherness, or, on the gnarled flip side of the coin, of separation, of loss. And while those unconscious dreams might haunt us, for better and worse, the waking dreams catch us most tightly in the lungs, sweep our breaths across the Minnesota fields and Venezuelan mountains, across the cracked concrete of war-torn cities.

In this issue of Realities, North Hennepin students give us those dreams, both literal and metaphorical. They invite us in to their dreams of the past and dreams for the future. These are oh-so personal stories that go beyond the individual, even when the individual stands tall in the center of the storm; these are stories of community and kindness and family and fear; these are stories that show us how we can be different, yet still come together.

As Rawshan Jahan Lipi Khondker-Huq writes, “I am puzzled by my dream with questions surrounding my mind,” because these dreams, and thus these stories, are complex, just like the lives of the authors and all involved. Liban Gelgelo dreams of a leader who treats people not by their differences, “but by their humanity.” Roxanne Flammond dreams of ancestors’ spirits side-by-side with their modern day descendants, engaged in both play and healing.

And what better influence of storytelling than healing, of using the dreams to haunt us all, in a good way, as a reminder, always, of who we are and where we’ve been.

Sincerely,
Brian Baumgart and Karen Carr

5 Acres

By: Philip Thao

"Living in a rural setting exposes you to so many marvelous things – the natural world and the particular texture of small-town life, and the exhilarating experience of open space."
- Susan Orlean

I still remember these memories as though it was yesterday, like the voice of my deceased father. Memories of life in the 1990s growing up in Livingston, California, where the population at the time was a little shy of 3,000. Gardening and selling chickens were the main source of income. Our crops were relying on the bright rays of the sun and surrounding water sources directed either from the nearby mountains or from a city well pump. Crops on our 5-acre land were picked and sold at surrounding flea markets to source financial income to credit our home, clothing, and necessities. Chickens were the main meat factor for our big family of 9 that consisted of father, mother, 4 brothers, and 3 sisters, with me being the baby of the brothers. On the far back east side of the property was my father's half torn 30'x20' blacksmith shop, which my father used to help bring some income in to make us do what we enjoyed to do. Valuing this 5-acre land is what makes me smile and understand how life is made to be.

Picking tomatoes, green onions, cilantro, green and red bell peppers, chili peppers, and sweet corn was a normality for us to sell at the local and nearby town's flea markets. With the sunrays beaming brightly on our backs and gardening hats, not a cloud in sight to redirect those brutal sunrays. Picking small green soft haired caterpillars off of corn to fill up 5 gallon white buckets. I can recall my mother saying, "Make sure there is at least 20 corn in the buckets." Breaking through small spider webs when sourcing through the chili pepper plants for the ripe ones while trying to avoid the ½ inch red ants underneath our knee-high water resistance boots. I can still smell the spice from the chili peppers, the fresh picked green onions, and cilantro.

With the smell of the chicken manure in the air while trying to collect eggs from hen's nests for the flea markets and dinner, I would try to avoid the mother hen's bites. "Hold the chickens facing the other way, away from your face as it might peck your eyes," said my father. I can hear my father's voice from a distance echoing to a fade. The weight of our chickens was typically 4-6 pounds each and colors consisted of black, brown and white. Each chicken was sold for $3-$5, depending on the size and sex of the chicken. The brown hens were the biggest contributor for income due to their softer meat when boiled. The smell of killing and gutting the chicken was not a pleasant smell, although I can still remember how good the result was. The taste of a brown hen boiled in water with my mother's special bamboo shoots and a bowl of rice for dinner – that taste would never be forgotten.

Aside from selling chickens at the flea markets with my father, my father would take me to help him with making kitchen knives. The blacksmith shop sat at the far end right side of our 5-acre plot. Half of the shop had no roof, due to high winds. My father said, "It was meant to be like that for ventilation." Memories of my father can make me remotely smile where others would look at me in a weird way. With my father and I occupying the side with the roof, plenty of spiders, red ants, and rodents lived on the other side that I saw as the dark side – to not be bothered with. Father would typically make about 3-4 knives within 8 hours and each knife would sell between $30-$40. I have seen father give out free knives to people that helped my family along the way of living in this small town. Their help didn't go unnoticed in the eyes of my father as he would give back in any way he could. I can still remember the sound of the banging of the hammer and metal chattering. The echoes of the shop will always be remembered as to what father loved to do for his hobby.

I physically cannot relive my past, but one thing I can do is relive my past in my mind – through memories. Recalling events would be the start of it all. Everyone has a way of remembering the positives and the negatives in each event. With this writing, I have touched on some points that could have been explained emotionally. I am glad I wrote today about my family's land. I feel this memory was a major factor that helped mold me into who I am today. I can say there is not a moment where I can remember that I did not enjoy about our 5-acres. It was memorable, and indeed, cherished. What was a location that affected you?

Philip Thao was born and raised in California. He currently resides in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. He is a 1st year North Hennepin Community College student looking to complete his BS degree in Business Administration.

The Recipe

By: Shira Ruth Cushing

It outlives the Generation;

The infamous Sensation.

The recipe that Grandma made,

I made Winter vacation.

It lasts beyond our years.

It brings laughter and cheers.

The fact is, recipes are gold,

For times of smiles and tears.

No biography submitted.

It Does Happen Here

By: Meghan White

Intersectionality is a bit of a buzzword lately. I'm old enough to have lived through an adulthood in which I remember being aware of intersectionality without having a name for it – we just called it "being a multiple minority" back then. I am female, I am gender-nonconforming, I identify as queer, and I am a racial minority who grew up with white parents in a white society, which means I have the experience of growing up white without actually being white or looking white.

As I've grown older, I've encountered endlessly variable, sometimes-tiny oppressions/prejudices/disadvantages related to one or more of my minority statuses. We who identify in a marginalized group know all too well what this looks like: assumptions based on our skin color, sexist jokes in the workplace, people of all ages and stripes using the word "gay" to mean "stupid," and being quietly passed over for a deserved promotion. As someone who, from the time of my adoption, has almost completely integrated into white society, I have been granted what I call "white insider" status. For me, this is not limited to race only. That status really means access to the cultural power club where people from all positions of power (either white, male, hetero, corporate, or any combination of these) gather to tell me what they really think. And what they really think is appalling.

I am seen at work as "the cool one." One of my coworkers told me in sincerity that I'm "the nicest lesbian" he's ever met (Why not just a nice person? Or does he just have that low of an opinion of the dispositions of lesbians?). I generally let offensive jokes slide at work, which the jokesters interpret as "coolness," but really it's because I've gotten retaliated against for bringing it up in the past. But what bothers me the most is the dismissive idea that racism/sexism/discrimination is non-existent. "Oh, that doesn't happen here."

Oh, I disagree.

I see it, hear it, or personally experience it every single day at work. I work in a hospital in patient care, but my hospital is in the Western suburbs which means I mostly see patients who are white, straight, middle-or upper-class, and middle-aged or older. The hospital itself is desperately

Strangers shout things at me on the street like “dyke” or “chink” or “faggot.”

corporate, holding mandatory dividend meetings and town hall-style discussions in which they sidestep questions about their non-profit tax status. I have contact with 4-20 patients in a day, and at least once a day, one of them says to me, “You speak English really good,” to which I reply, “Well. You mean I speak English really well.” I grew up in Minnesota, so I have a Midwestern accent. These people are ignoring what they hear, and instead they’re judging me on how I look. Other examples:

“You’re adopted? My son is, too. But he’s an American.”

“So am I.”

“I can’t tell if you’re a girl or a boy. You should grow out your hair if you’re a girl.”

“Your confusion over my gender is not my problem to fix.”

“Can you read Chinese?”

“No, I grew up here with white parents.”

“Oh. Can you read Hmong?”

I have transgender friends who’ve been assaulted. I saw a Target Field staff member policing who could enter which bathroom at the Prince tribute concert over the summer. I was present at the protests at the 4th Precinct last year when I saw police mace peaceful protestors and shoot children with rubber bullets, and the headline in the *Star Tribune* the next day said, “Protestors Incite Violence at 4th Precinct.” I have been told to go back to my country. I have been a target for bullying at work. Strangers shout things at me on the street like “dyke” or “chink” or “faggot.” I get dirty looks in the locker room of my health club every time I’m there. I’ve had mothers snatch their children away when they see me in the women’s restroom (I’m really just there to pee, people). One of my coworkers said to me, “I don’t trust people who aren’t white and won’t make eye contact, it means they’re up to something.” When you’re a “white insider” you’re expected to commiserate with such outrageous suspicions, so my coworker was pretty surprised when I said, “I don’t make eye contact with anyone I don’t know because I want to make it clear I’m not a threat.” I told her about my experiences in bathrooms and locker rooms, on the streets, in church, in school, and even with my adoptive parents. Her sputtering response was, “…but…but…that sort of thing doesn’t happen here!”

It does happen here. Your colleagues, friends, and family members who are part of marginalized groups have all experienced it. We don’t bring it to your attention because “that sort of thing” is the norm for people like me. You assume it doesn’t exist because you’ve never personally experienced it. And that is the essence of privilege.

Meghan White started at NHCC in the fall semester of 2016 as an adult transfer student. She works full time in health care, and will be applying to NHCC’s nursing program. She is a Korean adoptee and she grew up in the Twin Cities. Her hobbies include homework, serenading her tiny dog on the ukulele, homework, unintentionally expanding her collection of coffee mugs, eating cheese, and homework.

My Life My Culture

By: Sheri Cindrich

I was born Sherie Marie Calkins on May 19, 1975, a Jewish girl, with pale white skin, bright brown eyes, and black hair. The day I was born I was immediately placed in a foster home and eventually adopted by my foster parents, Diane and Joseph Cindrich. They named me Sheri Marie Cindrich as they accepted me into their family. My identity changed not only with my name and a new religion in the Lutheran faith, but I was I also introduced to my new cultural background of my new family. Having been parted from my Jewish and Ojibway ties to my biological family members and traditions changed my future and knowing true roots of my biological Jewish & American Indian heritages.

Part of my biological nationality has been identified as Jewish & American Indian. My ancestors from my birth mother’s side of the family were my grandfather, Abraham Fredkove, who was Jewish and migrated from Lithuania, Russia & my grandmother, Beatrice Biggerstaff, who was Ojibway Indian, and migrated from Ontario, Canada. My birth father was never identified, so I will never know this part of me. My basis of my story is that I come from a very diverse cultural background with many various aspects of culture that have yet to be discovered throughout my life.

As I was growing up in elementary and middle school, I was always encouraged to participate in Indian Education classes. This gave me an opportunity to at least be partially in touch with my natural-born heritage. My adoptive parents were amazing when it came to teaching me who I am and allowing me to grasp onto the traditions of my ancestors. My adoptive father was very encouraging about teaching me about American Indian culture because he always told me that he felt robbed of his own opportunity to identify to his own ethnic background because his mother was ashamed of being a Native American, so he made sure I could have this opportunity and showed me the importance of this part of culture in my life.

When I turned 18 years old, I was terrified to become aware that I was a Jewish woman because of the discrimination against Jewish people and the many horror stories I have learned about over the years about the mistreatment of Jewish people. My initial reaction was fear of the unknown. While doing a lot of research about Jewish people, I have had great opportunities to reconnect my ties with my biological Jewish family members. I have been able to learn many interesting and intriguing things about the Jewish nationality and aspects of Judaism, which is also another way to be identified as a Jewish person. I felt a compelling desire to be able to know who I am and have always felt a part of me has been missing throughout my life because of not having the opportunity to be raised in a Jewish home with the traditions and values that my ancestors could carry on within me and my own children.

I could learn and engage in many of the American Indian cultural traditions for many years of my life such as dancing at Pow Wows, beading clothes and other jewelry, sweat lodges and eating fry bread. Part of this experience was very intriguing and made me happy to be able to be part of my culture that could have been taken from me growing up in a household with one parent who is Scandinavian and the other parent is part Yugoslavian and part American Indian but not affiliated with a tribe or even practicing his own family traditions. As I grow as a person and become more interested in knowing more about my Jewish culture, I have involved myself with many activities with my biological Jewish family so that I can continue to have a stronger connection with my Jewish roots. I have been blessed with attending two of my cousins blended Jewish weddings, and I am close friends with our family Rabbi, Max Fallek, who I’m so thankful for his friendship and his ability to understand and welcome our religious differences even though they are not ideal to the Jewish faith guidelines. He performed my biological mother’s funeral ceremony with both Christian and Judaism practices. I continue to reach out to my aunts and uncles and spend family time with them so that I can continue to learn about Jewish traditions and Jewish celebrations. I take pride in my culture truly and love to carry on traditions of my family.

Sheri Cindrich is a student at North Hennepin Community College and is pursuing a double major in Paralegal Studies and Business Management. She is currently an employee at the US Postal Service with over 20 years of experience with an emphasis in management, organization, and safety areas. She has also volunteered in many leadership roles over the past 25 years and values the importance of community involvement. In her free time, she loves reading, writing short stories, spending time with family and friends, enjoying nature, and being outside, preferably gardening and fishing. She also enjoys watching live music of all types. She is a person of integrity, dependability, and is a positive role model for everyone that she is acquainted with in life. .

Her Little Friends

By: Desirae Koelsch

In 1999, when motor skills were still developing, a little baby girl lounges in a warm, cozy family room enveloped by the smell of firewood and fabric softener. Sitting in a polished dark wood rocking chair, nestled in a mint-colored squishy seat, she rocks away staring up into the rafters. Smiling and giggling in her own little bubble. Across from the little baby, her grandmother sits on the end of a roughly textured, indigo-colored love seat, crocheting a rosy baby blanket. A dulled yellow lamp on the side table to her left lights her hands. Apart from the small metallic clicking of her steel crochet needles, she notices little squeals coming from the rocking chair. It's her little granddaughter laughing away at the ceiling. The grandmother stops her patterned hand movements and stares at the little thing and wonders why or what she is laughing at. She sets aside her knitting, rises from the divot in her seat and silently walks to the rocking chair, breaking the baby's stare at the ceiling. She picks up her little granddaughter and cradles her to her shoulder as she sits down in the rocking chair herself. The swift back-and-forth movements of her rocking lull the baby to rest. The grandmother stares up at the ceiling wondering what her little grandchild was seeing.

In 2003, the little girl is attending kindergarten. The small but fairly sized room was overwhelmed with colors, shapes, and animals, accompanied by four tables placed in a broken up square around the room. Sitting in a tiny yellow painted school chair at the end of the table among six other children, two on the longer sides of the table and one child at the other end across from her. The little girl sits silently while the high-pitched, joyous sounds of her classmates ignore the teacher's gestures to be quiet. Two buckets of Crayola markers of all colors are precisely placed on the rectangle wood table. Along with the markers, a stack of blue, yellow, green, pink, orange, and white construction paper is in between the buckets. The teacher instructed the kindergartners to color whatever they want. When the teacher said to go ahead and draw the children burst into movement, snatching at the markers and the paper on their tables, picking the colors that most aided their ideas. The little girl waited patiently for her other classmates to choose their materials first. Then she calmly plucked out a white piece of paper from the stack, set it in front of her and slid the transparent plastic Tupperware of markers toward her, picking every color in the bucket and lining them up in the order of the rainbow. Then she slid back the bucket to the middle of the table. She could draw anything…*anything* the teacher said, but the little girl was stumped. She looked around the classroom for inspiration on what to doodle when something caught her eye and made her smile.

Her little friend sat across from her at the table smiling away at her. *I'll draw you*, she said to herself. *Stay still so I don't mess up*, she said to her little friend. She picked up the blue marker, took the cover off, stuck it on the end, and began drawing. She drew a circle for the head and then parallel lines for the neck and horizontal lines making the shoulders. She drew the body as a blob then lines protruding from the shoulders and smaller lines from the first lines, making the arms and hands. Then long lines to the bottom of the blob with small little ovals to the bottom of that line making the legs and feet; the end result was a blue figure. Satisfied, she put the cap back on the marker and placed it between the green and purple marker in her rainbow. Then she picked up the brown marker, uncapped it, and drew long, wavy lines coming out of the figure's head. Hair going down to the figure's hips started to appear. She then picked up the black

> When the tears started to trickle down her cheeks, the bullies took advantage of the opportunity.

marker and colored in the eyes the nose and smiling mouth. The teacher was walking around the classroom looking at the children's drawings, saying how good they were, that they were doing a great job, and to remember to put the markers back into the bucket after they were done with one. The teacher approached the table I was sitting at and looked at the other children's doodles and asked what they were. A dog, an apple, their parents, a racecar, their house, and then she approached the little girl drawing the figure and asked who that was. The little girl answered, *it's my little friend*. The teacher didn't quite understand. She watched the little girl as she picked up the gray marker and drew ovals on top of the figures shoulders. *What are those supposed to be*, the teacher asked. *Wings*, the little girl responded, still looking down at her artwork.

In 2006, the little girl attends recess. She plays with the little kids like a normal kid would. She had told the children that she could see these things before; that she learned they were called fairies. But quickly some children dismissed her saying that fairies weren't real. That she was stupid and a liar; that she was weird and they didn't want to play with her. To her excitement, she found other kids that would like her in every way, fairies and all. They could play pretend all day long. With her two new friends, she could be her normal self. But on certain days, when her friends weren't there to ride their pet dragons and run around in their castles, kids would often confront her at her loneliness. A group of five kids would make fun of her daily, asking where her little friends were so they could hit them out of the sky. They would push her, tease her, and throw rocks at her while the supervisors weren't looking. One day, when the girl and her two friends were flying around with their dragons on the jungle gym, the same kids that would always make fun of her stepped in to make their daily insults. *Where are your fairies*, they would say in a mocking tone. *What do they look like again? Little naked pixies? That's so weird! You're so gross. They're not even real! I know, she lies all the time! Liar!*

When the tears started to trickle down her cheeks, the bullies took advantage of the opportunity. *Look! We made her cry! What a baby!* Of course her two companions would stick up for her like great friends would, but this was a day that she would stick up for herself. She was sick of being put down and had to do something about it, and that didn't mean telling the advisor. As the kids laughed at their success at making the little girl cry, they could not expect the little girl to stand up for herself in a moment of vulnerability. The girl took all the energy she could muster and punched the ringleader in the face. He was blindsided and became off-balance at the punch, and fell to the ground. She gained the success of making HIM cry. The little girl filled her lungs with as much air as she could and shouted, *All of you can leave me ALONE now!*, and stomped off to go find her dragon. She expected the kids would tell on her. She got in trouble and had a note of "violence against other students/peers" sent home for her mother to read. The little girl's mother wasn't too happy.

In 2013, that girl is in high school and now there are more fairies than she has ever seen. Every time she goes to a new class and walks down the crowded senior hallway, she sees the different cliques of her fellow classmates. With those cliques, she sees their own fairies. Different colors, different personalities, and different genders just like their own selves. Being older, the weird girl still seemed weird, but everyone forgets something that doesn't really seem real. They forget why they're making fun of you or they don't like you. She made even more friends when she was in the musicals. Everyone in

the cast was a certain weird just like her. She would tell close friends in the cast that she could see fairies and they would be more accepting than the kids when she was little. Her friends now would react very shocked but had many questions for her. *What do they look like? Are there any in the room right now? Do they have one too?* Many, many questions that would soon be answered. She would tell them every time they were on stage she saw the fairies flying around the catwalk above them, blocking out the light once in a while. The thing about friends is when you know that they're real friends, they might forget about some stuff that may be weird, but they won't think of you any differently than they did 5 minutes ago.

The girl still sees her little friends.

Desirae Koelsch was born and raised in Minneapolis, and she has vacationed to Florida twice. She is in her second year at NHCC "majoring" in fine arts. She loves all things Harry Potter (Slytherin House and proud), and one of her favorite book series besides Harry Potter is The Secrets of the Immortal by Nickolas Flamel. She loves the YouTube gaming/Let's Play community. She has 7 tattoos, and counting. Her favorite movies include Closet Land, The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Deadpool, and Tim Burton movies in general. She sings every day and takes a picture every day.

The Smell of Books

By: Paula Koski

I have always loved reading, at least I think I have. My earliest memories of books are hazy images of warmth, security, and a sense of peace and safety. The smell of books will forever conjure up these feelings. The odd part is that even though I chose to embrace books, I have never thought of myself as smart.

Perhaps, to better understand, we should start at the very beginning. I was born toward the end of an age when women seldom had drivers licenses much less college educations. Wives and mothers were expected to stay at home, feed and clothe their children, keep the house clean, and care for their husbands. My mother was a good wife, but my father was not a good husband. By the time I was one-year-old, mom and I were on our own.

My mom worked hard to support us both. She struggled, and while I know now the terrible conditions we lived in and the pain she went through, I never wanted for anything. I never felt unloved or unsafe. Two years later she met the man that would ultimately become my daddy. He was the only father I have ever known and he was the best dad anyone could ever hope to have. In an effort to understand my relationship with reading and writing, it is important to better understand the man that cultivated that relationship.

My dad's name is John. His name is common, a name we hear every day, but the person behind that name was anything but common. He was from a large Italian family, raised in the inner city of Saint Paul. His parents had no education beyond primary school, and his family was poor. He told me stories of them having one light bulb to light the entire room and of eating only bread with mustard for lunch at school because food was scarce. Yes, money was scarce, but hope was even scarcer.

John, however, was a person with internal hope. He grew up with a thirst for knowledge. He wanted to learn about everything. He wanted to understand what made people tick and why, and he read books voraciously. He knew that he wanted a better way of life and he intuitively understood that the path is paved with education. When he came into my life he was a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. He loved my mom immediately and he wanted her to love herself as much as he did. He encouraged her to become educated because he so strongly believed that reading and learning was a window to see the world and our place in it.

My earliest memories of books came long before I was able to read on my own. I was three years old and loved my new dad beyond measure. I was enthralled with the big heavy books he toted around everywhere he went. I would sit and turn the pages of those books, nod, and make small interesting sounds just like he did as he read. I loved the smell of the paper and ink and longed to embrace this foreign world of type. I wanted to be just like this man.

My mom was working hard and going to school, so I spent those long hours with my new dad. He needed to study, so he took me to the university with him. I reveled in the smell of the library. I would watch all those people hunched over all those books. I would wonder what they knew and how I could learn it too. He would sit for hours poring over his books, his pen slowly underlining as he read. I was transfixed. I received books of my very own to look at and paper and pencils to draw with. I would sit in that big hushed library, surrounded by shelves and shelves of unknown knowledge. I longed to be just like him. I would carefully trace lines in ink under the words in my books, seeing the ABCs, repeated over and over again. Soon, I began see patterns and sounds, and suddenly the world exploded. I began to read.

I find that I have a lot in common with Sherman Alexie in his essay, "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me." It is like Alexie says, "I loved my father with an aching devotion, I decided to love books as well" (64). I felt if this man, admired by me, valued something so greatly it must be valued by me as well. I became an avid reader, and I read everything I could get my hands on. I entered first grade at what I was told was a fifth or sixth-grade reading level. Like Alexie, if I had been born at a different time, I may have been considered gifted and my thirst for reading better cultivated. In my world, at least the world outside my family, I was simply "an oddity".

I had few friends; most of the other kids my age didn't understand my obsession with books. They wanted to play games or play with dolls. I wanted to be at the library where the smell of old paper called to me. I made friends within the pages of stories. I reveled in the diverse worlds I discovered. I read classic fairy tales by Han Christian Anderson and The Brothers Grimm. I explored impossible worlds with Jules Verne, Jonathon Swift, and Daniel Defoe. I learned to care about humanity with Charles Dickens. I wept bitter tears of loss with Wilson Rawls. I breathed deep the smell of the prairie grasses with Laura Ingalls Wilder, I listened to the lyrical language of the South with Margaret Mitchell, and I bathed, almost hedonistically, in the sweeping worlds of Narnia and Middle Earth with C. S. Lewis and J. R.R. Tolkien. I could lose myself in a story, hearing the lines of the book being read in my mind. I would feel the wind on my face, the sun or rain on my head. I would laugh and cry. I completely understand the words of Eudora Welty, "There has never been a line read that I didn't hear. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me" (51).

By the time that I entered high school, I no longer felt lonely. I had so many stories in my imagination. The characters, their lives, and adventures were constant companions to me. I don't know why I didn't think I was smart, I just never thought about it. Books were just a part of who I was. A part of the world I chose to live in. Books became so much a normal part of my world that they no longer symbolized being smart. They became an escape from what people viewed me as, simply odd.

Looking back, I wonder why I never went to college, though I was encouraged to do so and it grieved my dad that I chose not to go. I wonder why I chose to graduate from high school and marry young. I love my husband and I love my children. I regret no choice I have ever made, except one. I saw modeled the power of knowledge, the power of books, and the power of education to change the path of a person's life. I regret not going to college. I regret not immersing myself in the world of learning, but living in regret is a powerless thing and I choose to remember the words of Adelaide A. Procter in her poem "A Legend of Provence", "We always may be what we might have been" (14). I will embrace the power of education today, I will look to the future through the lens of my past, and I will boldly set my feet on the path to knowledge.

No biography submitted.

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School Struggles

By: Alina Tkach

I was born in Minnesota in the United States, and my parents are from Kishinev, Moldova. When my parents moved to the United States from Moldova, they didn't know nor understand English. As I was born, I was raised in the Russian culture. My mother tongue was Russian. Since my parents didn't know English, I didn't learn it until I went to preschool. Growing up in a family whose parents were immigrants to America gave me a hard time during my younger years in school. I had a hard time communicating with others and also reading and writing didn't come easily to me.

I still remember my first day at preschool like it was yesterday. My mom drove me to school that day and as she dropped me off by the door of my classroom she said, "будь послушной" (be obedient). I was a shy little child in the first place, and on top of that I didn't know English and was scared because everyone was a stranger to me. As I was coloring and waiting until the class started, I remember I heard familiar words coming from a little girl who was crying. She was speaking Russian, telling her mother that she didn't want to be here. As the class started, we sang a couple songs and got to know the teacher and each other. When it was playtime, I came up to the girl and started talking to her in Russian. Her name was Kristina and she to didn't know any English and didn't want to be here. We became best friends right away because we understood each other and could talk to each other. I remember telling my mom when she picked me up from school that day, that I liked school because I made a new friend who I could talk to. The first couple weeks were awesome at school. All I remember doing is singing some songs and playing most of the time. I didn't even bother to try to learn English because I had Kristina who understood me.

One day, like usual Kristina and I were playing together during playtime and communicating with each other in Russian until the teacher came up to us and told us that we couldn't talk in Russian anymore because she had to understand what we were saying and that we needed to start learning English. That day the teacher gave me a letter to take home with me for my parents, to inform them that I speak Russian during school and that it had to stop. After that day we would quietly and secretly talk in Russian so that the teacher couldn't hear us and when she walked by we pretended like nothing happened. This didn't go on for too long because Kristina became adept at English very fast. Unlike Kristina, I had a hard time trying to express myself because my parents didn't know any English. So at that small age I had to listen to other kids during school to get used to English and become familiar with it. I remember coming home from school crying because I didn't understand the teacher and because Kristina was playing with other American girls and spoke with them in English.

One day I was mad at Kristina because she had stopped playing with me and I bit her shoulder so hard that she had to get stitches. I remember being called into the principal's office and crying for my parents. We are still friends up to this day and still laugh about this incident at school.

As days passed and a new school year started, we began to learn how to read. During this time, I started to understand English and could somewhat express myself, but reading was a skill I hated to learn. My parents understood that I was having a hard time and were helping me and in that way, they were learning English. Up to this day, I have trouble with reading. Since I am fluent in Russian, it was hard for me to learn how to read in a different language. I was the slowest reader in my classes. During timed graded reading tests, I would always score the lowest points. I felt that I was not like everyone else. Kids would make fun of me because I couldn't read and because I had a strong accent. This made me not want to go back to school and I would cry when I came home. But as I grew older, I was motivated to put in some extra time into things that I had a hard time in.

Writing was another challenge for me. I grew up writing in Russian first. There also we have print and cursive. Some of the

letters corresponded to the letter in English but they had different sounds than the Russian letter and some are written differently. As I began to write, I kept mixing up both Russian and English letters together when writing words. Up to this day, I am still very bad at spelling. My parents would sit with me for hours trying to learn all the spelling words I needed to know how to spell. We would copy them multiple times then try writing them down by memory. For other kids who are fluent only in English, writing came easy to them and they didn't even have to study.

I have two younger sisters, who too started off with learning Russian as their first language, but for them school was a little easier. Since I already went through all the challenges and our parents started talking in English, we got to help them. Even before they went to school, they knew the basic knowledge and could communicate in English because they heard me doing my homework with my parents and had watched movies in English. They still had a hard time with reading and writing, but they didn't mix Russian in with English. They are slowly forgetting Russian because they speak and are more comfortable with English nowadays. It's good to know English as a second language because it's the primary language in the United States, but it's making them forget Russian, their home language, and they also are losing the Russian culture and becoming more like Americans. They have a hard time putting a sentence together in Russian when someone talks to them in Russian. They even combine English words with Russian words when they talk because they forget a certain word in Russian. Culture is what makes each and every individual different from each other.

Since I was the firstborn in the family and my parents were immigrants to America who had no knowledge in English, I had a harder time in school. I had little help from my parents in the beginning of my school years because they were learning English themselves, unlike American kids who grew up with English as their mother tongue. Having all these struggles that I eventually overcame shaped me into the person I am today. Yes, because we live in America life is different than it would be if we lived in Moldova, but we still kept the majority of our cultural values. That's what makes us different from others.

No biography submitted.

Political Principles for our New Leader

By: Liban Gelgelo

You are superior—

You got the chance to come to power.

That is a great thing; it is not minor.

Try to do your best to become a role model.

Not for the sake of you, but for the people.

People elected you, not for your favors.

They elected you because of their matters.

They think you are the best, compared with another.

Do not sleep as before; you have more and more responsibility.

Think not only of the majority; think also about the minority.

You were elected by many who are thinking you are the best.

There are also other people who believe you are not.

They did not vote for you; now that does not matter.

You became their leader; just think about equity and equality.

Do not be partial; do good things…

For your country

For your community

For all human beings…

Treat the people

Not by their color

Not by their tribe

Not by their race

Not by their origin,

But by their humanity.

A good leader creates a competitive society.

A competitive society creates a great country.

History calls itself again and again.

Do great things today; history calls you over and over,

Forever.

No biography submitted.

Rainbows

By: Madison Poindexter

I never imagined my rainbow would turn black, until it did. I had everything I could've wanted: a boyfriend, a brand new best friend, and a volleyball team. Nothing could possibly go wrong. Little did I know that the next several months would submit me to a living hell, and days darker than the darkest nights. My life as I knew it was over.

The start of my sophomore year in high school was only the beginning of a new life. I met this girl, and she had just moved here from Wisconsin. She was going to try out for the same volleyball team as me. I instantly brought her under my wing, and she became my best friend. She had interests similar to mine, and we both were dating boys on the football team. She was always up for something fun, and always available to hangout. She was the new exciting toy that just got released that a child cannot wait to get. I let all my other friendships slide off to the back burner. Being on my volleyball team, our schedules were the same. We would be able to leave Friday practice, go get glammed up for the football game, and then spend the rest of the night together. I spent every moment possible with her. I never thought someone I cared so much about could put a knife so deep into me.

My boyfriend was a 6' 5" senior wide receiver on the varsity football team. It wasn't exactly a relationship that I wanted to be in, but when my best friend wouldn't stop telling me how great this guy was I decided I would just find out for myself. Being a football player, he was kind of popular. He was the #1 wide receiver in the state, and I was dating him. I knew that I was supposed to feel happy about something like this, but I didn't and I wasn't going to.

I was busy with volleyball, so I tried to use that as an excuse why I could never spend time with my boyfriend. In reality it was the fact that I didn't want to go waste my time with him. His idea of a good night was going in his friend's car and making out. He was almost 18 and didn't have a car or a license. I would spend my Friday nights after football games with him until I claimed that my mom needed me to be home to do some random thing. I think that he started to suspect this, but I had no desire to tell him.

He cared so much about his other friends that when he told me he cared about me it seemed like it was all just a lie. One night we got into an argument about not having our priorities set on each other. The following night he was walking me out of the school cafeteria after a football game. Another girl came up to him, and he instantly walked away without a word to me. In that moment I thought my head was going to explode like a pop can left outside in the middle of winter. I thought this was going to be the end.

I wanted to remove myself from the relationship terribly, but so many people knew about it that I was too afraid to cut things off with him. I would miss watching the varsity volleyball games so that I could go hangout with my boyfriend. I would always make sure I was back in the gym by the end of the game so that no one ever noticed I was gone. I was embarrassed for people who knew me as a volleyball player to see this guy as my boyfriend. I wanted separate lives.

I found myself lost in a group of friends I didn't want to be around, a boyfriend I didn't like, and a life that was slipping out of my hands. That's when my boyfriend did the unthinkable. He told me that I was ugly unless I had makeup on, and that I was too fat. Hearing that from a person I thought cared about me put a lot of unwanted thoughts and ideas in my mind. I had never really felt like I fit in with anyone, and this was just the lightning strike that split the mountain. I was only 15, and I was looking for a way out. I felt as unlovable as the piece of trash even the homeless man leaves in the garbage.

When I got the courage to break up with my boyfriend, my name went into the mud really quickly. People had no idea what had gone on in our relationship, yet they could talk about it like they were a part of it. My best friend went around telling everyone I was a terrible person, and that I didn't consider how other people felt. I heard these things from people who were also in the volleyball program. She would say these things to them and then walk in the gym and pretend we were best friends.

I have always been one to put other people's feelings above my own. I also was the type of person who let anything other people say go straight to my heart. I started to believe the things I was hearing. I told myself they were true. I was good for nothing. I was fat and ugly. I was the most disrespectful person around. I questioned how I had friends, and how or why anyone cared about me.

Nights were blurred; days were foggy; all I could think about was how to get out of the life I was in. I felt like I was a car in the junk lot just waiting to be put into the crusher. I had to do something, or it was going to be too late. My life had become too dark. I couldn't even look at myself in the mirror. I needed help, but I just convinced myself this is what I deserved.

I went through the rest of my volleyball season hoping that no one would notice the scars, or question why I would wince after diving for a volleyball. Little did they know that my waist line had become an art gallery, a race track too complex to drive on. I turned the black to red. I took the pain and made myself numb. I punished myself for hurting the people I cared about.

Volleyball season ended, and I decided to leave the people who had hurt me behind. I thought this would help. I still had the nights. The cold and blurred red nights were the one thing I was unable to leave. I would go to school and people would never guess the pain I kept inside. A smile on my face because people didn't actually care how I felt. This went on for months, and it was like I was stuck on a broken ride I wasn't sure how to get off. I actually wasn't one hundred percent sure that I wanted to get off of the ride. I needed someone to notice me before it was too late.

I was then confronted by my volleyball coach one day when I was helping manage her track team in the spring. She asked me what was going on, and why I was not coming to track very often. She asked if she could do anything to help me. This was when I made my one and only cry for help. I didn't expect anything to come out of it. I told her my story. I told her how she had watched me for so many days knowing nothing outside of what happened on the court, and how much she could never see.

She came up with the idea to get me help by seeing a counselor. I didn't want to hear anything she had to say. I would think to myself, "Seriously…counseling? Who does she think I am? She thinks I'm crazy! I don't need counseling. People die every day, and they need help, not me." Little did I realize that I was just like all the people who I claimed needed help. I needed help, and I was trying to avoid it. After I told my coach that I would not make the first step, she reached out to my school counselor.

My school counselor wrote me a pass to her office the next day. I was surprised how quickly that had happened. I met with my counselor, and we decided she would be the one to give my mom the news. I sat in my class thinking, "What will my mom think? She's going to have to leave work because she can't focus. She's going to think she failed me."

I was terrified. My thoughts raced like an Indy car in second place in the final lap of the Indy 500. My counselor called me back down to tell me it was going to be okay, and she would like to see me the next day so that I could tell her my plan. My mom got home and asked me how soon I needed to start seeing a counselor. I told her, "Mom, I'm not dying. I've waited this long. What is a few more days going to hurt?"

My mom and I spent the next several hours researching counseling facilities. I refused to go to a counselor who was a male, who looked older than 50, who looked crazy, or who didn't dress good for their picture on the website. It was like I was speed dating, and all I had to go off of was their picture. Finally, we came across Ingrid. She looked pretty normal, not too old, and definitely not crazy. My mom sent her an email, and just like that it was decided that she would be my counselor, and I was going to get the help I needed.

Half of my head was in love with the thought of Ingrid, and the other half was terrified and about ready to cut off the other half. I was not ready for people to know what really happened behind closed doors. I was not ready to go somewhere and have people think I was crazy. It was for one time in my life a change that I was not ready for.

I was not ready to not be able to go shut my room door and just deal with things the way I used to. I had found security in the bad things. I was not ready to give up the things I had become comfortable with. I was not ready for my mom to look at me and think that she had failed me, or that she could change me. My bedroom door wasn't allowed to be locked because everyone around me lived in fear. Homework in my room wasn't something I could use as an excuse anymore. The living room floor became where I was spending most of my time. No longer able to just hide out and have no one know. The secret was out, and it was never going back in.

The first day I met Ingrid, I instantly knew it was going to be alright. I got to go and talk to someone who wouldn't judge me, and someone who I felt was on my side. I would plop down onto the couch in her office, and pick out my quote for the week out of the basket. Her office had a patio door that overlooked the lake, so if I ever didn't want to look at her while I was talking I would just look out the windows and pretend I was outside. Ingrid was so nice, and so understanding. She would change my mindset to think that it's okay to love the person I am.

Ingrid became the one person in my life I saw every week, on the same day, at the same time. I would leave school on Wednesdays to go spend my hour with Ingrid. I would tell her my past, tell her my thoughts, and tell her my goals. Every minute with Ingrid was another minute I was alive. She became my best friend. I never imagined that my counselor would be my best friend.

I still wasn't comfortable telling people I went to counseling. I would say I had a doctor's appointment, and then I would have another week to figure out another excuse as to why I couldn't go to my friends after school. I would go to counseling, and I would work so hard with Ingrid that I would be exhausted mentally and emotionally to the point I would go home and sleep at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Counseling brought a light into my life right before it was too late. My coach saved my life without even knowing it. She sparked the fire that would change my life forever. I spent many months in counseling. After many months with Ingrid, the day she told me that I didn't need to come every week was a miracle. The day she said I could switch to a once a month or once every six months schedule was the day I found meaning in my life again.

I am not alive on this earth to let other people tear me down. I am in this life to be the best version of me possible. I have so much joy in my life after letting all the negativity out; I am able to put a real smile on my face every day. I am able to look people in the eyes and tell them I went to counseling. Counseling has given me a new opportunity to live, and I am grateful I walked in the door the first day. My rainbow is brighter than it has ever been before.

Madison Poindexter and her family all live in the United States currently, but they have origins from Germany and different European countries. She is currently a PSEO student at NHCC in her second semester, and she is a junior at Champlin Park High School. She is pursuing a degree in elementary education, and plans to continue her studies at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities. In her free time, she enjoys playing volleyball and spending time with her best friend Brianna. She loves ice cream, raspberries, and chocolate (even all together). If she could go anywhere in her free time she would spend her time at the lake or at the beach. One of the things she learned in counseling was going to her happy place, and her happy place is sitting in the warm summer sun with her feet dangling off the end of the dock in the chilled blue water.

Emily's Story

By: Emily Hedstrom

By the edge of a lake up north, my dad pitched a tent for my sister and me to sleep in under a summer sky, during a family trip. The excitement and musty smell of blue tarps and rough ground encased us with sheer walls and "shhhhing" of the reeds beyond. I zipped my sleeping bag on the hilly slant and felt the firm ground under my back.

The night changed as a rainstorm began. A river formed and flowed through the tent, right between my sister and me. The water ran down the hill to the lake, gliding right into us on its way, ruining my sister's books and our night in the tent, which was becoming uncomfortable and scary, pitched so close to the lake of choppy black waves.

A couple years ago, my mind became like that tent. Upside down, flooded with cold water, confusing, unpleasant, howling winds, watching my parents try to stop a current they had no control over. I did not recognize beauty correctly. Out of fear and a low sense of self-worth, I began to take inward pain out by physically punishing my own body. I staked my tent on dangerous ground and when help came to uproot the pegs, I shoved the stakes deeper into the earth with fists. "NO, I don't believe that." I told truth. "NO. I'm fine." I told concerned faces.

I stopped eating properly,
afraid of my weight.

I began working out many more hours
than necessary,
afraid I wouldn't lose enough.

I began covering my eating patterns,
afraid of being called out.

I began thinking I wasn't lovable
the way I was.
God doesn't really love me.

Eyes. My own eyes, blue, green grey, impressionable, opened as I walked

Each time a faithful friend lifted a candle of truth and held light to the lies, offered prayers, I was lifted, helped, encouraged, and desperate to remember and act on the truth.

down the long hall across glossy floors which seemed to stretch farther than they ever had before. Beckoning me past sanity with warped truths, a lie said something better was almost in reach. My body barbed wire. Twisted, bare, thin, hurt.

False conclusions and judgments in my head. My head, my head, a part of me, the tallest part of me, was weak and malnourished, under a stream of muddy thoughts. Above the door at the end of the long hallway, a word labeled a side of this destructive obsession: GYM. My long lasting pattern of harm was broken in upon by the voice of Truth.

Truth. Life and whole and holy. I was halted in my path.

You love the gym more than you love me.
I stared at the sign.
You're right. I do.
I saw the destructiveness
of my sin and in this place it scared me.
I am so sorry.
But how could I say sorry and keep doing this?

Sorry without change is not true repentance.
Sorry without change doesn't release chains.

Curse these chains.

Slowly, links of lies repeated that the cross, that hope, the way out, was further and further away. I was tempted by each bend and twist of truth, always a restless, nagging tirade of don't, can't, worry, FEAR.

Each day, harder to fight- deal blows- to death blows. *Fight? I'm fighting myself? Which part of myself?* Another punch from thoughts I believed could never go away, ever go away, ever go, ever go, ever go, *forever go.*

I want them to go. I can't remember what it was like before. I'm afraid. I'm so afraid. Hcope. What am I hoping for? I don't know anymore.

0.0lbs

My worn out shoes are kicked to the floor. *Take them off. Jacket off. Shoes off- off- any extra weight off.*

One frightened step. Numbers blink high, low, high, low—worry heightens as the screen goes blank for a split second—then freezes on my weight.

Again, there is less. More numbers fall off the scale but the falling numbers don't give me the satisfaction I thought they would. So now I'm there, lower, but there is still no peace. I'm worried it will come back. I'm worried it will change. Less, less, less and less… will counting backwards ever be enough?

Every spoken remark exposed struggle, shadows, shame a little more and I couldn't escape the comments or respond truthfully.

Lifted into air, feather-like and easy, "You're so light," mocks me when I realize I don't want what I thought I wanted at all. *Let go of me.* I don't want to be touched, any touch on my shame.

We hug and her hand lingers on my shirt, on my ribs, on my protruding spine.

"I can feel every bone in your back," she says, eyes looking shock, worry, fear, blue, grey, at me. Her hand traces up my arm, on my shoulder. "You need to eat…"

I pull away.

"I am."

I am not.

Not fully, not enough.

All barbed wire and lies.

It's a quiet room with a window, and the doctor speaks in a gentle voice when she looks inside my eyes. "You need to gain weight." This medical perspective is startling me and grabbing my slipping brain energy and attention. "I'm going to give you the name…" *Where will I get help?* "…nutritionist…" *Do I need an intervention?* "She can help you gain weight in a healthy way."

I tuck the pamphlet in my bag beside a severely limited source of food I've rationed. She shows me a graph displaying the range of a healthy body weight for my age and height. *Do I see what she sees?* "This is where you are."

I'm far—too far off the graph. *Yes. This is where I am. This isn't how I should be. What am I doing?* I read through the lines and stare at the possibility of loss, and now I join the water around me. If I remain off the graph much longer, permanent damage is possible.

Sterile, may even gone, like the empty cases and black tips of disposable needles on the wall.

My body is starting to shut down.

I want to be a mom someday.

. . . . .

After all the tiring hiding and covering, I know the way to get out is to open. I tell a friend. I share again. It's hard and good. And still, the battle is less than I let on. Each time a faithful friend lifted a candle of truth and held light to the lies, offered prayers, I was lifted, helped, encouraged, and desperate to remember and act on the truth. However, the fullness of hope came later.

At the bottom of it all, uncomfortable to admit what he already knew, uncomfortable to say help, unsure of his response… *I need to talk to you.*

He sits in the chair, head resting heavily on his hand. Flames dipped and flew behind the glass case around the fireplace while I waited for him, for myself, to find words. *I am not worthy of love.*

Empty. I don't know where to start. I am cold.

I prepare for judgment and harsh rebuke. *That's what I need, isn't it? To be yelled at? Told I'm terrible?* Then, after heavy silence pulls down the weight all around me, he speaks and it isn't at all what I was prepared for.

"I know what it feels like to be so depressed. I remember what it feels like for everything to lose its flavor."

Salt. My cheeks taste like salt.

I had not been prepared for a quiet compassion, reaching out to my heart with love.

Silently all expressions, guilt, shame, fear, sorrow, wash down my face.

"I don't want you to kill yourself."

Fear rushes around me as hot as the flames from the fireplace.

I don't want to die…how can I get out of here? I don't want to kill myself. I don't want you to watch me die.

Truth spoke again: but Satan does.

Cracked my voice
open wide in a
broken cry I'm helpless. *The thoughts are not stopping.*

"I keep praying and asking God to help me with this, to help me stop thinking these things that aren't true, but it keeps happening! Will you pray for me?"

"Yes, I'll pray for you, but you have to DO something." Prayer alone wasn't going to refill an empty bone frame. Neither was trying to change by myself. Faith requires action.

"You HAVE to eat. I don't care if you don't feel like it or think you need to." His eyes look pained. His voice extended to me again and this time—thank God this time—it broke past the lies. The severity of where I was had not gripped me like this. This time, living words arrived upon my exposed, beating heart and shifted the thoughts.

"Faith for you right now looks like eating a full meal. Keep telling yourself that. And have some ice cream, too, because your body needs the calories."

Faith for me right now looks like eating a full meal. Faith is eating and believing what God says is true. Faith is obedience, even though the lies inside my mind scream against this.

He hugs me tightly. *He still loves me.* I hold on.

Hold onto me, says the Lord. Because He loves me.

I can surely count the ways I'm broken.

Jesus, the one at the right hand of the Father God, counts my abundance.

"Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink.'"

He came for every soul—my soul—on the brink of starvation.

The devil, the accuser, the father of lies comes to cut, destroy, and leave souls strung out like barbed wire, forgetting the rich promises of God. He opposes God, who is life and truth and love, in every moment.

I have seen the weakness of my heart and mind. The damage of my sins are nailed to the cross.

Jesus sets me free. I am forgiven and alive in Him. He helps me fight temptations and walks with me daily. He helps me meditate on the hope from Him when I'm tempted to be highly self-criticizing and doubt his love. I am a new creation called to life in Christ.

Months and years pass in seasons of frustration, celebration, and thankfulness. My shadow passed by a pale pink rose. In the center of colorless leaves hiding the cold earth, the sun dances around the colorful petals.

I sit in a quiet room, waiting for the same doctor as before to come in and see me. What do I see? Every pound lost and more has been regained in marks across my skin. Emptiness is redeemed, reclaimed, Holy Spirit living inside me.

I need Jesus to depend on, Jesus who gives me faith to believe truth because I can't on my own. I remember where those lies took me before. I remember the voice that drew me out of the deep waters. "Abide in me and let *my* words abide in you."

A knock on the door, the waiting is over. My body is healing. Quiet turned to joy. *I'm alive!*

She enters and sees what she can of change. "Look at you! This is amazing! This is *amazing*. Your body is in a healthy place." She smiles at me. I smile back.

. . . . .

I follow my Savior's footprints back to the edge of the lake, where I had pitched my tent of unbelief. And there in His company, I thank Him for saving me.

Emily Hedstrom lives in Minneapolis and writes live from introvert cave at her favorite library, the kitchen floor, and occasionally a much too fancy coffee shop or open-air café. After finishing her AFA in Creative Writing at North Hennepin, she is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in the field. Writing this piece has been, at its best, a child laughing on the beach while waves pool around a castle of sand and tiny sticks and shells are treasures to be found. At its worst, it's been a frustrating search for an overdue book which seems to have scraped where you last left it off every surface like wallpaper and sticky glue, leaving a patchy, ugly mess and all the wrong answers to the nagging question, "Where?" Eight drafts in, her friend tells her, "Just share your heart. God can use it any way." Patchy, unexplainable and all, with vignettes of that summer beach and sunshine on water.

Lacrosse, The Medicine Game Baaga'adowewin/Takapsicapi

By: Roxanne Flammond

Walking up smelling the dirt and grass, hearing laughter, greetings, hugs and handshakes; watching the teasing, zippers opening equipment bags, helmets hitting the ground and more laughter as the boys get ready to play the game. Sticks are clashing and the wind is whipping the ball through the air as each player warms up to begin fierce competition.

Spirits of ancient players of long ago enter the field accompanying the modern players. Each player takes his position, anxiously waiting; two players crouch down, face each other, eyes locked, muscles tense. The whistle blows and the face off begins; the ball flies in the air, landing in the pocket of the midfielder's stick, and possession is in play. He runs down the field toward the goal with the grace and speed of a deer, passing the ball to an attack player who catches it and charges toward the goal, calculating the play. With the eyes of a hawk, he takes aim, draws back, and with the power of a bear, hurls the ball toward the goalie and scores a goal.

This is the game of Lacrosse. The game the indigenous people call the "Creator's game," once played by many tribes on what we call Turtle Island (otherwise known as North America). This game has been with my people for many centuries. Men originally played, as it was an extremely physical and brutal game at times. However, in modern times, it is played by both men and women (although there were a few tribes that had a women's game; the women's game being a variation of the men's game, but not quite as brutal). Even in the modern game, it can be physical, and a player can sustain serious injuries.

Watching the game, I imagine the ancient players running alongside the modern players, guiding them as they cradle the ball, keeping it steady in the pocket of their lacrosse stick. Whispering in their ear instructions in our original tongue, "wewiib/ináǩni" (hurry, quickly), encouraging them to keep up the pace, imparting wisdom when they face defeat and celebrating in their victory. I see them in my mind's eye: all the players who have held a stick, who've run the gauntlet and came out unscathed watching our young men with pride and happiness restore the ancient game once more.

I watch my son (Anonginini) take off his helmet, sweat dripping down his face, his hair wet from perspiration, his breath labored. I see his eyes filled

the pride of a young warrior, pride in a tradition and culture that is as old as the earth we walk on and the stick he holds that unites him across time to our forefathers and to our people. When he plays, he plays for the pleasure of the "Creator"—an age-old teaching that our young men learn when they pick up that stick.

In the modern-day sport, there are rules and protocol; as in the modern game, the ancient game had those and much more. Baaga'adowewin (lacrosse, in my original tongue) is to many tribes more than just a game; it carries with it teachings, medicine, wisdom and memories. It gives our young men guidance in the role and responsibility of a man. In ancient times, it was part of a young man's rite of passage.

This game was also called the medicine game, and to our people it holds the medicine of our future, our children. I have seen the healing taking place by this game. I have noticed that with the resurgence of the game, our indigenous men are picking up that stick taking back their pride. I've witnessed the power and beauty it has given back to a people who have had so much taken from them. In the modern world, it may be just a game, but in my world, it is a powerful healer, a beautiful gift given to the people.

Roxanne Flammond was born in Minneapolis but grew up on the White Earth Indian Reservation in Northern Minnesota. She lived with her grandparents until they died when she was young and was then introduced to the city life. Her mother, who is Onieda and Ojibwae, lived on and is an enrolled member of the Red Lake Nation. Her father is full blood Ojibwae from the White Earth Nation. She lived in Minneapolis, San Diego, CA, Albuquerque, NM, Denver, CO and Flint, MI when she was younger and settled back home in good ole Minnesota. She speaks Ojibewa, not fluently but she understands it, and some Lakota and English. She is a mother, grandmother and great grandmother. Her youngest is 14 years old and is a lacrosse player. When she wrote this piece it was with him in mind, but also for all the young Native men that are coming into their own and trying to find their place in this world. She wanted to share this game, "the medicine" game, with people to better understand what this game is to the Native peoples. She loves to learn, to share the knowledge of who she is as a Native woman and to build that bridge of understanding between cultures. One of her hobbies is sewing and regalia making, and her youngest is also a traditional dancer. She makes regalia for a lot of young dancers. At NHCC she is pursuing an Associate of Art degree. Learning new things and broadening her mind is one of her favorite things to do. She is an older student with a young heart. She loves to travel and to go to pow wows in the summer and make regalia in the off season. She loves DIY projects, anything that she can put her creativity to use. Her first love is to watch her son on the lacrosse field and just being that lacrosse mom out there cheering him on.

Define Happiness

By: Karla Del Moral

I was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1998, and I am the only child of the normally happy marriage between Diosa Teppa and Ilde Del Moral. My mother, Diosa, is a dedicated ophthalmologist living in Venezuela, and my father, Ilde, is a hardworking Electric Engineer living in Plymouth, Minnesota. I moved from Venezuela to the United States in July 2015, and I discovered how to overcome adversity by finding happiness.

It is year 2004, and I am only six years old. Biking with my cousin around my grandpa's neighborhood is one of my favorite hobbies; Teto, my cousin, and I do it every day. Even so, I absolutely do not like every time I go back home with my knees scraped. My mom always gets mad. According to her, I should not be trying my nine year old cousin's dangerous tricks. She puts brown medicine on my cuts, and it makes them hurt twice as much for a few seconds.

Apart from biking, my other favorite thing to do at my grandpa's house, named "Mamá Diosa," is to sell lemonade with Teto. Mamá Diosa is located in a loop, so we do not get many clients. It is a shame because Aunt Ana, Teto's mother, makes the best lemonade. At least that is what our best clients, the police officers, always say. Even though we do not get many costumers pretty often, I always feel happy sitting in our lemonade stand.

It is March, 2006, and things have changed. Although I am older now, I am not allowed to go to the streets as I used to when I was six. Grandpa says the reason is because streets are not for kids anymore; they are too dangerous now. It does not matter much since Teto and I found other ways to have fun, such as our daily adventures with Kyra inside our new Secret Club in the basement.

Who is Kyra? Well, this past month was my eighth birthday, and my parents gave me the greatest surprise I have ever had in my life. They finally gave me a puppy, and not any puppy, my own puppy! I named her Kyra, and she is the best Golden Retriever in the world. Teto and I are trying to teach her new tricks. My dad says Kyra looks like a little lion, because her paws are slightly big for her size. On the other hand, I believe she looks like a smiley and playful little ball of fur. The funny thing is I discovered she really loves

mangos, and we have a mango tree in our backyard. I bet she is going to be really fat when she gets older.

I am ten years old now, and it is summer, 2008. I came to Orlando, Florida to visit my cousins: Michelle, Andrea, and Nicole. This is the first time I see them since they left our country a long time ago. I clearly remember, five years back, at Venezuela's International Airport, when their mother said, "This new government is going to destroy Venezuela. We have to leave now." At the moment, I did not understand, but now that I am older I know exactly what she meant.

Since we arrived to Florida, we have been going to many wonderful places as Disney World, SeaWorld, Universal, etc. But today we need to recover energies. This is why we decide to rest at my Aunt's house for the day. Nicole, my youngest cousin, asks me to play with her; so we are in the living room playing Nintendo DS. Suddenly this music starts playing from the distance. Immediately, Nicole runs towards the front door, opening it, and leaving the house. I panic as soon as she opens the door; just thinking about all those horrible things that could happen to her petrifies me. What if she gets killed? What if some bad police officers kidnap her? My second reaction is running after her to stop her.

In my surprise, once I reach the door, the first view I have is a truck surrounded by many kids laughing and eating Ice Cream. How could it be? What are their parents thinking? Then I realize, not all countries have to keep their children inside their houses to maintain them safe. There must be something wrong with Venezuela. Filling in my lungs with air, the first picture that comes to my mind is Teto and I riding our bikes around the neighborhood I love the most. As strange as it feels, happiness gets my soul and I experience freedom once again.

It is summer 2015. Time has gone by, and many more things have changed. I just finished my junior year of High School, and, since I am not going back for next year, it is bittersweet. During the year, I spent memorable moments with my friends and classmates. We are all a big family since we have known each other for fourteen years now; and it is pretty hard for me to leave them just before graduation year. Even so, I have to go.

Venezuela is not even the shadow of the Venezuela I love. There is almost no food, no toilet paper, and no security: In other words, no life quality. The government has cheated on the elections again, and we cannot do a thing about it. Many protests have been taking place around the country, and I have gone to many of them; but the only outcomes have been plenty of murders and new political prisoners. The government has control of the media, and soon they will have control of who goes in and out of Venezuela too. This is the only shot I've got to be free, and I have to take it.

July 29th, 2015, the day my life will change forever. I am sitting in this airplane waiting for it to take off, and I can feel how, each second, it gets harder to breathe. Trying to distract myself from thinking that this might be the last time I see my Home Country from a window, I force myself to look forward, and search for a movie to watch during the flight. Even though I am doing my best, I cannot stop my tears from running down my cheeks.

As I hear the engine of the plane turning on, I start looking around, as if there is a possibility that this is just a dream, and I am about to wake up. This situation feels completely unreal, I cannot even describe it. Twenty minutes ago, I was with my family and friends: The ones who saw me grow, the only people I love, and the ones I might never see again. Twenty minutes after that, I am stone cold sitting inside a plane, and about to leave behind the only life I know. While I am slowly breathing in, the airplane starts to move. Then, I force a smile on my face, and think to myself, "After every ending there comes a new beginning."

Today is December 31st, 2015. This is the first time in my life I do not spend New Year's Eve at Mamá Diosa. My parents and I are in Plymouth, Minnesota, experiencing our first winter. I see my mother's bag, still unpacked from her Caracas-Minnesota flight of last week, and I feel nostalgic.

Twelve years ago, I would have never believed I was going to be here this day. The bag reminds me of one of those crazy Venezuelan New Year's Eve traditions: The one where everyone, after saying happy New Year, walks on the streets, under the sky full of fireworks, with an empty bag. Last year I did it; it is supposed to bring good luck and numerous trips around the world. I never thought it would lead me to a one way trip.

I am eighteen years old now. It is April, 2016. I am Skyping with my mother once again. Since she had to go back to our country after the holidays, she has been giving me news from Venezuela these past four months. These last news have not been good at all: "There is no food"; "There are no medicines, and your grandpa is pretty sick"; "Teto was kidnapped, but we paid for him. He is alive." "Your Aunt did a five hour line to buy toilet paper today, but there was no toilet paper left. I guess we will figure it out." For this reason I am scared of what the report might be this time.

I close my eyes, while breathing in, before asking for today's news. Then, I open my eyes, and breathe out. I ask her about our family: My grandpa, cousins, my dog, and so on. Her answer is the last straw that, after so long, makes me break down in tears. "Kyra has arthritis, and there are no medicines in here. We have looked for them everywhere, but there is no hope. She cannot even stand up because of the pain. You need to make a decision."

I know what she means with these last six words, and it rips my heart. Once again, I cannot be there to support one of my loved ones. Also, now I have to decide between Kyra suffering but living, and Kyra dying. This dog has been there for me since I was eight years old, and now I will not be there for her at last. Completely destroyed, I go out of my house, and run until I cannot breathe anymore. Suddenly, I find myself lost in the middle of the woods; I do not care. Crying out loud every single tear I have been bottling up, I try to find a reason why my life turned so black and blue.

At the end, after my eyes go dry, I remember that my phone is in my pocket. Taking it, I unlock the screen to search my way back home; but the first website I find has an anonymous quote completely out of context that caught my eye. "We Cry Because We Once Had Something to Smile for." In that precise moment my mind goes blank.

Reflecting about what I just read, I realize my life is not black and blue. Now I am crying but once I smiled. My childhood might have been inside of a house, but I once tasted freedom. I might be scared of the Venezuelan corrupt police officers, but my best clients from the lemonade stand, in 2004, give me a reason to think maybe some of them are willing to do well. Also, I might not spend New Year's Eve in Venezuela anymore, but I used to have the funniest New Year's Eve celebrations. Finally, my dog might be dying, and my family might be far away, but we shared eighteen years full of love. That is all that matters.

Thinking about my life, from this point of view, makes me understand: Happiness is all about perspective. For example: I might have had to leave my country and part of my culture behind, but I have a new culture and a new country waiting for me to discover. Happiness can only be reached by paying attention to the little good things life has for us, rather than focusing on the bad things we have to go through. Although my country, my family, and I, are actually passing through a tough transitioning phase, it does not mean I am not grateful for what I have lived, and it does not mean that better times are not yet to come.

Karla Del Moral is a nineteen year old student at North Hennepin Community College. She was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1998, and is the only child of the normally happy marriage between Diosa Teppa and Ilde Del Moral. Her mother, Diosa, is a dedicated ophthalmologist living in Venezuela; while her father, Ilde, is a hardworking Electric Engineer living in Plymouth, Minnesota. Karla moved from Venezuela to the United States in July 2015, and discovered how to overcome adversity by finding the true meaning of happiness.

Dreaming of World Peace

By: Rawshan Jahan Lipi Khondker-Huq

I have a dream that one day Palestine and Israel will be merged and will have peace. In my dream last night, I saw Palestinian and Israeli children coexisting. Because they became friends forever, they walked to school together happily, laughed crazily, and played fearlessly, and were not haunted by the hatred of their elders. However, there are differences between a dream and a reality. In dreams, people always hope for the reality, but in reality people force themselves to make that existent. When I saw in my dream that the fight for land was over, I felt a rush of happiness within my soul. The people were not against the peace treaties, against unity, against religion. After both Palestine and Israel became allies, they consisted as one nation. Peace in their eyes. Smiles on their faces. However, a dream is only a dream. When I opened my eyes from my dream to reality, I was exposed to the cruelty of this world and was distressed with the forever crying of the Gaza. My eyes shed tears when I saw the innocent souls of children eternally sleeping for the sacrifice of their heritage. Will this ever happen in my lifetime? Could both of the nations ever have the same equal rights? I woke up to the reality of bloodshed, to the consequences of the three Israeli teens who were murdered, to the reality of a Palestinian boy who was kidnapped and burned alive. I could not share the story of my dream to this world. Not to my mother, not to my siblings, not even to my friends. I could neither share nor understand why the children of Israel were tormented by the actions of their elders—confused by their actions—living in the despair of bloodshed—the loss of dignity. My dream was simple. An emotion. A whisper. For years, we've seen that the world is in a constant battle with each other, but nothing is ever complete. I am puzzled by my dream with questions surrounding my mind: Could this really happen, the idea that one day Palestine will be free from Israel and become one nation? Will this dream be a reality one day? When I am envisioning both Israel and Palestine becoming friends, I feel confident that they will act against war, against discrimination, against hatred. Alas! A dream is never accomplishable, never expectant, never jubilant; that is why I can rely on hope. My hope will remain until my dream comes true.

Rawshan Jahan Lipi Khondker-Huq views art as a form of expression and exploration. Art would not exist if any artist would not have their perception to create masterpieces. She believes intense hope soon becomes the ability of power to achieve one's dream. She is a graphic designer, an artist, and also wants to be a writer so she can incorporate her talent and utilize her creativity. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and also the Honors Society. She has received many awards in painting, illustration, computer art, digital photography as well as NHCC 25th Anniversary scholarship. She was one of the luckiest students who is one of the designers and painters for the Mural at NHCC ES40. She was Orientation Leader for North Hennepin Community College. She was an actress in Bangladesh and she is a lifelong enlisted artist for Bangladesh Television. She is a member of FOBANA (Federation of Bangladeshi Associations in North America). She always believes in and applies in herself that "It is never too late to fulfill your dreams. Never settle, strive to succeed, you are never too old to accomplish your visions." She believes her knowledge can contribute to the American way of life, whether in a literal or artistic method.

The Café

By: Akraam Abdel-Kerem

Pulling up in my car, I notice the signature gray cloud near the café from people smoking, to relieve stress or merely pass time. As I am getting closer, the owner raises his hand welcoming me and pointing at the parking space for his regulars. I open the door. Suddenly a strong scent of Turkish coffee and mint from the numerous cups of tea takes me by surprise. I feel a summer breeze from the Nile that resuscitates me after a long day, accompanied by a beat-up stereo playing rhythmic classical music in the background and vibrant Christmas lights and colored banners dangling from one street light to the other, regardless of the time of day or season.

By the time I get to my table, my first cup of tea is already on its way. The owner's welcoming words bring positivity after a long day. I head to the far-left corner, where a washed out brown wooden chair—that has seen more life than I have—stands with my name engraved on it from the day I got admitted into my first-choice university. The waiter puts the cup of tea on the bright orange-yellow copper top of my table (that is still shining after 25 years). Looking deeper, I could see the names of lovers engraved on the table top. To pass time while I wait for my friends, the owner and I try to bring the love stories back to life; for example, we created back stories for the lovers and imagined the conversations that once took place at my table.

My friends come one after the other as the time gets closer to midnight. The sound of bubbling hookah and deep chuckles echo throughout the streets, from the people sharing their stories next to us. Neighboring tables always welcome me and my friends to join in their conversations about politics, soccer or any other debatable topic. I always feel warmth across the smoke, from people I can barely see. I knew at the end of the day that the most important conversation was the one at our table, the table with a handful of guys with the darkest hair and thickest beards. The group of young adults that constantly rant on about how their days went, whether we were competing for the worst day, the most awkward first date, or congratulating a friend on his engagement that me and friends just came from.

We see the light of the next day, already creeping through the Arabian arabesque. We glimpse out to the light reflecting on the Nile, and the heat wave of Cairo already starting to gain on us. Slowly standing up with our cups of tea in our hands, looking at one another, knowing we would not

leave unless we knew we would see each other the next day. The owner silently cleaning up, but would never ask us to leave; instead, the owner insists we stay longer, which we always find tempting. We gather our chairs and help him out closing up, as age was no longer on his side. We constantly offer him a ride home. He resembles a father to us as he helps the group take numerous decisions in dark times we simply could not take back home, his advice continually proving to be valuable.

We felt relaxed at the café. It was a place to vent and know judgment was nowhere to be found. The café was a tension-free area that was hard to pass by, yet essential to keep us going through life. At all times, we saw it as a place to call ours where the owner insisted we do so. We tried several times to hang out elsewhere, but we felt out of place. The owner and my friends created an environment that guided us through life. A place that praised and encouraged our dreams, by a group of brothers and a father figure.

Traveling to America, the café was the last place I saw in Egypt, I am glad it was. Our table witnessed a variety of emotions, such as joy, frustration, and uncertainty replacing one another; nevertheless, the feeling of camaraderie was the only definite at our table, a feeling that is represented by the café but felt across seas. I am certain the moment I land in Cairo that my luggage would be next to me on the faded brown chair on that far-left corner, surrounded by the people I shared more than half my life with.

Akraam Abdel-Kerem was born in Minnesota and lived here for the first 10 years of his life. Akraam could only speak English back then and barely mumbled in Arabic around family. By the time he turned 10, his family took the decision to head back to Egypt. He attended from middle school to 4 years of university back in Egypt where he majored in Clinical Pharmacy at Cairo University. Akraam witnessed the Arab Spring first hand, which lead him to take on social causes on and off campus back in Egypt and become a close follower of the Egyptian startup scene. He travelled to Europe once as a speaker in a conference in Ukraine and to Poland to represent Egyptian youth with fellow colleagues. Akraam just started attending at NHCC during Spring 2017 as a step to pursue the dream of eventually becoming a pharmacist.

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for more: *http://northernlightnhcc.org/*

Under Construction
Every year since 1968, students at North Hennepin Community College have collaborated to produce the award-winning literary and arts journal Under Construction. Its pages have typically portrayed a breadth of human experience, but in recent years, as the student population has become more diverse and international and enrollment of both older, returning students and PSEO students has grown, this range has increased dramatically.
for more: *http://nhcc.edu/about-nhcc/publications/under-construction*

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