

REALITIES

Tenth Issue

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

Tenth Issue, Academic Year 2017 – 2018

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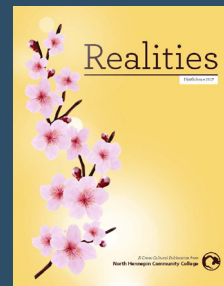
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Realities is dedicated to all people who have had the
courage to cross over their boundaries, thereby enriching
their lives by seeing how other lives are lived.



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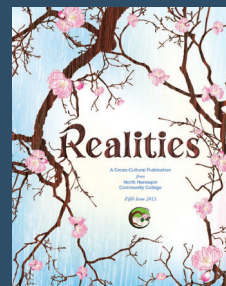
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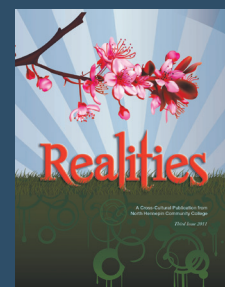
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Third Issue 2011



Second Issue 2010



Premier Issue 2009

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
Introduction

A Fading Memory, Oloyo Kidega 1

No Longer in Denial, Safiya Aden 3

Home Blood & Dear Dark Lady, Mariah Hanson 7

More Than One Me, Ashley Williams 9

Diagnosed, Lauren Rogina 11

As a Black Mother, Micah Eubanks 13

A Future Father’s Fear, Lombeh Wilson 16

Dear Timothy, Alice Shafer 17

My Future Pride and Joy, Jose Nunez 19

The Fear of Falling: A Conversation in Three Parts 20

Anonymous, Ryan Pederson 23

Seeing Is Not Believing, Kayla Strumstad 24

Girls Looking Out for Girls, Abby Peterson 26

Journey to a Better Life, Amy DeLuna 28

Studies in Writing and Literature at NHCC 31

Other Publications by NHCC 32



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Introduction

For the past 10 years, Realities has existed as a place, a venue, a conversation, and a home for writers existing in the margins, speaking from places of transition, and attempting to understand where they belong and who they are in this big, wild world. It is, and has been, “a cross-cultural publication,” one in which our student writers often find themselves at a crossroads that, in so many ways, also operates as a parallel.

And as we enter this 10th issue—oh, how we love to celebrate the big anniversaries—we pause to look at the parallels and the transitions that form those crossroads. Realities was founded a decade ago by faculty members Mark L. Larson and Don Wendel, and, no doubt, it would not have existed without their strengths and energy driving the publication forward, and even though they are not managing the publication, their vitality is still everpresent in the spirit of Realities. But what has remained the same is that NHCC students—our students—are at the forefront of Realities’ voice. They are the heart, the lungs, the legs.

This issue, as always, features new voices. They speak to us, and we listen. And while Realities has always been a place for those intimate personal explorations, those stories of the self, there has been a turn onto a different road here, perhaps even a transformation, in which these writers are not just looking inward, but looking outward as well, speaking from within to the world outside, sometimes screaming from the rooftops and sometimes, gently, to a specific somebody, even if that person does not yet exist.

As NHCC student Jose Nunez writes, “Always feel comfortable in who you are because then you will always be able to be you.”

Sincerely,
Brian Baumgart and Karen Carr

A Fading Memory

By: Oloyo Kidega

Sitting on my bedside table is a four-corner, milk chocolate photo frame. Within this enclosure is a 4 by 6 photograph compressed between transparent glass and a scratchy gloomy back.

The photograph is of my mother and my younger self in the summer of '98. It is the day of my baptism in Tanzania. I am a year old, and she is thirty-five. She wears a bare white and blue entangled dress. She pulls back her twisted autumn leaf hair, exposing her unblemished gentle brown skin.

She has a cheerful smile. Her cool white teeth are exposed. Looking at her smile always reminds me of the five pm conversations we had in her room. That was the only time our daily routines would converge. I would lay down on her soft cushion-like lap while she read a book. We would talk and joke about our separate day together, filling the room with our laughter and affection for each other. This made any bad day pleasant and any good day memorable.

I, her baby boy, wear the same white and blue clothing. I am lifted on the right side of my mommy's hips. They were pushed towards the right to create a seat for me. Her fingers from each hand interlace to form a nest-like pattern to support me. My small left arm pushes against my mommy's chest and my other arm wraps underneath her arm.

My face is turned away from the camera as if I heard a bang. Was I frightened by the people around me or curious to who they were? My uncle, who is close by me, has a facial expression of sympathy as if to empathize to my uneased face.

In the background of the photo, you can see a collage of green foliage, people interacting and wearing fabrics of black, maroon and white. The photograph takes a moment of bliss while still capturing the noise of everyday life, creating two worlds in a single frame.

Being distant from her now, the photo is the only way I can feel connected to her. It allows me to be in touch with what is a fading memory. The photo draws me back to when I was three. I remember always waiting for

my mommy outside the fenced gate of our house as she came back from work. I would run up to her and she would swoop me into her arms, embracing me. I am in that memory, running towards her but never reaching.

My mother's voice calls ever so quietly, like a falling star her voice illuminates the opaque night sky. It cheers me up when it passes by until the end of its journey, its tail fading in the distance, leaving traces of affection, never there to stay but to say I love you!

No biography submitted.



No Longer in Denial

By: Safiya Aden

I sat and stared at the quiz question on my iPad screen, watching the timer tick. But I could not bring myself to answer the question. So instead I look out the first-floor window and let me mind wonder. I wonder back to the readings we had just discussed, I wonder about institutionalized racism, about the definition of the status quo and how it creates systems of down tracking. And I realize I am in denial. I tell myself I can't answer this question because it does not apply to me. I am not being down tracked. I am not living in a cycle of poverty. I am not needy and a charity project out of pity. But I know I am lying to myself. This question does apply to me. And I will answer it. But first I let my mind wonder some more, back to the streets of ruler Islii¹.

I am about seven years of age. I walk out of our one bedroom apartment with my mother into the small courtyard we share with our only neighbor. It is a warm bright morning with an equally warm, gentle breeze. I have a smile on my face because I know where we are going and what to expect. This has become my mother's and my ritual since I dropped out of kindergarten. Every morning after my older sisters went off to school, my mother and I would walk to the crowded market about two blocks from our apartment, where we would get warm, freshly made madaze². The market which I can closely compare to a farmers market here is always crowded with morning shoppers. The street is lined with many stations with all kinds of fruits and vegetables, even a station of freshly butchered meat. But I walk past them, letting the invading smell of the frying dough lead me to the last station. Here we buy two madazies² and walk back home fighting the urge to eat it until I got home where I would dip it into a hot cup of my mother's famous shaax³. I smile to myself after the memory

fades and I feel happy to have had such a loving childhood. I would say that we lived a comfortable life. My mother made our income from selling sweets and her amazing shaax. We went to a

very small private school where we learned the basics of math, reading, and English. We always had food to eat, nice clothes to wear and a comfortable place to live. I didn't think we were poor. We were the ones who fed the poor that came by with their tattered rice or potato sack which my mother never failed to put some food in. In fact we would be considered middle class here. My mother worked hard and my sister who at the time had already come to the United States sent money to pay for our school and medical bills. But that all changed when my mother got the call that said we had been granted a permanent residence in the US. I knew this was coming. We had gone through a very lengthy process applying for this and working with the refugee agency World Relief which would later help us get to the US and get settled. But the fact that it was finally happening was bittersweet. I knew I would miss my home but I also knew we were going to a place where we would be better off. But how that would come to be I did not know at the time.

Once we had arrived to the United States, we were given a place to stay for 25⁴ days with the expectation that someone in the family would find a job in that time and pay for our rent. But that turned out harder than expected given that none of us could speak English. My four oldest siblings moved in with family friends and the rest of us moved in with our sisters. After about three months, we were once again moving, and this time it was to a motel where we would stay until there was an opening in a nearby women and children's shelter. After about another three months, one of my sisters found a job and rented an apartment which we moved into and lived until 2008. Then one day my sisters and I got home bone tired from our walk from school (as usual). We could smell a warm scent of our family comfort food, hot beef stow with canjero⁵. We all poured into the kitchen which was only two steps from the door and stop short. My mother had a worried and sad look on her face. She looked as if she wanted to tell us something but couldn't quite get it out. So my oldest sister asked what was wrong.

"Hodan got laid off from her work, and she doesn't think she can pay the bills for next month," she said.

We could hear the heartache in her voice. And we all knew what that meant. But we continued to live there until the notice of eviction letters started to pile up. And just like that, we were back to the old tan motel with its red peeling doors and never dying aroma of house cleaning products. From there, we went to the shelter house that had become too familiar.

This shelter was for temporary stay only, so one day my mother was called into its small office and told that we needed to find a permanent fix to our housing situation. They suggested we apply for a housing assistance voucher. At the time, it took about one to two years for a family in Virginia to get approved for a voucher, and we had stayed our maximum days allowed at the shelter. So, they said we would have to go to North Dakota where we had a wait time of only six months. We left Virginia, and moved to Grand Forks, ND, where my sister had to drop out of high school to pay for our rent until we got our housing voucher.

This was a part of my past that I never talked about. I was embarrassed to have spent the majority of my childhood depending on welfare to feed and house me. I did not like having that as an only option. Most of all, I did not like the feeling of being in a system that benefits the dominant group. A system that helps to maintain the status quo. I saw welfare as a way to down track minorities, to keep them in a cycle of dependence. I understood welfare as when a family could only live in the "bad" side of town, where a cluster of public housing was. Where they could go to schools with other kids just like them, where there was no diversity in class and financial status. A school with no academic competition, no great expectation, where their education was not challenging, not empowering, but rather undermining and a waste of their time. I saw welfare contributing to modern segregation through institutionalized racism. I saw welfare as giving parents an excuse to not show their children how hard work and perseverance looked, when they waited on welfare checks instead of working their butts off to provide for their family. I saw welfare as demoralizing, unmotivating and unsignifying to individuals and parents. I saw welfare as a cycle where children who grow up in low-income housing, went to bad schools,

weren't as capable of succeeding in college (that is, if they go), would end up working in low demand, low paying, less gratifying career fields or even in a blue collar job. They would then need some assistance because their income might not be enough. And then the cycle would start all over again. There would be a new generation of welfare dependent families. I wanted us to live an independent life financially like we did in Islit.

With hot, stinking tears threatening to spill and my face growing warm, I peeled my eyes from the window and turned back to the quiz. Was there a time when you wanted to be the giver but you were the receiver? It asked. And my answer came as a surprise.

Yes. I have been a receiver of welfare when all I wanted to do was give to the poor. I did not like being on the receiving side at all. But the more I come to think of it, the more grateful I feel to have had such an opportunity. After all, it saved me from being homeless at the age of eight. It gave me opportunity to go to school and learn with a full stomach. But most of all, it was the fear of being stuck in what could turn into a cycle for me that motivated me to do better. It was the desire to be independent, strong, and a giver that I strive to achieve more in school and in life. And because of that, I have a brighter future.

Now this was a big deal for me. I was no longer denying being on welfare, and I was telling someone else that for the first time. I did not want to be judged, pitied, or seen differently because I was on welfare. Welfare is so stigmatized that those on it feel ashamed and outcast from society. I remember once when my sister came home from school and was really upset.

“Do you know what this cadaan⁶ kid said in economics today?” she asked me. I told her no and she continued on.

“We were doing a Socratic seminar about SSI and this kid started a rant about how black people drain the economy with their welfare. He said ‘all they do is sit on their lazy ass and wait for a fat check to come in the mail. They don't want to work like the rest of

us and they get all this money from the government, which they just use to buy weed.”

This generalization hurt a little because that is not true. But sadly, many people associate welfare with lazy people who do not want to work for their own living. They have this one story and think it's the same for every family and individual on welfare.

Well, my story is different, just like the others. And so will my future.

Safiya Aden is from Somalia and has lived in Minnesota for the past five years. She likes learning about other people's cultures and what life is like for those who have more the one cultural identity.





Home Blood

By: Mariah Hanson

Sweeping crystalized flaxen sands
racing through veins
of the African heart.
The roaring kings of the
dark tribal jungle.
Far too robust to drag the
standard of being penurious
in the other world.
Remember when
the chains of agony
swept through our godly
nation?
Yet, we have become
so free;
So free
that we roughly
walk through
our own home blood...
All the way through our bloody sea.

Dear Dark Lady

By: Mariah Hanson

Yesterday I was thinking about you.
Usually how this goes is
me having to fight for the anger
that resides in my heart...
My brain cannot conjure up
how much reparations of love
you deserve from the universe.
Your beautiful skin that makes the night sky seem repulsive.
You deserve the moon and stars as a gift for everything you go through.
Yesterday I was thinking about you;
the way your kinky curls
tell me your daily tale.
My thoughts began to weep for you.
Your hair, so gleaming
so heavenly, keeps the world at ease.

Mariah Hanson thinks as a writer she is in a constant state of growth and prosperity. She means that in the humblest sense because being a writer is becoming a humble new voice. She is 18 years old and in such a creative period in her life. This is her first year at North Hennepin and previously she attended high school with a predominately white student body, and coming to North Hennepin was a complete educational culture shock. She has professors and advisors who can appeal to her as a young, multicultural woman.

More Than One Me

By: Ashley Williams

As I child, I was very confused about my identity. Being of a mixed race, which consisted of white and African-American, I grew up standing in the middle somewhere, constantly teetering back and forth from each side. I was raised in a predominately white neighborhood in Minnesota and was one of the few children at my school with any color. I stood out in the crowds with my dark features and curly hair. I tried to blend into my white side by straightening my hair and wearing brand name clothing like Hollister or Abercrombie & Fitch that my black curves could just barely fit inside. Even though I was half white, no white person ever saw me as one of them. Despite my efforts, I was still the black friend, and to this day I still receive many jokes for it. They are race jokes and even though I am aware of them, it does not bother me. They point out how I was the only person of color where we went to get drinks or even how my taste in music is too black for them. When I would visit my black side of the family, my cousins would say things to me like “Why you talk like that?” or “You think you all that cause you light-skinned.” I would then try to fit in by using their hood accents or by dressing in their style which would consist of brands you could barely find where I was from like Baby Phat or Apple Bottom.

I thought jumping from one side or the other and trying to buy into their stereotypes would make me feel more accepted, even though I always fell short. It took me many years to realize that this only made me insecure with my identity. My sense of identity was being hindered by these stereotypes. You cannot change your race by any means but I learned I did not have to act black or act white. My identity came from knowing both sides of my race or cultures and learning to comfortably stand in the middle. You will always be a part of some stereotype, in one way or another. You must pick which one fits you the best and that you are most comfortable to live with and be identified by.

Stereotypes to me are much like picking out an outfit and wearing only that outfit for the rest of your life. Say when you are born, your parents give you an outfit to wear to show people who you are according to them. Now that you are older, you get to decide for yourself if you will continue to wear that outfit that was given to you without choice; or you get to change it to suite who you have grown to become. Would you change your outfit?

Eric Liu, an Asian-American writer, talks about his struggle with identity and stereotypes in his essay “Notes of a Native speaker.” Liu states, “I

combated stereotypes in part by trying to disprove them. If Asians were reputed to be math and science geeks, I would be a student of history and politics. If Asians were supposed to be feeble subalterns, I’d lift weights and go to Marine officer candidate school. If Asians were alien, I’d be ardently patriotic. If Asians were shy and retiring, I’d try to be exuberant and jocular...” (104). Liu fought his Asian stereotypes in every way he possibly could, proving to himself that he was not going to wear the outfit his parents gave him. He wanted to be different than his culture and he was successful in this endeavor. He became all things he thought were white, to try and gain the confidence he was lacking in his own skin. Wanting to better yourself from where you started is always a positive thing, but wanting to change who you are, I do not agree with. You can better yourself and try to beat the statistics, but you cannot forget where you have come from. Be proud of what is behind you, while you continue to move forward.

Eric Liu later debates this with himself in his writing, that the fight to break the stereotypes associated with Asians may have went too far and he has lost some of his original culture. He writes, “I wonder sometimes how I would have turned out had I been, from the start, more comfortable in my own skin. What did I miss by distancing myself from race? What friendships did I forgo, what self-knowledge did I defer? Had certain acts of privilege been accidents of privation or exclusion, I might well have developed a different view of the world. But I do not know how my view would have differed” (105). Eric Liu reflects for moment in this passage just how his life might have been different might he have chosen the path of sticking to his own race. He does mention in his essay also that he

does feel successful by anyone’s point of view and he was proud of his accomplishments. Liu was passionate about the route he took through college but I tend to sense some regret there as well when reading that paragraph. Liu seemed, in my eyes, wanting to better himself from the stereotypical Asian. I commend him for doing so but I feel saddened for him also. He worked so hard at breaking his stereotype, trying to be white, that he forgot he was not, in fact, white. Obviously, Eric Liu knows that he is Asian but he stepped over the line in a way that puts his culture on the other side. Knowing but leaving your culture across the room while you strive so hard to be a part of another crowd just does not work. Anyone can strive to act or be of another race, like white. Except if you are not white, no white person will ever mistake you for being so. Wearing

“Khaki Dockers” or marrying a “White woman” (100) will not physically change you. I will never be a white person and I will never be a black person, no matter how much I can assimilate to each side. There is a point of balance that must be achieved within multi-racial people, immigrants, or people adopted by a race other than their own. That you simply cannot be what you are not. Accepting both sides and realizing your differences is a true spot of serenity within yourself.

Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian-American female writer, agrees when she writes, “As I approach middle age, one plus one equals two, both in my work and in my daily existence. The traditions on either side of the hyphen dwelt in me like siblings, still occasionally sparring, one outshining the other depending on the day. But like siblings they are intimately familiar with one another, forgiving and intertwined” (98). I so closely relate with Lahiri’s experiences throughout her essay “My Two Lives.” When you have a hyphen in your ethnicity, you sit in the middle. Sometimes you sway from one side to another. Ultimately, there is more than one you. You are rich in the sense of having more to yourself than the average person. “One plus one equals two” (98). Being blessed with two or maybe more rich cultures may be confusing at young age; when you grow to be older you can just appreciate how much this adds to your own unique identity. Stereotypes within your culture don’t make your identity. It is what you do with your cultures stereotypes that gives you an identity. You can drop the stereotypes and pick up a new one but your culture should always be there with you.

No biography submitted.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. “My Two Lives”. *The Arlington Reader: Themes for writers*, edited by Lynn Bloom and Louise Smith. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2014 pp.97-99

Liu, Eric. “Notes of a Native Speaker”. *The Arlington Reader: Themes for writers*, edited by Lynn Bloom and Louise Smith. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2014 pp.100-105

Diagnosed

By: Lauren Rogina



I reached halfway out of my window to push the button to get my ticket to be able to park in the ramp. I got out of my car after parking and walked in to the usual place every Wednesday. As part of a class for school my senior year, all we had to do was volunteer. For me, there was one I was very passionate about. That was helping younger kids at Children's Hospital who have been recently diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. I had been diagnosed at six, and it was hard for me considering I felt like the only one who knew how to take care of me was my mom.

Every Wednesday, I would go in to volunteer in classes for young kids who have diabetes at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis to get the chance to get to know one another and, more importantly, ask questions. Sometimes it's hard to have a serious illness like diabetes at such a young age because often mom or dad will just be taking care of you. But these kids could now have the freedom to ask their own questions from someone who had dealt with these issues firsthand. I felt like these kids really trusted me because deep down they knew I was one of them.

Being with all the other diabetics every week really touched my heart in places that it felt like had never been touched before. Honestly, I don't ever meet a lot of other people my age who struggle with this same disease, so this was comforting for me as well knowing that other people share my struggles as well.

No biography submitted.

During the 2017-2018 school year at North Hennepin Community College, we used Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* as our college's common book, and we asked our student writers to respond in some way to the book or the themes contained within, specifically relating to Coates' epistolary style: it is written in direct address to his son, as if it were a letter, commenting upon what it is like to be black—particularly, a black man—in America. *Between the World and Me*, published in 2015, won the National Book Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

What follows, in the center section of this issue of *Realities*, includes some of those responses.

As a Black Mother

By: Micah Eubanks

In the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, I enjoyed the rawness of his statements and analogies. I was brought to tears many times in retrospect of the events he mentioned and what continues to happen; I often thought of my own life as a black mother.

In this matter of fact letter Coates writes to his son, he says all the things we as African-Americans must tell our children, some of it within in due time. I sometimes wonder when “due time” is; the age of accountability for children is getting younger, and for African-American boys it is imminent; they are viewed as a threat and dangerous from the beginning of their time with all odds stacked against them.

Coates made this analogy and he stated, “Black people love their children with a kind of obsession, you are all we have and you come to us endangered.” I can relate to this quote having four African-American children (both girls and boys). I worry for all them, growing up in this world full of systemic racism which is profound in the state we live in. I try to guard them with all the strength, faith, and prayers that I have. I want to shield them from racism and injustice but in the end that would only bring them more harm and hurt. To further explain, in another book, *A Good Time for the Truth*, Shannon Gibney writes in her essay, “The Fear of a Black Mother,” the following “How do you protect the thing you love most in the world, when it is also the very thing that the world fears most?” Gibney, like Coates and most Black mothers and fathers across America also fear for the safety, health, legal, and education disparities that are in store for their children (Shannon Gibney was referring to her own son in the quote above); I too share these same fears. I looked into the eyes of my 12-year old son the summer of 2016 and gave him the inevitable lesson—I will write more about this as I continue this book review.

Coates goes on to write to his son about how the black body has never been valued to the other and how their suflaying of backs; the chaining of limbs; the strangling of dissidents; the destruction of families; the rape of mothers; the sale of children; and other various acts mean first and foremost, to deny you and me the right to secure and govern our own bodies”⁸.

Although this kind of terrorism does not exist in this direct fashion, it still

happens today. It is in mass incarceration of African-American males and police officers reserving the right to kill black people without ramifications is a constant reminder that they can destroy our bodies; that constant state of fear is an act of terrorism. Coates writes, “And you know now, if you did not before, that police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body.” Meaning “Sell cigarettes without the proper authority and your body can be destroyed. Resent the people trying to entrap your body and it can be destroyed, turn into a dark stairwell and your body can be destroyed. The destroyers will rarely be held accountable”⁹.

Black families are destroyed by locking up and killing fathers, which at one point was the strength of the black family. The three strikes law that was created for minorities who are caught up in the revolving system of receiving harsh sentences and felonies are being released from prison without proper trade training, rehabilitation and healing from trauma (including Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome). These examples are reasons men released return to the way of life prior to being imprisoned. This leaves the woman to birth, raise, and take care of children, all as a single parent, shifting all strength and responsibility to the black woman; the weight of the world is on her shoulders, yet she is labeled as “angry.” Most single parents have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet, leaving children unattended, and in rough neighborhoods this can be dangerous. Coates refers to this in his book also when he speaks of growing up in Baltimore.

Coates writes, “To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape and disease. The nakedness is not an error, nor pathology. The nakedness is the correct and intended result of policy, the predictable upshot of people forced for centuries to live under fear”¹⁷. In this quote, I believe that Coates is referring to

Redlining and housing discrimination. This act of discrimination was practiced by banks and insurance companies by not offering mortgages and loans to certain geographical areas especially within inner cities literally drawing red lines on a map around these areas. This how the “ghettos” were formed. This left the black family to rent never owning and never gaining equity through property which we all know is one way wealth is passed down through generations. People without resources healthcare, jobs, adequate food and clean drinking water (Flint, MI) are left to fend for themselves. This is often mistaken for “black on black crime” when really it should be called zip code crime.

Coates also writes about his son’s experience with finding out that the murderers of Michael Brown would go free. “That was the week you learned that the killers of Michael Brown would go free.” Coates writes how his son cried and he did not comfort him because it was the reality of having a black body in this country. I, too, have had this conversation with my oldest son, with tears in my eyes having wailed after hearing the verdict of the officers who killed Minnesota native Philando Castile. Everything I taught my children about the police seemed to be null and void. I have always told my children when they enter stores, do not completely turn your back on the clerk for they will think you are stealing, never put your hands in your pocket while in a store, when encountering the police speak kindly saying yes sir and no ma’am, keep your hands where the police can see them, put your hands up and they won’t shoot. None of these tactics worked for Philando Castile, and for the first time I had no words for my children as they too looked to me with glossy eyes months after his shooting when we all learned the fate of his murderers. Hopelessness consumed us that day. I, as a mother, didn’t even have the strength to fall on my knees to pray.

I would like to back track for a moment to a few weeks after the murder of Philando. On Father’s day Sunday I went to visit my dad in New Hope, MN; my four children, Joe (my significant other), and I all loaded in Joe’s Jeep and drove out there with hot dogs and hamburgers for the grill. We had laughs as we cooked and reminisced while my dad told Joe stories about my sisters and me from our childhood and tears as we discussed the recent tragedy in Saint Anthony, MN. We always had very serious and political conversations with my dad.

He is a Black Panther/activist until the end and is always fired up for these types of discussions. After cooking food and chatting for hours, we packed our to-go plates, said our goodbyes and headed back to Minneapolis to get ready for the next work day. As Joe drove down Boone Avenue, we noticed a New Hope police car parked just outside of Sonnesyn Elementary school. I watched in the side mirror of the passenger side as the squad car pulled out quickly and began to follow our vehicle. A surge of fear went through my body, my heart palpitated, my armpits began to sting, and tears welled in my eyes.

After swallowing the frog in my throat, I whispered, “Babe?”

“I know,” Joe whispered back to me, trying not to alarm the children who were oblivious in the back seat.

I continued to watch as the squad car got closer, running the plates. Whoop whoop! Red and blue filled the rear window

and filled me with fear and panic. I became dizzy and was sure I would pass out. Wails and cries from the backseat began to give me the calmness I needed to be strong for my children; for they knew all too well what police were doing to black men and too feared for Joe's life.

Joe continued to drive until he was able to pull over onto a busier road which was 36th Avenue; it is smarter to pull over on a street that is not secluded. I secretly started the video recorder on my phone and tucked it into my bra. The police officer approached the vehicle and asked us where we were coming from and where we were going. After Joe politely answered the questions, the officer then asked him for his license and registration. Joe pulled both his license and registration from the visor as we had instructed the kids to do once they too started driving after Philando was killed for an attempt to retrieve his papers from the glove compartment. The officer shone his light on the weeping children in the back to see who indeed was in the backseat but never stopped to console them in any way. The officer ran Joe's license and came back to the car and asked him to step out of the car. The kids and I began to scream, wondering what was happening. The love of my life was in grave danger. I knew from his image alone that this officer was afraid. Joe, a dark skinned man with a beard with arms bigger than the next man's thighs, was a major threat and capable of things this scrawny officer did not want to know.

The police officer escorted Joe around to the back of the car and, due to the tinted window, the kids and I could no longer see Joe. "He's gonna shoot 'em!" my oldest daughter cried out. "Mommy! Help!" she said. Joe was all Jazzy knew in her life as a real father. Her dad took off when she was just an infant but Joe had taken Jazzy under his arm, teaching her about, music, instruments, life, and everything he would pass on to his child for the three years he had been in her and all the kids' lives. Those thoughts gave my legs some stability and I quickly got out of the car and walked around back.

The officer put his hand on his weapon and said, "Ma'am, get back in the car!" The officer and I exchanged words. Summarizing, I told him that I was not getting back in the car because police had been shooting unarmed black men. The officer told me that Joe's license was suspended from a missed court date due to a traffic violation and he was going to take him to New Hope lock up. I sensed a softness in his tone but I still didn't trust the officer. The officer assured me that I could meet them at the New Hope Police station, pay for Joe's bench warrant, and he'd be free to go. I stood outside the car and watched the officer gently cuff Joe and put him in the squad car. I followed the officer back to the station and bailed Joe out right away as

memories of Sandra Bland (a black woman who was murdered while in police custody) flooded my mind. In this situation we all ended up safe, but the hypervigilance alone could take years off of our lives.

In my conclusion, I can say that Ta-Nehisi's Book is a confirmation of knowledge I have learned along the way over the years through ancestors, black history classes at my predominantly black schools, pastors at church, books and videos. Coates said it best when he quoted Amiri Baraka's poem:

We are beautiful people With African imaginations Full of masks and dances and swelling chants

With African eyes, and noses, and arms, though we sprawl in grey chains in a place Full of winters, when what we want is sun

This poem speaks of the strength, adaptation and resiliency of black people, in a place not meant to be our own, and under all the circumstances we still strive, thrive, and rise. This is the hope we can give our generations to come.

No biography submitted.

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A Future Father's Fear

By: Lombeh Wilson

I am afraid of losing my daughter, not to death but an unknown culture.

I cherish and love the teachings of my ancestors, thus, I hope to pass it on to my daughter.

I am an immigrant. Pardon me if you do not understand the language I am speaking.

I was forced to assimilate into another culture which causes me to neglect and abandon my culture and my ancestors.

I tried to celebrate and acknowledge my heritage/tradition but it didn't work.

I tried to recreate my identity to assimilate into American culture but I was often reminded of my home; where I truly belong.

I forgot that identity cannot be created or destroyed.

Your identity is you, it represents you.

These are the things I tried to pass on to my daughter.

I hope she understands.

Lombeh Wilson is a student at NHCC who plans to study Neuroscience, Biology and Biochemistry after high school. He struggled with identifying himself and his purpose in society. In 2016, he immigrated to the United States from Liberia to stay with his dad. Since then, he has grown and developed into a man. He likes to assist people, share knowledge, and experience new things. "A Future Father's Fear" imagines how he might feel if/when he becomes a father.



Dear Timothy

By: Alice Shafer



Dear Timothy,

Hello to my dear late husband, how are you doing? It is fourteen years since you left me and our son. Your memories are still very vivid in me. I remember you every day. Our son might not be able to have very clear memories of you, but I have told him so much about you. He knows how much you loved him and who you were. I am writing this because I have some questions and some updates for you from the time you left us. I would like to know why you had to go that soon. I would like to know how you are doing and the updates are how we are doing since you left us.

“Tim! Why did you have to go that soon?” This is one of the questions I ask myself all the time. We were less than one year in this country. You were our hero; you always led the way and we followed because we trusted you so much. We were only married for five years and our life was starting to get better. Having our first born child was a miracle after several miscarriages. It was our greatest joy to have him, but you did not stick around to watch him grow and guide him to become a great man like you were. He was barely two years when you left, just when he was started calling you dad. We were less than one year in United States. You struggled so much for us to come here as a family. I feel like life for us as a family was just starting. “Why did you have to go?”

I would like to know how you are doing. Do you miss us? This another question I ask myself all the time. I would like to know if you are happy where you are because that would make me feel a little better. I have heard people say that their dead people are watching over them. I don't say that because I don't know if there is any truth to it or if it is just a myth. Do you see us? If you do, that would make me really happy. I know I won't get an answer to my question, but the thought that you can see us would make my days without you a little better.

It is fourteen years since you left us. It was the most unexpected thing that has ever happened to me. Our son is now sixteen years old now. He is like a copy and paste of you. He is very handsome, very kind-hearted, very smart, and very respectful. I have tried to bring him up the like we

dreamed and desired. I continued taking him to church, praying with him, and reading the word of God with him like you used to do. He is very involved in the church youth group and he does PowerPoint during the service. He might not become a pastor like you, but he is headed the right direction. I have told him so much about you, until sometimes he thinks he knows you more than me. Sometimes he asks questions about you and I love it when he does that. You have missed so much of him, but I would like you to rest assured that he is doing very well. It has not been easy, but I have tried to do my best. It is always very emotional for me during his birthdays and graduation. Always wondering why you have to miss it all.

How am I doing? I am doing well. I believe it would have been better with all of us together, but life has to continue. I remarried, and my husband now is a very good guy. He is taking good care of us. We are blessed with a baby girl; she is three years now. Our son has a sister. This is something he wanted for a very long time before I remarried. He kept asking how come he did not have a sister or a brother like his friends. He is now very happy with his sister. They love each other very much. I know this would make you happy to know he is not alone. It took me seven years to introduce another man to our son's life. I am happy, but I wish you did not go.

As I conclude I would like to let you know that we miss you very much. I wish there were a way we could communicate. Death is the cruelest and most horrible thing I have ever seen. I wish death were not part of life, but unfortunately it is part of life. I have to deal with missing you and unanswered questions for the rest of my life. Peace till we meet again

Yours loving wife,

Alice

*Alice Shafer is student at NHCC. She is from Kenya.
This is a letter to her late husband who passed away on
Dec 19 2003.*

My Future Pride and Joy

By: Jose Nunez



Dear Future Son,

I am writing this letter today to express to you to stay true to yourself and to not allow yourself to conform to how society wants you to. I have experienced and have seen the roughness that society says is how we as boys and men are supposed to be, and I wish that you never give in to the careless shaping that society thinks is right. I will always want you to feel comfortable in doing and feeling however you feel is right to you. Always feel comfortable in who you are because then you will always be able to be you. Today society says that a man who shows his emotions is weak and less of a man. I am here to tell you to never agree to such nonsense and that a man who can't express himself is a man who is alone. Not knowing how to express yourself properly can have some serious psychological punishment on you. Knowing when to cry, be humble, or even get angry are simple things that people need to learn how to control, and lack of control is worse than being known as a weakling. Being able to stand up for what is right or even for your friends is nothing short of a being great person. Balancing your emotions and knowing when to show emotions will lend a great hand in allowing yourself to grow; knowing how to pick your battles is just another choice that people underestimate, even though we do it every day. Understanding that you can't win all your battles, but being able to always get back up and keep moving forward is what helps build strong character. Never forget, always be true who you want to be no matter what or who is involved in your life.

Jose Nunez was born in Florida but moved around a bit growing up. He has lived in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New York, California, and now Minnesota, but he would have to say he did his growing up in Montana. His dad is from the Dominican Republic and his mom is from Florida but to say the least

he began having less and less Hispanic friends, so he stopped speaking Spanish and now he has trouble speaking it, but he still understands it pretty well. He has attended NHCC for just one semester thus far and hopes to continue until he can transfer. He is studying for Computer Science. His favorite food is pizza, and he likes music working out, playing sports, relaxing, and gaming.

The Fear of Falling: A Conversation in Three Parts

By: Anonymous

“Dear friend, as you know...”⁷

You've come a long way, haven't you?

You were always so caught up thinking of yourself, being chained beneath your own world. I can see you fading away, collapsing in on yourself--that's probably for the best. You always were so blind to everyone around you, drowning in the vast universe of self-loathing you'd created. You were weak; I wish you'd fought for yourself more.

Your mother clung so tightly to her faith. No matter how much your family tried to impose its Roman Catholic beliefs upon you, bleeding the pure Irish blood of your great-grandfather into the code of your train of thought, it remained dissonant within you. I applaud you for thinking for yourself. Your grandmother would frequently berate you with the question: “if your best friend told you to jump off a bridge, would you do it?” I almost wish you'd had the chance to ask her the same thing, but about me. She died before you had the chance to come out, though I wonder if you ever would have were she still around. You were so keen on being used by those around you--perhaps if everyone else was happy you wouldn't feel like such a burden to them. But I cannot let you define me anymore. I'm sorry.

Oh my love,

the precious twin of my past self;

you're out of tune

with who you are,

take your self-hatred off the shelf.

You cannot learn from caving in

Try to let go of who you've been.

You can't be stingy with your love, you can't be quiet with your words, and you cannot hide behind familiarity. The books and videos may tell you what you want to know, but you won't understand unless you're out there, involved in all you've learned about.

I promise you, this is who we were always supposed to be, before you broke. You never forgot about me entirely, but you did forget the feeling. You buried yourself beneath the lies of those you tried to please, and you were content to stay the same. I can tell you though, that the world is so much more beautiful than anyone can ever write about.

I don't want you anymore. I'm a fire, and a king, and a warrior--and **"warriors are not afraid to die"**⁸.

"Dear friend, as you know..."

Your flames are bright, I won't deny that. They also rage throughout you unchecked--a wildfire always spilling over into every day. You dare to call me your past self, but you were here before me, were you not? You existed from birth, and left dominion to me as soon as you gave up. Adults often don't think of children as other humans until they're old enough to believe for themselves, and I am truly sorry that they fractured you so quickly.

I don't want to injure you, my friend, but you're unpredictable and so difficult to control. You feel everything like hurricanes, you young volcano, overflowing with all the emotions that don't ever leave you alone. You are ardor, agitation, noise--you're starry-eyed, always scheming, your sword always drawn and aching for a fight. You dazzle everyone with words of honor, and when it comes time to be strong, you vanish like the moon behind a cloud. How do you expect me to handle all the violent, churning embers of your ever-changing moods? You feel so much, I can't keep up. You wear me down, and my head is always left spinning as I watch your flames go out.

Oh you mover,

the always blazing spitfire child--

you're self aware,

yet can't compose

all the ambitions of the wild.

You say you hear the fighter's calling,

but I still know about your fear of falling.

I am so happy for you, truly, that you've rediscovered who you once were, but I know that you're not proud to note you have your father's temper. You want to live your life for adventure, see the world you feel you've missed. It's good to see you have an open mind, and lifelong growth is something to be admired. I'm glad that you've been honest with yourself about who you are; even if your mother never wanted a son, she'll have to learn to love the one she's not been aware she's had.

That said--and I know you struggle to admit this--though your heart isn't bound by fears, your actions are. It's not something you should blame yourself for, it's just the card that you've been dealt. You never learned how to fall, did you? Children know this--they aren't scared to take a tumble every now and again--but it's something you haven't ascertained; you're still afraid. You don't fear being hurt by someone else, only you, and beating yourself back into a cage.

When others see your weakness, they seem to turn their backs, and so you've convinced yourself, it's best to try to save face...when you can, if you can, sometimes you slip, and then you hand me back the reins.

I'm everything that you don't want to acknowledge about yourself. I'm insecure, a waste of space, and I never fail to bring you down. I am the submission you're so scared of; I am the fragility you don't want your friends to notice. I'm part of your story and you can't ignore me, but before you can truly begin your adventure it will take a *"while for the medicine to sink in"*.

"Dear friend, as you know..."

What have you learned from your choices, regardless of how impulsive they may have been?

We'll both remind you, just in case you've forgotten:

You've lived your whole life in a bubble manufactured by your family, by your roots, and what's more is that you've been living in fear the whole time because they never really welcomed differences, did they? Then you spent a week on your new college campus, surrounded by people who were, more often than not, vastly different from you. Despite

that though, you fell in love--because beneath age, skin-color, language, gender identity--beneath all of it--you and everyone you met were irrefutably connected. Never before had you felt so infinitesimally small, miniature in a way that humbled you. The multiplicity stunned you--everyone was so much more beautiful and fascinating than you could have ever anticipated.

And then you took a job working at a high school, which forced you to be honest with yourself: you're supposed to keep working with students. I know you fear financial instability, but you can't be stingy when it comes to kids who deserve everything you have to offer. Their potential for future success outshines yours; this is how you get to leave the world a little better.

In sociology, the lens of judgment you'd already started to crack was hammered into oblivion.

You came to believe that there was no such thing as a good person or a bad person, that actions were all that could be labelled as one or the other. What's more is you finally came to give your trans-ness some much-needed attention because familiarity became so much more miserable than being different.

Finally, and truly such a serendipitous decision, you chose to study Aikido, often considered a martial art, but really more of a Japanese way of life. It was originally just something to fill college requirements; however, it was quick to become so much more. Not only a way to exercise your spirited muscles, but also a philosophy that resonated so deeply with you that something finally righted itself in your heart. You never felt like you belonged anywhere until you took up Aikido, you couldn't put words to the kind of person you desired to be until you learned from Aikido, and you weren't aware of your intense fear of falling until you were asked to fall in Aikido. The universe tugged at your soul; you were suddenly filled with the ruthless desire to become all that you felt you lacked: loyal, honorable, sincere, compassionate, brave, benevolent, and just. You were so used to being either too much or too little, but in Aikido you found that your personal worth was insignificant--it didn't matter where you were at or where you had been as long as you committed yourself to lifelong growth. And that was all you'd ever needed.

So, my dearest friend, we want to tell you that though your past has been painful, and there are parts of yourself that you want to ignore, the only way you can ever work

towards bettering yourself is by acknowledging those pieces which still trouble you. Nothing can be addressed unless it has first been recognized as an area in need of improvement. We believe in you, and we're hopeful. Someday we're sure you'll overcome your fears because--we are you, and we'll help you pick yourself back up when you fall. Stay golden my friend--and if you ever feel as though you're forgetting yourself, please, **"come lay with me on the ground"**¹⁰.

The author comes from a very mixed background, namely French and Irish, but also a conglomerate of other things; Irish was by far the most prominent culture in their life growing up. Now they've broken away from that and consider themselves simply 100% pure-blooded Minnesotan. They're a transgender male (assigned female at birth, use he/him pronouns), currently living in Buffalo, MN, and they have lived in Minnesota their entire life--got that silly Midwestern accent. They have about 10 years' experience with Spanish classes but have lost a lot due to not using it; however, they do aspire to pick it up again along with a few other languages (Japanese, ASL, Latin, etc.). Their dream is to travel around the globe working in the field of education. This is their fourth, and final, semester at NHCC, and they're graduating with their Associate of Arts with plans to attend the U of M Morris for further college education. In their spare time, they like reading, writing, and creating art, and are always looking for adventures and something new to learn about.





Anonymous

By: Ryan Pederson

The Internet is a peculiar place. It is the greatest source of information in the history of planet earth. It also is the largest connector between many people from all around the world. Since the dawn of social media, the Internet has started to create its own unique culture. A culture of anonymous interactions that are rather plastic and meaningless. As we all know, political and cultural divisions in the United States have been rising steadily in recent years. This political polarization can partly be attributed to the Internet and social media. These sources have started to allow people to get away with expressing hurtful and often extreme ideas that they would not normally say to someone's face. Interactions like these really tend to hurt unity because of the generalizations we start to make. Each opposing viewpoint starts to see the other as inhumane and deserving of the highest form of punishment. If all Americans view the other side as either Hitler or Stalin, it prompts us to want to take violent action. The clash in Charlottesville, Virginia is a prime example of each side clashing in a violent manner because they perceive the other as being too dangerous. I am not defending either Antifa or the Alt-Right in this scenario; I believe that extreme groups like these do not have a place in civil society in 2018, but it was the Internet and social media that began enabling extremist groups like these to start forming in the first place. Groups like these may be the first, but they will not be the last if Americans are driven further and further apart. There may be no saving us now, but only time will tell.

No biography submitted.

Seeing Is Not Believing

By: Kayla Strumstad

Everyone has something in their life that drives them every day. Whether that be family, work, money, love, etc. Every person has a reason to get out of bed every morning. For me, that reason is music. Discovering my love for the violin has shaped the person I am today and opened a door to happiness I never knew existed. This was manifested to me one October night of 2013. I was listening to Pandora in my bedroom and came across a very unique violinist named Lindsey Stirling. She immediately seized my attention with her cunning twist on classical and dubstep. Upon minutes of discovering this admiration, I felt something new and different churning inside me. I flung my door open and frantically ran over to my dad, who was sitting on the couch.

“Dad,” I proclaimed as my voice quivered in excitement, “I want to get a violin.”

“What?” questioned my father.

“I heard this new violin artist and I want to learn the violin” I replied in desperation.

“Okay, you can ask for one for Christmas,” stated my father with a smiling face.

That's exactly what I did. That Christmas I asked for a violin. To others, my first violin may have seemed like a generic, starter violin that smelled like newly painted plastic, but to me it was a majestic artifact of opportunity. I still remember my first violin lesson like it was yesterday. As I protruded through the doors of the nursing home where my mom worked, I saw a man standing across the room with his back to me, holding a black violin case in his right hand as if it were a briefcase. I stood there in the doorway grasping my violin case in front of me with two clammy hands until my mom waved me over and introduced me. We guided our way to the elevator and headed to the second floor of the complex and began our journey. Every week mom and I went to the nursing home for my lessons and as time grew, so did my anticipation. He showed me the proper way to hold my violin, where my fingers should be positioned, how to interpret music, and even taught me my first song: “Green Blade Rises” which

we recited together in front of a Catholic Church for Easter. This man not only taught me the skills I needed to jump-start my violin career, but could also play like the sound of a million angels singing in unison. Does it sound like I'm describing a blind man? Even though he could not see me, or where my fingers were positioned, he always knew where my fingers were and corrected me. I was so in awe and inspiration of his talent that when I would practice at home, I often played with my eyes closed and just focused on the audition instead of watching my fingers.

A year down the road, I found myself juggling between high school and violin lessons at the "School Of Music" in Rogers. However, my lessons were much more structured and limited than they were before. I entered into a small cubicle room with a time limit of half an hour and as the lesson begun, I felt as if I were on a gameshow of "beat the clock." My teacher was very talented, but I never felt like I was progressing in my musical skills. So I fell behind, quit my lessons, and focused on school.

As I walked into my room and threw my backpack down on the bed after school, I would glare at my violin sitting across the room and felt as if it were glaring back. I tried to fill that pleasure in my heart with alternative things but everything fell short of satisfaction. One day, enough was enough. I searched around for months for a new teacher until my mom came across a business card at the dentist office of a young, talented woman who gave lessons at her house, so my dad and I went to meet her and I got the urge to play again. My journey began once more.

Christmas of that year I became a whole new person. I got the greatest gift a musician could want, a new violin. My dad and uncle both chipped in on a Peavey amp and a Barcus Berry acoustic/electric violin with a black, glossy finish that was smooth to the touch, like running a finger along a soft kitten. Opening the box to my new violin, I felt like a kid again unwrapping my presents on Christmas, eager for a new toy. As I started my lessons with my new teacher, I felt that joy and anticipation again every week for my lessons. My teacher, Laurie, not only pushed me to better my skills but also gave me the encouragement I needed. Through her encouragement, I encountered my second recital. Over the course of a month, I learned a song of my choosing, "Arkansas Traveler" which was a folk piece. As I walked into the auditorium where we were performing, I tuned my violin and got warmed up with the rest of the violinists. I sat patiently for my turn to go on stage, but then the unthinkable happened; one of my violin strings broke. My mind

went blank as I heard the loud snap of the metal string and saw the rosin fly into the air like dust flying from a pickup truck on a dirt road. I frantically crouched down and scurried over to my teacher to show her my violin. I thought it was all over for me until she reassured me she had a backup string. We put it on my violin quick as my name was called next up in line to perform. We tuned up the final string and I hobbled on stage more nervous than I ever had been in my life. As the piano began to play and I felt my shaking arm sway across the strings, my fingers being magnetically pulled to the notes to the song. I made it through! I saw my family stand and cheer as the song concluded in haste. After that night, I gained the confidence that I was missing, and I wanted more of the violin.

As I was scrolling through my phone that next spring, I came across an ad for Orchestra Hall, so I clicked on it and discovered that I could volunteer as an usher. So that's what I did for about six months and got to experience a connection to music like never before. Before the concert would end, of course, I had to snap back to reality and run out to hold the door for guests and direct them to the nearest bathroom or concession bar. Sitting in the balcony of the dome-like hall as the music bounced off the architecture and danced in the air, I felt at peace. I closed my eyes and listened to every note, every slur, every stride of the bow, and envisioned what being blind would be like. In that moment, I realized not all happiness derives from what we see. All these experiences, from learning the violin from a blind priest to sitting in Orchestra Hall gaining a desire to pursue music, made me the musician I am today. I'm not perfect—no one is—but I found my reason to get out of bed every morning.

Kayla is a full-time student at NHCC getting her associate degree. She plays the violin and writes in her free time. She started writing poetry at 13 years of age and plans to continue writing in her future.

Her dream is to get a bachelors in English and publish her own novel and/or poetry collection someday.



Girls Looking Out for Girls

By: Abby Peterson

I tugged on my skirt as the bouncer flashed a light on my ID. He looked up at me, looked down at my ID, and looked at me again. I gave an awkward half-smile as he handed it back to me. It was 18+ night so my coworkers had dragged me to come out with them. I've never been big into the club scene; I don't even really like house parties, but I was sick of being called 'grandma' and 'lame' so I sucked it up for one night and went out.

We walked into the club, and I could hear the bass from the DJ from a block down so as one would imagine, it was loud as hell in there. I followed my friend to the bar, dodging clusters of people left and right. Drunk, high, twisted, you name it, someone was on it. All I smelled was alcohol, sweat, and cigarette smoke. I couldn't hear anything. My coworkers ordered drinks for everyone as I pulled my sleeve down to hide the big black X on my hand signifying my age.

My closest friend of the group was Sabrina. She was the one who had convinced me to come and she was also the one who pointed out the guy who was staring at me from across the bar. My first thought of course was that there was something wrong with me, Oh god, is my skirt tucked into my underwear or something? Do I have something on my face? Is my hair frizzy? I knew I should have used better hairspray.

"Go talk to him!" She screamed in my ear over the blasting music.

"I'm good on that," I said back to her, "not my type."

She shrugged and handed me a shot of tequila. I downed it and gagged. Tequila really is the worst alcohol, nothing good has ever come from it.

As I was trying not to throw up, I lost Sabrina in the sea of drunk people.

Great I thought this is a fucking disaster.

I felt someone grab my waist and I jumped. I've always hated people touching me.

I was hoping it would be one of the girls I was with, but to my dismay it was the guy who was looking at me a few minutes before.

“You’re so beautiful,” he muttered to me. I smelled alcohol on his breath and he was visibly drunk, “what’s your name?”

I stepped away to give our bodies some space.

“Jessica,” I said.

My name is Abby.

“Honestly, you’re so *hiccup* beautiful, who are you with?” he stuttered, and he kept stepping closer to me and grabbing me.

Obviously uncomfortable, I looked around nervously for my friends.

“Uh,” I yelled, “coworkers, I need to go find them I’m sor-“

He grabbed my arm forcefully and my stomach fell to the floor.

I looked at him in shock and terror and his dark brown eyes turned scary.

“Hey!” I heard a female voice behind me, “Hey!”

I turned around to see a girl I’ve never met before in my life.

“Hey girl! There you are! Where did you go? I’ve been looking for you!” she said to me, smiling, her eyes suggested I play along.

“Oh I, uh,” I was at a loss for words; my heart was beating too fast.

She stepped between us and grabbed my hand out of his grasp.

“I’ve been looking for you, our Uber is here.” She looked at the guy, “Sorry!”

We quickly walked away, hand in hand into the bathroom.

“Thank you so much... oh my god, thank you, I didn’t know what to do.” I said quickly and apologetically.

She smiled, “It’s happened to me so many times. Girls have to look out for each other everywhere we go.” We exchanged phone numbers in case anything else was to happen, and she helped me find me coworkers.

Ever since that day I’ve been extra attentive in situations like a club or a bar, or even house parties. I’ve gotten the same reaction every time, a thank you. The girl at the club was right, girls need to look out for other girls.

No biography submitted.



Journey to a Better Life

By: Amy DeLuna

As a Latino I hear many racial stereotypes especially about Mexicans. Some of these stereotypes include, “Mexicans are lazy. Mexicans are bad or absent parents. Mexicans are violent and come to steal our jobs.” Many ignorant people rush to judge someone and assume they know everything about them just by one look, the color of one’s skin, where they come from, or simply by their culture. However, various people overcome these and many more obstacles. I happen to know a few of people with these stories, but the story of one person affected my life the most. This is the story of a boy named Leo who rushed into manhood in order go to the U.S with the purpose of helping support his family.

A young couple from Zacatecas, Mexico got married in their late teens and had nine kids. Mexico wasn’t at its best, and the economy was fairly poor. It was very challenging for this family of eleven; therefore, the oldest son, Leo, decided he had to help out his family. Every morning at 5am he woke up to go to work in the fields with his dad. As I interviewed him to further expand my knowledge of his story he said, “I remember every morning waking up, riding the mule as my dad guided the way. Sometimes I would even fall asleep and nearly fall off.” Working in the fields wasn’t bettering their situation. Leo wanted to come to the United States to get a job with a good salary. Not only did the he want a good future for himself, but he also wanted to be able to give back to his family.

At the age of fourteen, Leo’s journey to a better life began. One day Leo’s dad took him to a bus station in Zacatecas, gave him some instructions on how to cross the border, and sent Leo on his way north to Juarez, Mexico all alone. Back then Juarez was best known as “Paso del Norte” or “Pass of the North” because it was where many people went to cross the border. When Leo arrived at Juarez, he took another bus to Tijuana, the largest city in Baja California, Mexico. He then spent the night at a cheap hotel and waited for the big day to arrive. The next day at noon he got together with the coyote, a human smuggler, and about 15 other people who were trying to pass the border by going around the immigration checkpoint to get into the United States.

Then, came the pickup plan. When the surroundings were clear, a car picked them up off of the highway and everyone had to get in that car. Leo said, “The seats were removed, one on top of the other we were

cramped like sardines on our way to San Isidro.” In San Isidro, the immigrants were put in a warehouse and then moved to a holding place in Los Angeles, California. The coyotes then had to get a hold of each individual’s family or friend or anyone who would pay the rest of the fee. One would have to stay in the warehouse until someone payed. It could be days, weeks, or even months until someone came up with the money requested. The coyotes didn’t care about anyone or anything but their money; they gave the people very poor care with little to no food at all. On some occasions, the only way out was to try to escape. The downside was that many didn’t know which way to go and if the coyotes caught them, then they would be beaten or even killed. In Leo’s case, however, they were able to contact his uncle to finish paying. The coyotes drove Leo to Angora, California to meet with his uncle in order to make the trade, the money for his life.

As soon as Leo’s uncle payed, Leo’s new life began: learning English, finding a place to stay, receiving help, and even getting a job was challenging for him. He bounced around from place to place not finding a secure home. The longest he stayed somewhere was about a month. The first job he got was in an Italian bakery working from 2am to 7pm only earning \$3 an hour. He ate only one meal a day. If he got lucky, he was able to afford a small pizza or meatball sub with a pop. Leo described feeling “like a slave working from sun up to sundown.” However, he didn’t give up hope; he continued to give his best because he knew something better would come.

After some time of being in California, Leo settled down with his uncle and saw a girl who lived on the same street as him. Her name was Maria, and she was from Guadalajara, Mexico. Leo fell in love with her thick wavy brown hair, her big hazel eyes, and her clear white skin. One day Leo saw her at a corner store, approached her and said, “¿Me disparas una soda?” He was asking her if she could buy him a soda even though they had never officially met before. Of course Maria said no and walked away. Following this, every time Leo saw Maria heading to the store he would also go and pretend to accidentally bump into her. Maria’s mom never liked Leo because he didn’t go to school and because he looked like a lazy boy with long hair. Maria’s mom told her to stay away from him, and Maria obeyed. Leo didn’t give up. After a few times of Leo flirting and being rejected, Maria finally started talking to him. This is when he finally got a chance to tell her his story. Leo explained to her that he worked very hard for many hours only to get payed very little because he was illegal. Soon they fell in

love and planned to get married. Many people, including Maria’s mother, began to say they suspected Leo was using Maria just to gain citizenship. Maria believed in Leo and disregarded what anyone had to say and they got married. Subsequent to the marriage, Leo became legal and no longer had to worry about immigration, but he was not yet a citizen. Maria tried to help him gain citizenship, but he would not accept it. Leo was hard-headed and worried that people would begin to say he would leave Maria soon after becoming a U.S citizen. Later Maria got to him; he agreed to become a citizen. After a few years of being happily married, Maria’s mom began to accept Leo and got along with him. When they were around twenty years old, they decided to move to Minnesota to be closer to some of Leo’s family.

In Minnesota they rented the basement of Leo’s uncle Nati. They were both grateful that they had a family that would give them a place to stay until they were up on their feet. Leo was working at an airport while Maria worked at a community service center. After some time, Maria didn’t feel very comfortable living in a basement anymore. She thought it was time for them to get their own house and move out. With some money they had saved up from work they were able to buy their first house together. Their house was located in South Minneapolis. Later, they found out their house was being torn down to construct a gym in place of it. Leo and Maria had to buy a new house in Cedar Ave. The house was small, looked old with broken front steps. While they were living in that small house, they became pregnant and had a little girl. Two years later, they were pregnant with another little girl. After their second girl was born, their house was way too small. They decided to sell that house and buy a bigger house for their growing family. Following their little girl’s birth in the year of 2000, Leo and Maria decided to get new jobs. Leo began working as a cook in a restaurant at the Mystic Lake Casino. Maria began to work as a receptionist at a hospital. As they looked for a new house, they realized they needed to find a safer place for them and their kids. More of Leo’s family lived in North Minneapolis and persuaded them to move to that area.

Now Leo and Maria have been married for over twenty-five years and have another daughter. They now have three beautiful girls. I am one of those girls; I am the middle child. Leo and Maria are my parents. My dad has now been a U.S citizen for many years. He is a very hardworking man who overcame many obstacles, yet still to this day, he deals with many of those same issues of discrimination. Even though he is often labeled with many stereotypes, he is one of the most humble and respectful men I know. He is an amazing father who works hard to keep his family happy

and gives us the best that he can. Even with his own small lawn service business, he still manages to give us time and affection. To this day, he still worries about his family in Mexico; however, he fulfilled his dream of coming to the U.S to better his life, his family’s life, and everyone’s future. Various people have negative things to say about immigrants like Leo, my father, but I don’t. I am very happy and proud of my dad. I am proud of him for never giving up, overcoming his fears, and overcoming all the challenges that were presented to him. I acknowledge what he went through was hard, but I am very thankful for everything he has done. I can’t imagine what my life would be like had he not done what he did to come to the U.S. All those stereotypes from ignorant people such as: Mexicans are lazy, criminals, and bad fathers have been proven wrong by my dad, Leo. There are some people who often feel ashamed of being immigrant descendants. Some often are ashamed to talk about their parents’ stories, but I am not. I thank god every day for giving me two amazing parents that can work together to keep both each other happy and me and my sisters happy.



Amy’s parents are both from Mexico; however, she was born in Minnesota which makes her Mexican-American. She is currently seventeen years old and her parents’ backgrounds have a big influence in her life. Spanish is the main spoken language in her house and she often travels to visit family in Mexico. This fall was Amy’s first semester at NHCC as a PSEO student through Brooklyn Center High School. She is currently interested in pursuing her studies in the medical field hopefully while being part of a volleyball team.

Works Cited

DeLuna, Leonardo. Personal Interview. 4 Oct. 2017.

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North Hennepin Community College's Studies in Writing and Literature

Associate of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

The Associate in Fine Arts in Creative Writing prepares students for further university-level creative writing studies by combining liberal arts general education courses and foundation courses in various genres of writing and literary studies. Graduates will be able to write effectively in multiple genres of creative writing with the intent of beginning a career in a related field or transferring into a baccalaureate program at a 4-year institution.

English Transfer Pathway Associate of Arts

The English Transfer Pathway AA offers students the opportunity to complete an AA degree with course credits that directly transfer to designated English bachelor's degree programs at Minnesota State universities. The curriculum has been specifically designed so that students completing this pathway degree and transferring to one of the seven Minnesota State universities enter with junior-year status. The courses in the Transfer Pathway associate degree will expose students to a broad knowledge of literary periods, genres, criticism and methods of interpretation, and writing, and all will directly transfer and apply to the designated bachelor's degree program in a related field.

Academic English Language Proficiency Certificate

This certificate recognizes that a student in the EAP (English Language for Academic Purpose) program has demonstrated a high level of proficiency in academic English language and literacy skills to support student academic and career success. Students also gain skills for education and employment through the completion of elective courses which support continued development of written, verbal, and technology communication, advancement of international perspectives, and career exploration.

Other Publication Opportunities at NHCC

Northern Light

Northern Light is a student-run journal dedicated to the publication of original scholarship by NHCC students in order to disseminate knowledge and increase the visibility of undergraduate research at two-year colleges. It is published electronically on the web every spring. 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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