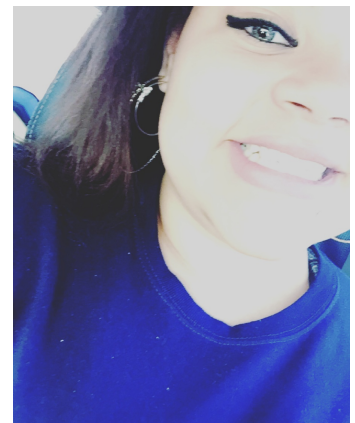
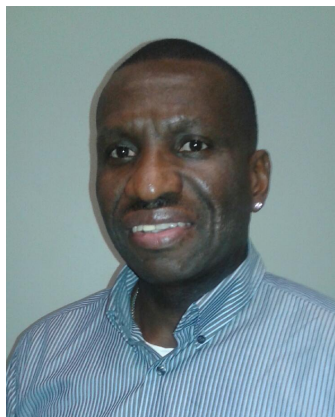
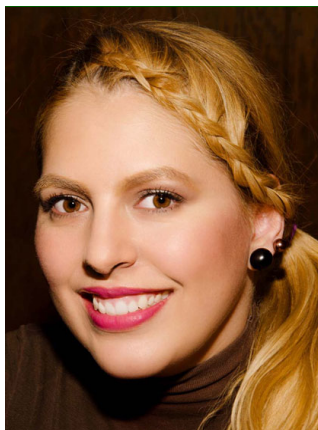


# INSIGHT

2016 NJALL

*Learner Writing Contest*

*Winners and Honorable Mentions*



# **INSIGHT**

## **Volume Two, 2016**

### **New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning**

For years, many adult education teachers and tutors have worked to make students' own words a key part of the learning and teaching process. In adult literacy classes, adult basic education programs and with adults learning English, teachers ask students to capture their experience and insight in writing. Not only does this work help the writer develop their skills and awareness of language, student written pieces can also serve as mentor texts for other learners. Indeed, we hope that the pieces in this volume will be shared widely and read in the classroom.

This is the second year NJALL has held this learner writing contest. Last year we received 75 submissions from all around the state, and this year we received nearly 80. We are very happy that students and teachers have responded so positively to the contest, and we plan to run the contest again next year. As always, we were very humbled by students' willingness to share their personal stories, including accounts of very sensitive experiences. We hope that the process was positive and productive for all the students who participated in the contest.

For the second year we also invited some of the contest winners to present their work at the annual NJALL conference. During the workshop, conference attendees were able to ask the student writers about their process and hear about ways that teachers can support their learners' writing. The poetry contest winner, Alyssa Davis, was gracious enough to read her piece at the start of the day before all of those in attendance and she received a very positive response.

Thanks again to all the writers, teachers and reviewers that made this magazine possible. We look forward to reading the submissions for next year's contest.

Erik Jacobson

Perrine Robinson-Geller

*Chairs, NJALL Learner Writing Contest*

2016 Reviewers: Keith Forrest, Debbie Graham, Faleeha Hassan Al Alabboodi

## 2016 NJALL LEARNER WRITING CONTEST

### AWARD WINNERS

#### Memoir

Winner	<i>Rising Above</i>	Barry Batts	1
Second Place	<i>A Day in the Life Of...</i>	Anonymous	5
Third Place	<i>Childhood Memories</i>	Beralia Briceno	7

#### Poetry

Winner	<i>Goodbye Letter</i>	Alyssa Davis	9
Second Place	<i>A Christmas Letter</i>	Fernanda Contreras	11
Third Place	<i>Drifting Into Eternal Slumber</i>	George Aguero	12

#### Non-Fiction

Winner	<i>Too Much Stuff</i>	Christine Coffineau	14
Second Place	<i>I Believe in Sleep</i>	Chelsea Acquino	16
Third Place	<i>Untitled</i>	Charles Brown	18

#### Fiction

Winner	<i>Confused Young Man</i>	Clifford Henry	20
Second Place	<i>Untitled</i>	Charles Brown	35
Third Place	<i>Winter's Surprise</i>	Andre Allen	39

#### Photography

Co-Winners	Anzhela Lukianova	Maricela Sandoval	40
------------	-------------------	-------------------	----

## HONORABLE MENTION

### MEMOIR

<i>Growing up in Gaza</i>	<i>Aisha Abdulla</i>	42
<i>My Memoir</i>	<i>Charles Brown</i>	42
<i>I Never Left Your Side</i>	<i>Tammie Byrd</i>	45
<i>El Salvador</i>	<i>Yvonne Carceres</i>	45
<i>My Memory of Chinese New Year in Hong Kong</i>	<i>Ka Ming Chan (Carmen)</i>	48
<i>Memoir</i>	<i>Meriane Dernier</i>	48
<i>Indian Weddings Like Mine</i>	<i>Payal Garg</i>	48
<i>My Life's Story</i>	<i>Clifford Henry</i>	49
<i>Untitled</i>	<i>Filipe Jaco</i>	52
<i>My Mother Susan</i>	<i>Sabrina Johnson</i>	52
<i>Trip to Paradise on the Earth</i>	<i>Surya Kandiyani</i>	53
<i>Weidong</i>	<i>Lucy Liu</i>	57
<i>My Journey To Get My Education Back</i>	<i>Mariella Mamone</i>	57
<i>A Letter as a Reminder</i>	<i>Andrea Mego</i>	58
<i>What A Time To Be Alive</i>	<i>Eriel Montesino</i>	60
<i>Change of Mind</i>	<i>Curtis Moore</i>	61
<i>Watch Don't Ask</i>	<i>Jaelixa Narvaez</i>	61
<i>Untitled</i>	<i>Oluwamayowa Oshodi</i>	62
<i>The Day I Became A Mother</i>	<i>Rhonda Sanders</i>	63
<i>My Memories in a New Country</i>	<i>Maricela Sandoval</i>	64
<i>Memoir</i>	<i>Jean Emile Souffrance</i>	65
<i>Memoir</i>	<i>Kedner Suffray</i>	66
<i>My American Dream</i>	<i>Zhi Sun</i>	66

<i>My Experience in the Running World</i>	<i>Laura Padilla Tellez</i>	67
<i>Returning Home!</i>	<i>Claudia Trani-Melgar</i>	68
<i>Memory of My Father</i>	<i>Li Tu</i>	70
<i>Reflections of My Life</i>	<i>Chin Wang</i>	70
<i>Senior People</i>	<i>Xuefeng Yang (Staller)</i>	71
<i>Through Thick and Thin</i>	<i>Anonymous</i>	72

#### POETRY

<i>In a Hurry</i>	<i>Abid Saeed</i>	74
<i>Your Peace</i>	<i>Ecaterina Birca</i>	75
<i>Reflections</i>	<i>Charles Brown</i>	75
<i>Unique</i>	<i>Charles Brown</i>	75
<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Charles Brown</i>	76
<i>Destiny</i>	<i>Charles Brown</i>	76
<i>Timeless Shade</i>	<i>Charles Brown</i>	77
<i>Thinking Out Loud</i>	<i>Zhnai Davis</i>	77
<i>Love Forbidden and Overrated</i>	<i>Zhnai Davis</i>	77
<i>Mixed Emotions</i>	<i>Zhnai Davis</i>	78
<i>The Story Behind the Pain</i>	<i>Zhnai Davis</i>	79
<i>Rainy Days</i>	<i>Zhnai Davis</i>	79
<i>God's Gift</i>	<i>Jeremy Johnson</i>	80
<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Rosa Nieves</i>	80
<i>Winter Time</i>	<i>Rosa Nieves</i>	81
<i>Thee</i>	<i>Rosa Nieves</i>	81
<i>Love Never Dies</i>	<i>Pat Smalley</i>	82
<i>You Never Had a Friend Like Me</i>	<i>Pat Smalley</i>	82

*FICTION*

<i>Enthrallment</i>	<i>George Agüero</i>	83
<i>A Secret</i>	<i>Ray H. Irving</i>	83

*NON-FICTION*

<i>The Boiled Frog (Selections))</i>	<i>György (George) Bartoli</i>	85
<i>Untitled</i>	<i>Daniela Carvalho</i>	89
<i>The Autumn in Qingdao</i>	<i>Shuang Chen</i>	90
<i>Mastiffs Are the Perfect Family Dog</i>	<i>Sara France</i>	90
<i>The Benefits of Learning English</i>	<i>Cesar Peralta Garcia</i>	92
<i>Autumn: My Favorite Season of the Year</i>	<i>Harry Lee</i>	93

## About Our Winners

### Chelsea Aquino



My name is Chelsea Aquino, I'm 19 years old from Hammonton, NJ. I graduated from Hammonton High School in 2015, and now attend Atlantic Cape through the NJSTARS program. I study Computer Science, with hopes of transferring to Rutgers-Camden or Rowan University in the future.

### George Aguero



As an ardent student and observer of life, I enjoy picking up on the subtleties that go unnoticed during the hustle and bustle of everyday life. I later explore and evolve these ideas into more in depth narratives that I enjoy sharing with the world. If you'd like to read more of my work you can visit my instagram: @inky\_veins or my blog: [veinsburstingwithink.wordpress.com](http://veinsburstingwithink.wordpress.com)

### Andre Allen

Andre Allen was born in Harlem, NY. He currently works two jobs, in the receiving department of a trucking company as well as the security department of a car dealership. In his spare time, Andre plays sports, including basketball. With his love of sports and experience with sports injuries, Andre would like to help other athletes by becoming a Physical Therapy Assistant.

### **Barry Batts**



Barry Batts grew up in New York City, one of 14 children. As a child he was never registered for school by his parents and he never attended. Barry was 50 when he enrolled in a Literacy Volunteers of America program and, within a couple of years of working with a tutor, he was reading and writing. He is now keen on putting his life in print. Barry has developed a passion for flowers and, in his spare time, loves to garden. In his home garden, he has set up a tranquil space where he and his friends can unwind. Barry also enjoys tackling home improvement projects.

### **Beralia Briceno**



Beralia grew up in Honduras where she worked as a teacher in the Central American country. In the U.S. she developed an interest in the environment and earned an associate's degree from Utah Valley State College (now Utah Valley University) in Provo, with a specialization in environmental science. In her spare time she enjoys riding bicycles with her 9-year-old daughter and reading books about water treatment.

### **Charles Brown**



My name is Charles T. Brown. I reside in Salem, NJ. I am currently a student at PathStone Adult Education Program in Salem, NJ. I am preparing to pass the TASC Test and obtain my High School Diploma. Growing up I always enjoyed reading many stories from different authors who later inspired me to write my own stories. I am focused now and hope to achieve the greatest goal of my life; being a successful prolific writer.

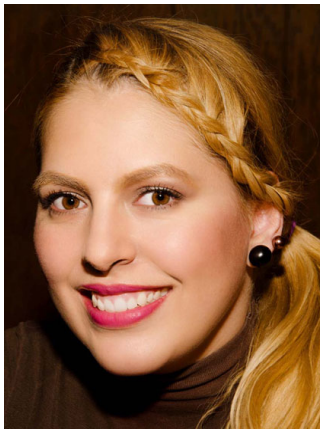


### **Christine Coffineau**



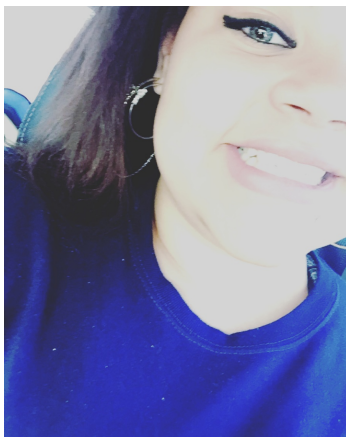
Christine was born in Long Island, NY, but grew up in northern Italy and it is probably there, in Europe, that she acquired a minimalistic attitude. She is very proud to be a citizen of the United States and prays often for her country to satisfy their needs instead of their wants. Christine is striving for an occupation that will assist the elderly in fitness training and remaining physically active.

### **Fernanda Contreras**



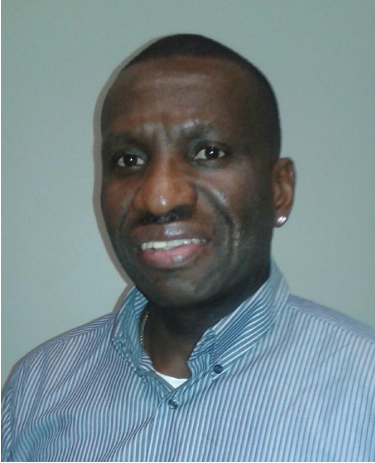
Fernanda was born in Calarcá, an important coffee-producing municipality in eastern Colombia. She earned a bachelor's degree in eco-business and worked in her country's burgeoning eco-tourism industry before coming to the U.S. She is married and has a 12-year-old daughter, to whom she wrote her prize-winning poem as a letter. She's an avid English student who enjoys teaching Spanish to tutors in LVA's English-Spanish Language Exchange, which she helped launch. When she's not studying English, Fernanda enjoys exercising outdoors, bicycling with her husband, and taking aerobics and zumba classes.

### **Alyssa Davis**



Alyssa Davis is part of Paterson Public Schools' New Jersey Youth Corps Program and graduated in June, 2016. She brought many attributes to the program and was the Lead Student, Student Government Liaison and Crew Leader while at Community Service Projects.

## Clifford Henry



Clifford has spent more than 35 years in the Army Reserve, serving in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, among other military outposts. He has five children, the youngest a 17-year-old son, and works as a restaurant cook. As a teenager growing up in Florida, Clifford dropped out of school in order to work full-time. He came to LVA Essex & Passaic Counties in the hopes of earning a GED and, eventually, attending college. He said he won't quit his studies until these are done.

# MEMOIR

## WINNER

### Rising Above

By Barry Batts

My name is Barry Batts. I want to tell you a story about my life and how I got to this point in my life. First of all, life is good for me now, but it wasn't always that way. Being born in the United States and being a child growing up you would hope to have good parents—a mommy and a daddy. But that was just a dream for me and my siblings. There were seven of us children born to my father and mother but there were seven others born to my mother by other men. Life for me was not easy growing up.

When I was a little boy I remember looking at television shows in the 60s and how it showed loving families. But we never saw that in our family. Why couldn't we be like the families on TV?

I remember my father was in the U.S. Army and he would come home on leave to spend time with his family. My siblings and I would try to dress in the best clothing we had at that time to impress dad. Little did my father know that we were hungry, we had not eaten for two days.

I remember one Christmas Eve when my mother had beaten us and left us home for a few days alone in the house with no food while she went to her boyfriend's house. But when my mother knew my father was coming home she would beat him home and tell us kids to lie to him and tell him we were in school. It seemed like he believed us.

We lived in my uncle's house but we had to sleep on a damp basement floor. My mother was getting public assistance to help take care of us and my dad was sending us an allotment check once a month to help take care of us. But my mother would give the checks to her boyfriend and we went without. I remember one morning we were so hungry my brother and I snuck upstairs as my sister looked out at the side door to see if anyone was coming. We snuck into the kitchen. We looked into the bottom cabinet as we slowly and cautiously opened the squeaking door. We looked and decided to take a can of corn from the back of the cabinet so it wouldn't be so obvious among the other canned goods. My brother ran downstairs with the can but I wasn't as fast. I got caught by my uncle and he told my mother on me. I tried to lie and say I went upstairs to see what time it was, even though I couldn't tell time. My mother beat me so bad and for some reason she was biting my hands like they were a piece of meat.

It seemed like I was always getting beaten for things, I never knew why. I remember one August evening when my grandmother came over to our house. We had just seen our father that day. She was very mad. She was screaming and cursing at me and I did not understand why. My mother grabbed me and she and my grandmother tore my clothes off me. There was an extension cord nearby and I hoped they wouldn't see it, but they did. Each time it hit my bare skin it burned. I thought they were enjoying it and the only reason they stopped was the neighbors banging on the front door threatening to call the cops because of my loud screams.

My mother never registered me and three of my siblings for school, so that is why I never went to school as a child. To make the neighbors think we were in school my uncle would take us out in his car in the morning and over to his mother's house. Some of our neighbors began to wonder if we were in school. But sending us to my grandmother's house, where we would sit in her backyard all day, allowed

us to stay hidden from the school authorities in New York City, one of the greatest cities in the United States. My mother lied to them and told the authorities that we had moved down south, and they believed her. So they never came looking for us after that. But it seemed like no one really cared.

My father left us. I hoped he would have come back and taken us with him, maybe to his mother and father's house in North Carolina, but I guess that was wishful thinking.

I had to grow up fast, starting with a paper route, raking leaves and shoveling snow around the neighborhood. When I got old enough, my first real job was cleaning a motel and working in factories. I had to grow up very fast in order to make sure my younger siblings would not suffer. They had to eat and have a clean bed to sleep in and clean clothes to go to school in. So I had to start quick, and it was worth it: My siblings were very successful. They made me proud. So we got something good out of a sad childhood upbringing when no one else cared and the authorities didn't look for us.

My mother kept having different boyfriends but they always were married men. She kept getting pregnant, bringing more hungry mouths to feed. Then the men would leave and go back to their wives. It was bad enough for us but the babies had to eat and needed diapers.

Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, who lived in one of the houses where I raked leaves on one of my routes, took a special liking to me. They were an elderly couple with no children, so they treated me like a son. They would give me an allowance for the chores I would do for them. As soon as I got it I ran to the supermarket and bought groceries, baby formula and diapers for the babies because their daddies would not. My mother gave her friends some of the children born out of wedlock, but the rest stayed with us.

So you see why I had to work hard to do whatever I could. It made me a strong person. When I fall, with God's help I get back up. We were children living in a damp dark Laurelton, Queens basement: forgotten about. But my siblings and I did not become statistics in the penal system. I put my own interests aside to take care of my family and helped get them all off to a good start.

Thank you, God, now I can concentrate on myself. I know that every child has the right to an education, but I missed out due to my mother. I somehow taught myself to read and write, at least enough to get by. Now I am studying with my tutor who volunteers to help. My goal is to someday get my GED.

So in closing, everything my parents failed to do we did better. To my siblings: we are determined. To my parents: you tried to keep us down and hold us back: you lost!

## SECOND PLACE

### A Day in the Life of...

Anonymous

I'm in my room, sitting at the corner of my bed in the fetal position. My head, down on my knees, I begin to pray. As I pray I could feel the tears coming down the side of my cheeks. I just don't understand. Why me? Why out of anyone that this could be happening to, why me? I mean.... I know it's selfish to wish it were someone else in my position. I wouldn't want anyone to be going through something as horrible as this, and the worse part is I can't even bring myself to tell mom. How could I? I mean she's so happy...

"LIGHTS OUT, \*\*\*\*", I can hear mom say as I take a deep breath in and continue to pray a little longer. When I finally get myself up I nervously walk toward the light switch and after another nervous breath, turn the light off. I walk back to my bed and get under my covers. All there is left to do is hope and pray that tonight won't be one of those nights...I continue to cry some more and eventually I feel my eyes getting heavy as I slowly fall asleep through tears of fear.

(gasp) I wake up. I can hear something. It's almost 2 o'clock in the morning and that feeling I always get when I know it's about to begin has just finished creeping through my body. I can hear the floor creek, and as the sound of the creaking floor gets closer and closer, my heart begins to pound louder and louder. At last there's that shadow at my door... now my heart feels like it's about to jump out of my mouth. I take a deep breath, but there's just no way to be prepared. I can hear the doorknob twist. I turn to bury my face into my pillow and pretend to be asleep. Now he's in my room. He walks up until he's on the side of my bed, and then...

I can feel his hands on me, on my body. But, there is nothing I can do. I'm scared. I feel alone. It's times like now when I try not to think about the things he's doing to me. I try to find my happy place. I think about how happy mom is and how I wouldn't want to ruin it for her. I'm a big girl. I can take it. I can get through this, for mom.

Finally ... its over...and again I cry myself to sleep...

It's morning now. Time to put on my big girl face. I take a deep breath. I can do this. It's nothing new. I've done it so many times before. I get up, run to the shower and sit in the fetal position. Thinking. Thinking about how weak, I feel. Thinking about how hard it is, having to go through this every night. I get out of the shower. I get dressed. My body is sore. I hate this feeling. I wish I could just lay in my bed all day and cry. Not having to face my mother and tell her I'm fine when I'm really not...

I walk up to my door, take a breath in and out, and head to the kitchen. Mom is making breakfast. My brothers are sitting at the table eating, and him.... He just walked into the kitchen. I sit down at the table and mom gives me my plate of food. As I eat, I could feel a hot stare burning my body, and when I look up he's staring right at me. Eating his food without taking his eyes off of mine. I look down at my plate and sigh, just another day. It's like nothing ever happened.



## THIRD PLACE

### Childhood Memories

By Beralia Briceno

When I think about my early life in Danli, Honduras the word “free” comes to my mind. I remember flying kites, feeling the fresh air in my face, and running through the spacious fields. The sweet smelling wild flowers made me feel very close to nature. I loved the sound of the small ravine where I frequently swam. Sometimes I walked over the suspension bridge that swayed over the ravine. My mom was at home waiting for us to come for her dinner. We had delicious tortillas, with cheese, beans, rice and eggs. Our table was very crowded with five sisters and one brother and of course my dad who came home very tired from driving a tar truck to and from the city.

At the weekend our whole family took care of our small field where we planted corn, beans, yucca and plantain. We kept some food for ourselves and the rest my father and brother would sell to the Mercado in town.

We also helped our mother with some chores before going to school - like feeding the chickens and the pigs and gathering the eggs for breakfast. My brother helped to milk the three cows and to feed Lucero, our horse.

Climbing in the trees was my favorite thing to do. I would find mangos, guavas, oranges and I would eat them while sitting in the tree with my sister Ana. We played rayuela (hopscotch) and hide and seek. It was difficult to find each other because there were many, many places to hide.

After we did all our morning chores we were ready to go to school. It was a very long walk on rough roads but we played and sang many songs. It was fun and we were joined by other neighbors.

Our teacher Matilde was a very nice and dynamic lady who taught grades 1-3. She recognized that I was a type of child who liked to ask questions and to get answers. We did not have a library so she brought many books for us to borrow. She advised us to study hard.

Looking back I realize how wonderful my childhood was and how it helped me to be a good person and a caring mother. I am sorry that my daughter who lives in the city cannot climb trees, care for farm animals and run near sweet smelling fields as I did.

## POETRY

### WINNER

#### Goodbye Letter

By Alyssa Davis

I feel as though I owe you,  
That I need you,  
You found me when I was only thirteen,  
Young and broken.  
You helped me numb the pain I was consumed within,  
Led me to forget all I was trying to no longer to remember.  
I felt as though you helped me when I couldn't help myself,  
Fore it as though I believed that perhaps,  
You were a gift from God.  
Sadly, you were far from a gift...  
Once I fell victim to you,  
I couldn't see,  
As if I were blind,  
I couldn't see all the bad you were doing to me.  
Consumed me you did,  
Destroy me you did.  
But blame you?  
I never did.  
But I am no longer blinded by you,  
No longer will I allow you to control me  
I now know you are no good for me.

I will not bow to you again.

I will find it in myself to be strong.

I will start to love me for whom I am.

And with that, I am saying goodbye.

## SECOND PLACE

### A Christmas Letter

By Fernanda Contreras

Dear darling daughter,

It's Christmas and it's a very special day. The people are very happy. They eat turkey and ham, and drink wine. Also, they sing songs around the Christmas tree. The children leave cookies and milk for Santa Claus. When they wake up, they open their gifts.

But in Colombia, it's different. During the week before Christmas day, the children pray around the nativity and sing typical songs like: Nana, The River Fishes, and Go Pastors Go. Then people eat natilla with bunuelos, and lechona. When it's 12 PM on Christmas Eve, the children open the gifts. The adults dance and drink beers while the children play with their new toys.

I know for 6 years I have not seen you, but I remember your face, your hands, your smile, and scent. You are always on my mind and in my heart every day of the year. Please don't forget I love you and you are my gift from God.

I hope you will go far in your life. You can touch the stars and make your dreams come true. It does not matter what you choose. If you want to be a doctor, nurse or teacher, I will be happy. What I will always look for is your happiness.

If you want to see me, you can see the moon because we are under the same moon. If you want to feel me, you can feel your heart. If you want to kiss me, I send my kisses in the wind. I promise darling daughter, your heart and my heart are one beat.

Merry Christmas my angel.

Your mother

## THIRD PLACE

### Drifting Into Eternal Slumber

By George Aguero

As I emit my final gasp,  
a gentle calm sweeps over my vessel,  
akin to the aftermath  
of a great wave  
crashing  
onto the shores of life.

Alone with my thoughts,  
my time on this earth  
feels transient,  
foreshortened to a degree  
unbeknownst to me before.

The gap between existence and oblivion  
grows ever shorter  
as the vivid colors of life,  
once basked in,  
transition to ghastly  
washed out versions of their former selves.

Without warning, my heart  
emits a final beat,  
only to keep lingering  
like an unwanted echo  
in my mind.

Ba dum,  
bad um,  
bad um.

It is the sole reminder  
of my former life,  
before a Stygian eclipse  
assaults my being,  
embracing it fully,  
to signal the end of my time.

# NON-FICTION

## WINNER

### Too Much Stuff

By Christine Coffineau

I believe in minimalization. My needs versus my wants have never been a difficult choice. To live I need air, water, and shelter, and most importantly, I need to give and receive love. I do not have many wants.

I believe the more I own, the more I do not know what I own. No matter how well I organize and store my belongings, what is out of sight is out of mind. I cannot recall ever having said, "Oh my gosh, I completely forgot I had this." I know everything I have because I do not have a lot of stuff.

I believe "stuff" is a dirty word: a thief of time. The more stuff I have the more time I spend using it. Otherwise, what's the point of having it? For example, I lived without a television for four years, and I accomplished so much that I vowed never to have one again. Sure, I love an Academy Award winning movie or documentary occasionally, but in my opinion, the rest of television programming is pure nonsense. I refuse to let that "thing" steal my precious time.

I believe in living simply and having more time for simply living. The less I have the happier I am because when I complicate my life with material things I feel weighed down. I am not the only one who feels this way. Many people testify that decluttering their homes lifts a heavy weight off their shoulders. These folks are not hoarders; they are mentally stable and everyday people like me, just with more room in our closets.



I believe shopping distresses me. I have difficulty choosing what to buy because there is too much from which to choose. I cannot “just go shopping.” I buy only if I need something specific, or for a special occasion, and if I can’t find it...I am outta there! My more fashionable girlfriends tell me my wardrobe is “criminal,” and it’s true, but that doesn’t bother me. I admit, I still have clothes that I wore in high school thirty-three years ago, and they still fit! I am very proud of that fact. Am I a miser? No. Am I cheap? No way. Am I thrifty? Heck yeah! I find unique treasures at the second-hand stores.

I believe that not having a lot of stuff helps me hold onto the rewards of my labor—money. When I was a teenager, my father taught me an old Neapolitan saying about money. “Stipe che trova,” which translated means, “Save it and you’ll find it.” If I do not save my money, it will not be there when I go to look for it. I don’t have much else to do with money except save it and donate some of it to people whose needs are greater than mine are. In doing so, I remind myself of the few luxuries I am fortunate to have.

I believe that my relationship with God and all the living things He created is far more valuable than my relationship with an object. My church, my family, my boyfriend, my friends and total strangers deserve my attention. I can give them more of myself if I’m not crushed by the demands of stuff. A true minimalist’s creed is, “I can share love with some one, but not with some thing.”

## SECOND PLACE

### I Believe in Sleep

Chelsea Aquino

I believe in the prisoner's escape from reality. I believe in the rich man's go-to after a long day of work. I believe in every teenager's favorite part of the day. I believe in sleep.

I see sleep as a beautiful thing and cherish every moment of it. Some say "sleep when you're dead," but I'd have to disagree on that one. I disagree because it allows an easy escape from our problems for a small amount of time in our busy lives.

In October 2013, I hit a brick wall in my busy life. I went from waking up everyday and heading to school to waking up with a group of doctors around me with puzzled looks on their faces. I'd wake up to the faint whispers of interns reading my chart and trying not to interrupt my peaceful rest. I was entered into the hospital for a mysterious head pain that wouldn't go away. Doctors threw everything on the table and couldn't quite find out what was going on with my head. I went from laughing and joking with friends at lunch, to laughing and joking with the nurse taking twenty tubes of blood from my tiny worn out veins. All of these changes, yet one thing remained the same, sleep. It allowed me to clear my mind and take a break from this new crazy routine. Looking back, it was hands down one of the hardest times of my life, and it took such a toll on me mentally and physically. It helped me get through the roughest patch of my life thus far, sleep allowed the brightness to shine through a cloud of darkness.

My parents always said from the minute I was born I went back to sleep. It has clearly been my go to for a very long time.

My best friend grew up with naps being her go to too, but for a completely different reason. Her father was an alcoholic, and her mom would constantly be trying to flee his abusive line of fire. There would be nights that up to four o'clock in the morning all my friend would hear is the screams and cries of her dysfunctional family while hiding in her room. She knew she had to get some rest because in a few hours she'd have to put on a happy face at school. Those few hours in the late morning she will always describe as the best moments of her childhood. She said she'd always dream of the perfect family she'd have in the future. She knew that things would get better and sleep gave her the strength she always needed to keep on keeping on and never give up on life.

Sleep is beautiful because everyone can have it. It is not restricted strictly for one type of person, race, or class. Sleep is a little piece of paradise that everyone can afford.

## THIRD PLACE

### Untitled

Charles Brown

I stood motionless as I wondered what the sudden booming noise was all about. Just a minute earlier I parked my car in a residential area for the purpose of visiting some friends, the noise turned suddenly into a steady roar as five fighter jets thundered above me, flying in perfect formation: I was transfixed as I watched them make a u-turn in the sky to their appointed destination.

The technology of yesterday is much different than the technology of today. If the 1800's technology could be compared to the technology of today's 2015 it would be no comparison. If the people from the past could view what we have now pertaining to today's technological achievements, they would be stunned with surprise and disbelief, claiming what they were witnessing could only exist in a fiction novel.

Why should the experiences of others who have witnessed strange phenomenon be considered a subject to avoid publicly? Classified invalid for serious discussion? Truth is stranger than fiction so it has been said.

Sometimes if we make this subject matter a theme of study, we would have to wrestle with the question what is truth, what is fiction? We can go just about anywhere in the world and find some of our technologies effects in the atmosphere, in the water we drink and in the bathing process: the earth we walk on, as well in the crops we plant. Everything seems effected from our technological achievements. We as men developed mass weapons of destruction, but when can we develop an invention can turn chaos into in utopia? This world has seen many changes. The world in which we live in used to be so vast, until men have invented

means to acquire travel in such a rate that the distances of travel we have considered great! Mean little to us in this technological age.

Men have studied how fast sound travels and now he can beat it! He's studying the velocity of light, traveling at 186,000 miles per sec. and plans to beat it too. It sounds farfetched even fictional! But as we look back in the past and see the slope of achievement man has accomplished, we can see from bass to what we call the top, it's very high and as man pursues his goal of conquest it's going to get much higher. Who can tell what man will accomplish within the next 100 years?

In the early 1960's John Glenn and others achieved space travel, something that was never accomplished by man. There are always obstructions in the way to discourage, intimidate or ridicule. It doesn't matter what you do, if it is something you believe in and you reach for it in order to make it a reality, it may seem unbelievable but anything is possible. This is a profound truth, but some of today's' realities have sprung from yesterdays fiction.

# FICTION

## WINNER

### Confused Young Man

By Clifford Henry

A young man was missing for three days. The mother and father were worried about their son.

The family put photo pictures all over the town. With the picture was the message, "If anyone saw my son, call us."

The father called the police station.

Officer Reed said, "May I help you, please?"

The father said, "My son is missing for three days."

Officer Reed said, "Someone will be over to take your report. What is your address?"

The father said, "222 Hillside Avenue."

His wife said, "What did the police say?"

"They will be over in a half hour to take a report."

The doorbell rang. The father answered the door.

Officer Peterson said, "I'm here to take a report for a missing son."

The father said, "Come on in and have a seat."

Officer Peterson said, "Start from the beginning."

The father said, "Me and my son got into a big argument."

Officer Peterson said, "About what?"

"He was stealing from us and would lie. He ran out the house. I ain't seen him since. I should have made it clearer before he went out the door."

Officer Peterson said, "How old is your son?"

The father said, "18 years old and his name is Michael."

Office Peterson said, "We'll be in touch."

The father said, "Thank you very much, Officer Peterson."

The mother said, "Go up to his room to find some telephone numbers to call some friends."

The father was driving around in the neighborhood to find his son. He stopped at a couple of places he thought he hung out at. He approached the young men on the corner. A young man said, "I saw him walking around on the streets. He was wearing blue jeans and a blue jacket."

The father said, "Thank you for your information." He went back into the house. The mother called a couple of places – no answer. The father told his daughters that their brother was missing. The mother noticed some of his clothes were missing. The two daughters came over to the house. One daughter said, "How long has he been missing?"

He said, "Least three days. I didn't mean for him to leave."

The younger daughter said, "Did you call any of his friends? He will come back when he cools down."

The other daughter said, "What are you talking about, Dad?"

The father said, "Money was missing from the house. He wouldn't go to school. I got tired of it."

The father got a strange telephone call. A man said, "If you want your son back, I want you to give me \$3000. I'll call tomorrow to tell you where to come. If you tell anyone, I will kill your son."

The father kept the phone call from his family. He did not want them to know.

The mother said, "Who was that on the phone?"

The father responded, "Is no one, Honey. I'll be right back."

The father went to the police station. He went up to the desk. "My son was kidnapped."

The police officer said, "Calm down, sir, take a deep breath. How do you know your son was kidnapped?"

The father said, "I got a phone call at my house from a man. He told me my son was kidnapped. I'm supposed to meet him tomorrow with \$3000. When I get more information, I will tell you."

The police officer said, "Go back home and wait until tomorrow. We will be there. Don't tell anyone."

The father went back to the house. He walked into the house. He did not say anything to anyone.

The wife said, "Where did you go?"

He said, "I went to the police station."

She said, "Why would you go to the police station?"

He said, "I got a phone call from someone to tell me our son was kidnapped."

The mother said, "Why couldn't you tell me the truth where you were going?"

He said, "I did not want to get the family upset. We all have to focus on the situation. The police officer is supposed to be here."

The police came to the house. The father asked, "What took you so long to get here?"

The officer said, "We had to put someone on the case."

The phone rang. The father picked up the phone. The police officer was recording the information. The man said, "Bring the money to 362 Drive Street and



make sure the money is in small bills. Make sure you come alone. If you love your son, you will do the right thing."

"How do I know my son is alive? Can I speak to him?"

The man said, "No more questions."

The father asked the officer, "Did you get all of that?"

The police officer said, "Yes, I'm going to replay the tape. Make sure we get everything we need on tape so we have this plan tight. Do you have the money?"

The father said, "Yes, I have the money. The money is put away."

The police officer said, "Go get the money and meet me outside."

The father said, "I'm very nervous."

The police officer said, "This is not the time to be nervous. You got to be tough to get your son back. I will be following you. Don't give him any idea someone is following you. First before you give him any money, make sure you see your son. Be very careful what you say to him. We got police around the area."

The father spotted the man with his son.

The man said, "You have the money?"

The father said, "Let my son go. I will give you the money."

The man said, "Give me the money and I give you your son, no trick."

The father threw the money over to the man. The son ran over to his father. The man ran away with the money. The police officers chased the man for a minute. The man ran into an abandoned house. The police officers surrounded the house. They said, "Come out with your hands up." The man was shooting at the police. The police officers shot back at the man. The man kept shooting. The police officers kept shooting back. The shooting stopped on both sides. The police officers rushed into the abandoned house. The police found the man dead on the floor. The man

hid the money before he died. The police officers searched the house. They found the money under a board in the floor.

The report said, "The man is dead." The police went back to the location where the father and the son were standing.

The father said, "Did you catch the kidnapper?"

The police officer said, "Yes, but the kidnapper is dead."

The father said, "Did he have the money on him?"

The police officer said to the son, "Did you know the kidnapper?"

The young man said, "No"

The police said, "I have to take your son in for more information."

The father said, "Can I take my son home now?" He demanded, "Where is my money? I'm not leaving till I get my money."

The police officer said, "The money is yours. Make sure your son will be there tomorrow morning."

The father said, "I will make sure he is there tomorrow morning."

The father said to his son, "Everyone will be glad to see you come home. Mother will be so happy to see you."

The father and son walked into the house. "The man was caught by the police officer. He was killed by the police officer."

The mother said, "Thank God my son is ok. Did you get the money back from the police officer?"

The father said, "Yes, I got the money back. Count all the money. We both have to have a long talk about rules and regulations in this house. You have to listen to me and your mom. Go to school or to work. Do you have anything to say?"

The son said, "Mom and Dad, I will change. I'm so sorry what I put you through but I have a drug problem. I need help."

The father said, "We will get you help."

The mother said, "We love you very much. We want you to do right thing."

The father said, "Since we cleared all this up, everything is ok. Let's go to the police station to clear everything. I will drive you there."

The son said, "Dad, I have something to tell you. Promise me you won't get mad with me, Dad."

The dad said, "I promise you I won't get mad with you. What's important, Son, is to talk to me about what?" He pulled the car over. "Tell me what you have to say."

"I planned the kidnapping, Dad. I made the call. The man was homeless on the streets. I knew he had a criminal record in the past. I told him he would get a thousand dollars. Only thing he needed to do was to go to the location and pick up the money. The man had no idea what was going on. I really need that money. I got in really big trouble with a drug dealer. I didn't have no idea where to get the money from. He will kill me in four days. I'm very sorry, Dad. I didn't want no one to get hurt. If the drug dealers can get to me, they will hurt my family. I do not know what to do."

The father said, "You got an innocent man killed for nothing. There's nothing I can do for you. Turn yourself into the police."

The son said, "Before I turn myself in, I would kill myself."

The father said, "Son, you do not have to kill yourself. Turn yourself into the police. That will break your mother's heart if you kill yourself. Killing yourself won't solve the problem. Think for a minute before you go in. We will keep that to ourselves what we talked about. Promise me this will not happen again. I put my neck out for you, Son, and you really have to keep this to yourself what we talked about. Don't talk to no one about what you told me."

The son said, "Promise, Dad, I would keep that to myself. Thank you, Dad."  
The boy walked into the police station and told the police that the man kidnapped him."

The policeman said, "Did you know the man?"

The boy said, "I never saw him before."

The police officer said, "I'm going to ask you one more time, did you ever see this man before? If I find out you lied to us we're going lock you up."

The boy said, "I am telling you the truth."

The police officer said, "You can leave but we will be looking out."

The boy walked out of the police station. "That was very close," he thought.

The boy went back to the car. The father said, "What did they say to you?"

The boy said, "I told the police that I did not know the kidnapper. If they find out I am lying, I am going to jail. Dad, I am very nervous and scared. I am going to have a drug dealer on my case soon. Dad, what should I do?"

The father said, "You want me to give you advice? What should you do? Make a better life for yourself and go back to school. Stop putting this family to too much stress. How can I help you if you keep lying to me? I need to trust you. First you need to prove to me you are a better person which you have to become. I want to help you this time. I'm going to give you a second chance. Don't mention this to anyone especially your mother."

The son said, "Thank you, Dad. I won't let you down, Dad."

The father said, "Let's go home."

They went home. The mother said, "Is everything ok at the police station?"

The father said, "Everything is fine."

The mother said, "You must be really, really hungry."

The father said, "Don't forget what we talked about. Don't mention anything to your mother."

The son said, "Dad, I remember everything we talked about."

There was a knock at the door. The father answered the door. He said, "May I help you?"

The drug dealer said, "Can I speak to Pete?"

The father said, "No one here named Pete. Maybe you got the wrong house."

The drug dealer was searching for the house in the neighborhood.

The mother said, "Who was that at the door?"

The father said, "Someone was looking for Pete. Do you know anyone named Pete?"

The son said, "Dad, That's the name I gave him. Did he say what he wanted? He's gonna keep searching until he finds me. He wasn't sure where I live."

The father said, "Lay low in the house for a couple days."

The son said, "Dad, he's not gonna stop until he finds me. I don't want to put this family in danger."

The mother came into the room. She said, "What are you talking about? Don't lie to me. I need to know what you are talking about."

The father said, "Nothing."

The son wrote a note, "Mom and Dad, I love you both. Dad, thank you for everything you have done for me. This is the best thing for me to do—run away. I did not want to bring any trouble to my family."

The boy left the house. As he was walking, someone was following him. He kept looking back. A car got closer and closer. The boy started to run. The car approached him. The drug dealer said, "Get in the car." The boy kept running. The

drug dealer stopped the car, got out and started running after the boy. The drug dealer caught up with him and beat him up. He drove away. A neighbor called the police. The police arrived at the scene. The boy was beaten up very badly. The police called an ambulance. The ambulance came. The boy was rushed to the hospital. The police took a statement from the neighbor who had called the police. The lady said, "I saw a man beating up the boy."

The policeman said, "Can you recognize the car he was driving?"

The lady said, "A black Mercedes."

The police officer said, "Thank you for the information you gave me."

He went to the hospital. "How bad is he?" he asked the doctor. The doctor said, "He is in a coma and has a broken nose. You need to call a family member."

The police officer said, "He did not have any information on him. I will have another police officer sit by the door. Someone beat him up very bad. Do you recognize him?"

The other police officer said, "Yes, it was a case that happened a couple of days ago. You have to open this file and see where he lives. Don't leave this room. I will be back."

The first police officer found the file and went over to the boy's house. He rang the bell. The father answered the door. "Good afternoon, sir. My name is Officer Tony. Sir, do you recognize this picture?"

The father said, "Yes, that's my son. What happened?"

The mother said, "Who's at the door?"

The father said, "The police."

Officer Tony said, "Your son was beaten up very badly."

The father asked, "Where is my son now?"

Officer Tony said, "He's at the hospital."

The mother and father drove to the hospital. They both went upstairs. They approached the nurse. The nurse said, "May I please help you."

The father said, "Yes, ma'am. My son was beaten up. Can I see him?"

The nurse said, "Yes, Room 16."

They both went into the room. They started crying when they saw their son lying there.

The nurse said, "Your son is in a coma."

The mother said to the father, "Where are you going?"

"I am going to make a phone call." He called his daughter. He said, "Your brother was beaten badly. Call your sister."

His daughter said, "Where is Mom?"

"She is sitting by his bedside."

The daughter said, "I will see you later, Dad."

He said, "Don't forget to call your sister."

He went back into the room. He said, "Carol will be here later. Tracy should be here soon."

The police officer came into the room. The mother said, "Did you catch the person who did it to my son?"

He said, "I need to ask you a question about your son. Do you know who did this to your son?"

The father said, "I remember his face. He came to my house looking for my son."

The police said, "Can I take you down to the police station to show you some pictures?"

The father said, "No problem."

He said to his wife, "Honey, I will be back. I'm going to the police station to look at some pictures."

The mother said, "Ok. Don't be long."

The police drove the father down to the station. The father was looking through the photos. The policeman asked, "Like to have some coffee?"

The father said, "Yes."

The police said, "How you like it?" He brought the coffee to the father.

The father looked at the pictures. He recognized the drug dealer's face in the photo book.

The police officer said, "Thank you very much. You did enough here."

The father went back to the hospital. His son was still in a coma. Tracy was in the room.

The mother said, "Did they have any luck catching the person?"

The father said, "No, they have a picture of the person. Go home and get some rest, Honey. I will stay with him. I will call you if there are any changes. Tracy, take your mother home. Ain't much we can do here."

The daughter said, "Dad, I will be back. Do you want me to bring you something to eat?"

The father said, "Yes, make sure your mother eats."

Detective Mitchell came to the hospital. "I have good news. We caught the person. How's your son doing?"

The father said, "He's doing about the same."

Detective Mitchell said, "If there are any changes, give me a call."

The doctor came into the room. "Your son has swelling to the brain."

The father said, "What does that mean?"



The doctor said, "We have to get the swelling down. If we get the swelling down, I think he will come out of the coma. Pray the swelling goes down."

The father called home. The phone rang three times. The wife answered the phone. "Honey, I got good news. They caught the person who beat up our son. The doctor said if the swelling goes down, he will come out of the coma. I will call you again if there are any changes."

The nurse came into the room and took another x-ray. She said, "Would you like something to drink?"

He said, "Thank you very much."

The nurse came into the room with the drink. He said, "Thank you a lot."

The mother came back to the hospital with her daughters. The father said to the mother, "What are you doing here? You didn't have to come. I would have called you if there was any changes."

The mother said, "I couldn't sit home knowing my son is in the hospital."

He said, "The nurse came to the room and took x-rays. The doctor said if the swelling goes down, he will come out of the coma."

The mother said, "Let's pray he will come out of the coma."

The doctor came back into the room. "I have good news. The swelling went down. Let's keep your fingers crossed."

The father said, "The only thing we can do is wait and keep praying. Let's take a walk, Honey, I have something to tell you. The drug dealer beat him up because he owed him some money. The man who came to the house that day was looking for our son."

The wife asked, "Why didn't you tell me the truth the first time?"

He said, "You know I didn't want to get you upset. You have health problems. I didn't want to get you upset again. I got more to tell you. I will tell you it another time. Let's go back into the room. Don't mention it to anyone."

One daughter said, "Mom and Dad, he moved a little bit!"

The wife said, "Go get the nurse."

The nurse said, "May I help you, Sir."

"My son is moving his hands."

The nurse and father rushed into the room. The son came out of the coma!

Everyone was very happy. The nurse went to get the doctor. The doctor came back to the room. He asked the boy, "How are you feeling?"

The boy said, "I feel great. Why is everybody here?"

The doctor said, "You were in a coma for three days. You know everybody in this room?"

The boy said, "Yes."

The doctor said, "I need to keep him one more day to run more tests on him before I can release him. I want to make sure you are ok."

The mother said, "Thank God you are ok."

The nurse said to the boy, "You must be very hungry. I will bring you something to eat."

The boy said, "I thank everyone for being here."

The father said to the daughters, "Take your mother home. Everything will be all right here. I will be home later."

The mother said to the son, "I love you. I will see you later."

The father said, "How are you really feeling today? The doctor will take the bandage off tomorrow. The reason I stayed back is that we have to talk. They caught the person who beat you up."

Detective Robinson came to the hospital and walked into the room. "How are you feeling, young man? The reason I am here is that I need to get a police report. I need to show you a photo for you to identify."

The boy said, "Yes, he's the one."

Detective Robinson said, "Do you want to charge him?"

The boy said, "No, because I owe him money - \$3000."

Detective Robinson said, "We have to let him go. He will be back on the streets again. He is going to come back after you again. This is your last chance to talk. You need to do something very fast. If you need to call me, this is my card. Call me tomorrow."

The father said, "I will call you tomorrow."

To the son, "You hear what Detective Robinson said? That bum will be back on the street. You need to think of something very fast."

The son said, "I will think of something by tomorrow."

The father said, "I will see you tomorrow. You will have a long day. Get some sleep. Don't forget what I said. Think about it."

The father arrived at home. The wife asked, "Can we finish that talk?"

The father said, "Yes, our son is in a lot of trouble with a drug dealer. He owes the drug dealer \$3,000. He didn't want to testify about the dealer. He will be back on the streets, the bum."

The wife said, "We have to do something fast because our life can be in danger too. Pay the money back. I have money saved. You never know what the drug dealer might do next. We are very happy he came out of the coma. The next time he might kill our son. That's why we have to pay the money."

The father said, "We need to talk to him first before we pay the money. Tomorrow I have to pick him up at the hospital."

He arrived at the hospital the next day. The doctor said, "It's ok for him to go home. Good luck, young man."

The father said to his son, "How are you feeling?"

The son said, "I feel great but I am a little nervous."

The father said, "We need to talk some more. Did you come to a conclusion what you want to do?"

The son said, "Yes, I need to borrow \$3000 to get the drug dealer off my back."

The father said, "I told your mother."

The son yelled, "You told Mom! What did she say?"

The father said, "She wants to help."

Everyone was there to see him back home.

The son said, "Thank you for being here." They said he was very lucky. The mother and father said, "We have to talk. We both came to the agreement for you to pay the drug dealer back the money. You have to promise us you will never do this anymore. We are only doing it because we love you."

The son said, "Mom and Dad, I thank you so much. I will never let you down. I will pay you back, I promise."

The father worried whether he had done the right thing with his son. The son thought, "I don't want to put pressure on my family any more. Maybe I should get some counseling for my drug problem. My father should talk to someone he can trust about this whole situation even if I have to put some time in jail."

He said to the mother and father, "I want to do the right thing and change my life around."

## SECOND PLACE

### Untitled

By Charles Brown

Way down south in the early 1930's lived the Smith family. They had their upbringing in religion and Mrs. Smith was raised in the roots of the church. Her husband, a World War 2 veteran, was half worldly and half religious. Mrs. Smith, because of her strong religious views was allowed to have most of the responsibility in the leadership role of the family unless at times in extreme emergencies Mr. Smith Sr. would take the reins. It was very unfortunate that Mr. Smith Sr. fell victim to a very bad accident on his way to work early one Monday morning.

But Mrs. Smith's strong courage and faith kept the family together, and prosperous. David Smith was the eldest of the three children, and next was Joe Jr., and Lilly Smith. David was given the responsibility in the place of his father and shared the load successfully and became the strongest pillar for the family to depend on.

As time commenced and the youngsters matured, a strong bond between mother and children grew until Joe Jr. was less on the scene than he should have been. This caused a problem and mother Smith was determined to have none of it. Joe Jr., a tall, strapping, strong, well built young man decided to have his own say on things making decisions of his own. "Well, I'm nineteen and a half years old I'll be twenty soon, I'm a man." One of his main occupations was the dance hall more than a mile from the Smith's home.

These problems came after moving from the Deep South to Chicago which, in some cases like the Deep South, lynching's accrued but not as frequently. One day Mrs. Smith said enough is enough. She knew that her eldest son David was not

only a man mentally qualified for the position of manhood to keep The Family together, but was more than physically able to execute justice by her command. David Smith was not only tall but outweighed his brother twice in muscle mass, a huge juggernaut of a man, a young man 22 years of age sincerely dedicated to his mother and siblings. Plus what her youngest son did not seem to realize—or ignored—was the ever impending danger, ever present in those days and which was the lot of Youngsters of his culture, even in Chicago.

So she decided then and there to turn the situation around that got so out of hand. She blamed herself by not acting sooner to bring things back in harmony. So she found her eldest son working at the woodpile in the yard chopping logs that almost looked like the giant redwoods she seen in California during a visit to her aunt's house down at the pacific coast. Dave was an awesome sight to see, striped at the waist, huge powerful muscles gleaming in the hot light of the Southern Chicago sun: chopping those giant logs cutting them down to size with the mighty swing of the axe in order to produce fuel for heat during the winter, as well as for cooking, also for selling and a number of other things. By her command she informed him concerning the ways of her youngest son and the waywardness of his younger brother going astray from the path of righteousness and responsibility.

She said, "Your brother thinks he's grown, he's sure nuff plain wicked, he's joined the ways of calling. Go down to the dance hall and bring his darn chops back home here, he's gonna get it."

"Yes-ma," Dave responded. Grabbing a heavy chain with a lock with keys, he prepared the mules with the wagon, put on his straw hat and vest, and off he went down to the dance hall.

The dance hall had as many people outside as it had inside. The excitement was so thick in the air, you could have cut it with a knife. Cab Calliway was the

featured star for the night, and the air was buzzing with eager anticipation. There were several attempts towards crime outside the dance hall, it was not good to go to such a place by yourself. Some of the biggest strongest fellas you'd ever saw just for the dare of it would block the entrance as though they were bar bouncers. They did this as a challenge game but when they saw Dave Smith approaching they all scattered like tumble weeds before a strong stormy wind, his demeanor was definitely serious. They knew if the large steel door had a padlock on it, it would mean nothing to Smitty, that's the nickname they gave Dave Smith.

The air was full of excitement, curiosity and apprehension as the spectators saw the awesome giant of a man standing mildly asking for Joe Jr. They responded with no hesitation, "He's inside, sir!" Smitty politely thanked them. As the large door creaked open, what a sight Dave saw! The floor was almost covered with dancing figures of young women and men. The band was swaying back and forth, and side to side with saxophones, drums, trumpets, and a man with a bass. The crowd danced in time with the rhythm of the band.

The hall was smoky and bright with flood lights of various colors that reflected off the chandeliers and the drinking glasses of those who sat at the tables. Out about six or more feet from where Smitty was standing stood the familiar figure of Joe Jr. with a woman on his arm, but that was not all, a lit cigarette was hanging from his mouth and along with that! A wine glass dangled from his hand. Smitty gave his brother a surprised look of disbelief and disappointment. Yet with a smile and a voice of reproof which arrested the attention of the crowd, he raised his right hand and with his extended forefinger pointing straight at Joe Jr., he said, "Little Joe Smith Jr., Ma wants you home right now! I's come to carry you home!"

Little Joe angrily retorted, "Look, I'm almost 21, I's going home with nobody! You's tell Ma that I'll be home when I's gets home."

What a scene! The spectators were eager to see what would happen next! They didn't have long to wait. Before anyone could blink, little Joe Jr. was above Smitty's head being carried toward the exit. He was kicking, flaring and cussing. His girlfriend Sandy, enraged, was cussing and throwing a barrage of punches on Smitty as he kindly brushed her aside. Smitty flung the big door open and shut it behind him. The crowds both inside and out saw this unusual drama all at the one time. They witnessed the tying and locking of the chain about Joe's arms, hands, and feet as though witnessing the tying of a prized bull. Dave Smith giddy-yupped the mules and off they went, headed for home.

Dave Smith said, "You didn't have to lie to those mens and womens, you're just 19 years old trying to acts grown up! Wait till Ma hears this! She's gonna tan your hide, Joe Jr. Like Ma said, yous just plain out wicked, you's smoking! Ya even took a drink! And what in tarnation is this? What my God given eyes has seen? A woman hanging on your arm?"

Joe Jr. responded, "You lived in the country too long and had never had a chance to relax, or even breath! You's killen yourself Smitty! You's take life too serious! We're in Chicago now. Although we live in the country, it's not like it was back in the DeepSouth, we's can get away from it all and party."

Dave answered, "Mah is right, yes, you joined the ways of Canaan, your wicked ways has gotta be reckoned with."

Dave Smith held on to little Joe Smith tightly as Ma Smith executed judgment. Oh well! Old methods are better than no methods at all, so it's been said.

The Smith Family

To be continued...



## THIRD PLACE

### Winter's Surprise

By Andre Allen

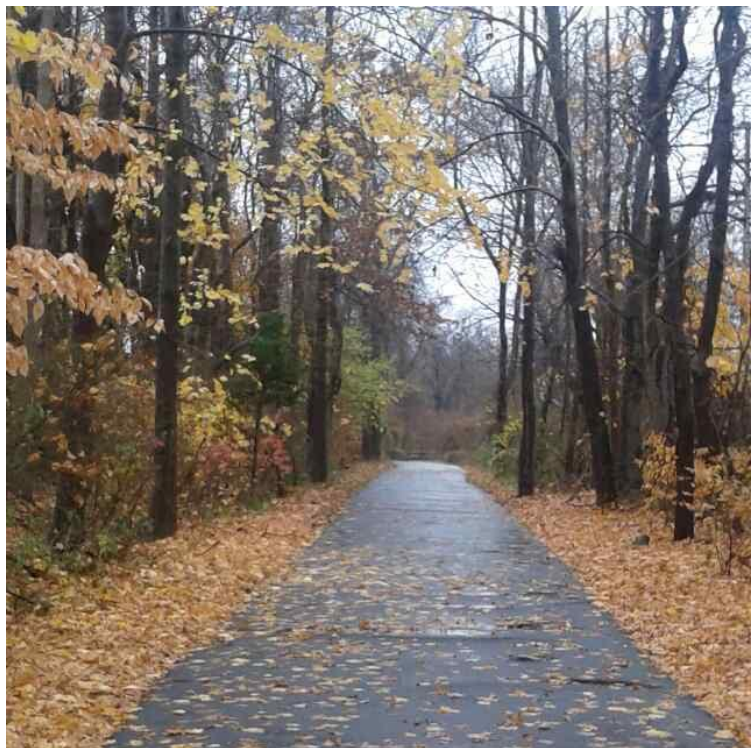
It was a cold November morning. I rolled out of bed. My apartment was cold. I donned my sub- zero gear. Manhattan was freezing this time of year. Dressed in a parker, jeans, flannel tee and running shoes, I made my way down to my favorite coffee shop, Starbucks. It's right on the corner of Lexington and 84<sup>th</sup> Street. I burst through the doors to be hit in the face with heat and the wonderful smell of hot coffee beans being brewed. Heaven. The line was very long. Nothing new. All of a sudden, at the register there seemed to be something going on. A woman, tall with model good looks, was making a fuss of some kind. She walked out and on her way out, she shook everyone's hand, saying, "Happy Holiday! This round's on me!" As I reached the register, the cashier told me that the woman just got a new job that would take her out of New York for the next ten years. It was her way of saying good-bye to her city, a city she loved so much. She left a Starbucks gift card with \$1000 on it and said, use it until it runs dry, for everybody, homeless or not. I looked at the cashier with astonishment. "What was her name?" I asked. The cashier replied, "Her name was Winter."

## PHOTOGRAPHY



*Anzhela Lukianova*

*Maricela Sandoval*



## HONORABLE MENTION

# MEMOIR

## *Growing up in Gaza* Aisha Abdulla

I grew up in a small village outside Gaza. I was part of a big family. I have 3 brothers and 9 sisters. My father was a businessman and my mother was a home maker. Because we were a big family, my father used to work hard so he could afford a living. My mom spent most of her time washing clothes, cleaning, and cooking.

For that reason, my siblings and I did not get a proper education. For example if we needed help with our homework, my parents were too busy to help. Also, my early childhood was during the First Intifada (uprising), so the school used to be closed for a couple of months each year. As a result, I personally did not gain a strong education.

Also, I have bad memories of the Israeli army who used to scare us all the time. As soon as we heard their army tanks in the streets, we would hide. With all of these situations, I still think my childhood was simple and more innocent and fun (than children nowadays). We never had a television until I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, so we used to interact with each other by talking, playing, and helping my mom with the household chores. We used to visit our friends and relatives and ask about each other more often. Unfortunately with all of the modern communication, social life is not as rich.

## *My Memoir* Charles Brown

I was born July 1, 1952 a native of Salem, New Jersey. Claysville, New Jersey is where I first lived. Then, within a couple of years, my family moved to the suburbs of the city of Salem. I remember most of my upbringing clearly in the early 1950's and 1960's. As I look back and recall those days, it doesn't seem that long ago.

I remember the football field right in front of my home without any barbed wire fencing to serve as an obstruction. There were walnut, mulberry, and just regular trees that stood 30 to 40 feet from the house. Back further were these beautiful shady willow trees under which the horses used to graze. The horse field is what we called it as we would dash through the thin paths in the grass while

racing towards one of the horses and daring each other to touch or get as close as we could without breaking our stride.

We learned every area of the grassy, bushy field and would make sudden dashes toward the high dense weeds in case one of those horses got fed up with us and took off after us. I remember a very large black dog named Champ. He felt that we owned the horse field, or so we thought, especially when Champ would send us scampering through the brush like scared chickens running for our lives to avoid being eaten. There was plenty of swamp area where hunting was a common hobby, in and out of season.

My next-door neighbors used to raise chickens and they also had their own garden. Out on the country roads were plenty of crop fields on the left and right that yielded tomatoes, corn, string beans, lima beans, water melon, cantaloupe and many other goodies which are rare to see except at the food market. Our neighborhood was comprised of more than 40 kids (both boys and girls). We had lots of fun catching lightning-bugs! Our jars would get so full of them that a full jar would look like a lantern!

We all used to play hide-and-seek, that was one of our most favorite games. The boys from the streets across town were considered "The Enemy". As we would meet we'd use sticks, reeds, and dirt bombs. The horse field was where every boy would meet for battle. The best game that we all enjoyed playing (both boys and girls) was called "Black Man In the Dark". No one ever volunteered to be the Black Man. In this game, we went into the darkest area of the field...all 20 or 30 of us. We would all press close together and let our imaginations run away with us. Before long we all could have sworn that a large clouded figure, about 30 feet away, seemed to hurry toward us! The girls would let out a blood curdling scream as we broke from our organized ranks and headed towards our homes where the street lights provided a safe haven. It was scary, but fun.

As time commenced a change took place in the area where I lived. The city had the swamp drained and they also chopped down the trees in the horse field, extended the ballfield, and set up a barbed wire fence. The change was sudden and so drastic until there was nothing left to remind me of how it used to be except for those two willow trees in the back close to the Grieves Parkway road and the physical fitness center that's there now. Finally, they took the willow trees. Now there's nothing left to remind me of how it was because the old brick row houses are gone too. Thank God for memories.

My mother, brothers, and I moved to more modern conveniences in the projects. We could flip a switch and the heat would come on and we could turn the knobs on the kitchen stove and Wow, we could cook our food without chopping

wood and throwing in coal. We had an indoor toilet, a bathtub, and hot and cold running water.

I remember people that have grown up as I have from way back in kindergarten, and up to elementary school and beyond. The singing groups, which were made up of my brothers and friends, I will always treasure. My brothers and I met new faces whom became our lifelong friends. We learned from each other's talents and our different cultures did not hinder our progress. It helped develop something unique which both black and white could relate to.

Today, I wish that I could have graduated from high school. I guess you can call this wishful thinking, but so many troubles and things pertaining to the "school of hard knocks" as we climb the ladder to learning and just plain-out aggravation which, no doubt, are for the younger generation could have been avoided. To make myself clearer, where I am now time should have placed me where the younger generation would admire the older generation for their achievements. I am what you would call a wanderer, but I have a goal to reach and that goal is my education along with working with the talents I already have. I was told by my parents they wished that I would apply myself. My parents also told me that the day would come where I would wish that doing my homework and pursuing an education would then had been a job second to none.

I have learned my lesson and I hope that what I have experienced in life can be beneficial to many. I've had a good life as pertaining to growing up and my achievements in ability gained through experience, both physically and mentally, but I'm aiming to benefit others and I will not deviate from the memory of the past from which I'm quite familiar which helped make me what I am today. I don't want to mold or shape anyone's life, I just want to offer some suggestions and relate to them as a friend and mentor in order to help him or her deal with the here and now, and to help them utilize whatever skills and talents they possess so that they can make life pleasant and their future something positive to look forward to.

***I Never Left Your Side***  
**Tammie Byrd**

Dear Tammie:

I have watched you grow from a beautiful child to a beautiful woman, and throughout those years you have endured trials and tribulations that made you feel like the world was closing in on you and there was no way out. I tried to tell you on different occasions that I have your back just be patient it will all work out, but you couldn't hear me so you tried to do things on your own and go another route that led you to a dead end which caused you to start all over again. Then came the mistakes and setbacks bringing more stress and self-doubt, but I never left your side. I prayed every day that you would lift your head up and grab my hand. Finally, you did, and I said keep going don't give up there is light at the end of the tunnel. "Thank you", you replied. I brushed you off and set you free. I'm so proud of what you have become, a strong independent woman who can rise up through the pain and push forward and believe that nothing can hold you back. You are a fighter, you are blessed. Someone loves you.

***El Salvador***  
**Yvonne Carceres**

El Salvador is where I was born and raised. For some people El Salvador is known as "The Savior" or "The land of Volcanoes". It is a unique country with many great geographical sites. It is rich in culture, and has exquisite cuisine. Today it is a blackened society due to the proliferation of gangs. My Country has undergone many changes throughout its history. According to the internet, El Salvador achieved Independence from Spain in 1821 and from the Central America Federation in 1839. A twelve-year civil war, which cost about 75,000 lives, was brought to a close in 1992 when the government and leftist rebels signed a treaty that provided for military and political reforms.

This "Land of volcanoes" is located in Central America, bordering the North Pacific Ocean and lies between Guatemala and Honduras. It is the smallest Central America Country and the only one without a coastline on the Caribbean Sea. It has ample tourist destinations. While I was living in El Salvador I had the opportunity to travel around the country. I visited San Salvador, the Capital many times. It's one of the cities with the most commercial movement in Central America. It has one of the biggest malls in Central America, as well as a convention center where the

international fair is held every other year. The nightlife includes dancing at discos or simply enjoying live music performances, especially around the Zona Rosa and La gran Villa Mall. I also visited Santa Ana which is this is the second most important city of El Salvador. It has one of the best-preserved historic centers in the country. Its main buildings include, The Cathedral, The National Theater, and The Municipal Palace. My hometown San Miguel is the third most important city of El Salvador. Its mountain range Tecapa- Chinameca, formed the volcano Chaparrastique. It is well known for the amount of garrobos, a kind of iguana that thrives there. Because of the garrobos people from the rest of the country call us "Garroberos". San Miguel has had the highest recorded temperatures, sometimes reaching 43 degrees Celsius during summer months.

Another place I visited is Cerro El Pital, a mountain on the border of El Salvador and Honduras. It is located 7 miles from the town of La Palma at a height of 8,957 ft above sea level, and is the highest point in Salvadoran territory. Cerro El Pital lies in the middle of a cloud forest that has an average annual temperature of 50 °F. Cerro El Pital is famous and attractive because of the amazing biodiversity in a wide altitudinal range. It has many endangered species of flora and fauna. The cloud forest has some of the most unique and rarest plants and animals in the country, including quetzals and other endangered species.

According to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources website ,they report that November to February the temperature ranges between 21 °F and 50 °F. and in the rest of the year the temperature ranges between 41 °F and 68 °F. Cerro el Pital is the coldest place in El Salvador. In April 2004, much of the mountain was blanketed by an accumulation of hail during a storm, an unusual event that caused a commotion among the local community and the rest of the nation.

Aside from the mountain adventures, there are coastal sites that I visited. The Cóbano beach has golden sands and is located in the largest northern Pacific rocky reef. The Costa del Sol beach is one of the main tourist attractions of El Salvador, with many hotels and beach clubs.

The culture of El Salvador is similar to other countries in Latin America, but more specific to our neighboring countries. Traditional costumes are mostly worn for festivals and religious events. In rural areas and older towns the people still wear regular clothing including blouses, skirts and dresses with elements like scapulars, shawls and cotton headscarfs, all made in vibrant colors and adorned with ornaments.

The official language of my homeland is Spanish but a small group of people called Amerindians speak Nahuatl. Both public and private schools teach English



and in San Salvador and San Miguel, private schools offer specialized learning in German, Mandarin, French and Italian.

The Catholic Church has been the most prominent religious institution since colonial times. Most of our traditions are based on religious beliefs. In the city of San Miguel the mayor feast season is in November in honor of "Our lady of Peace". There is also a municipal festival called the "Carnival of San Miguel. The entire country also celebrates the Nativity, Holy Week, the Day of the Cross, and the August festivals held to honor San Salvador's Patron Saint.

According to many people, before the 1970s, El Salvador was a peaceful country until civil war broke out. War continued for over 10 years until finally in 1992 the leftist and military signed a treaty of peace. The treaty was not a remedy for El Salvador. According to the Internet, during the civil war many Salvadorean youth immigrated to Los Angeles, where they were soon victimized by local Latino gangs in the area. In response, the Salvadoreans fell into the cyclical pattern of coping with violence by forming another gang, whose name is a combination of "La Mara," a violent street gang in El Salvador and "Salvatruchas," a term used to denote members of the FMLN. The MS-13 quickly became known as one of the most violent gangs in the area because many of their founding members had experience or training in guerilla warfare, giving them a level of sophistication that surpassed their rivals. These gang members committed crimes, were judged and deported from the United States back to El Salvador. This background of military training and fear contributed to an even more violent sub-culture of Salvadoran gangs. In addition Political unrest in other Latin American countries added to gang proliferation. The violence and insecurity affected me and my family. We were victims of a home invasion and robbery. In addition we were threatened with death if we did not comply with the demands to hand over a large amount of money.

Our exquisite cuisine is based on maize. Pupusas is a hand-made corn tortilla filled with pork, beans and mozzarella cheese. Corn tamales are customarily accompanied with cream and cheese. Chicken tamales accompanied with a cup of coffee or hot chocolate and cookies are common foods served at funerals. Maize pastries are made with a filling of minced meat or vegetables. El Salvador grows a variety of Tropical fruits including coconuts, mangoes, mamones, jocotes, anonas, nance and gindas. There are many delectable desserts like Budin, cakes filled with caramel and cream, Empanada, made from plantains with cream filling and other varieties of cakes and cookies.

Despite the proliferation of gangs, this unique country called "The Savior" struggles to be recognized and saved. It is a beautiful tourist destination, with abundant culture, unique landscapes and wise and friendly people. El Salvador, a

Central American gem, is a great place to visit and hopefully will again one day be a nice and peaceful place to live and raise kids.

***My Memory of Chinese New Year in Hong Kong***  
**Ka Ming Chan (Carmen)**

My mother bought new clothes and shoes for us before Chinese New Year. When she left for work, we would try on the new clothes ourselves because we couldn't wait. Then she came home and saw that we were all wearing the new clothes.

She was angry. But we all said to her, "Gong Xi Fa Cai" which means we respect you since you are our elder and we wish you a happy Chinese New Year. That made her smile.

***Memoir***  
**Meriane Dernier**

I arrived in the U.S. with my daughters named Younica and Gemima. We arrived at 7:00 PM on November 10, 2010 after the terrible earthquake in Haiti. We were very cold for the first time because we didn't have any coats. My husband picked us up at 9:45 and brought us coats. We were very happy for that. Sometimes my daughters and I cry because we miss my brother, cousin, friends. Everybody. But I am trying to relax. Last time I was alone and now our family is together. Now English is my biggest problem.

***Indian Weddings Like Mine***  
**Payal Garg**

The Indian wedding is a union of two families and souls. Most of Indian weddings are arranged. First the priest checks to see if the boy and the girl will be happy according to the stars' position at their birth time. Then the boy and the girl meet along with their families to finalize the wedding and ring ceremony.

Traditional Indian weddings are generally structured first with pre-wedding ceremonies. Indian weddings are filled with ritual and celebration that continue for several days. Usually about 100 to 1,000 people attend.

Wedding day ceremonies have lavish preparations by the bride's family to receive the groom in beautiful and decorated venues, typically farmhouses or hotel halls, where a sacrificial fireplace is built. Brides decorate themselves with gold and diamond jewelry; apply henna to color their hands and feet, and undergo various bridal rituals, including wearing a bridal sari. Bridegrooms typically wear a "sherwani" dress or designer suit.

To complete the marriage the bride and groom walk in a circle around the sacrificial fire. This is one of the main rituals. They must walk seven times around the fire together while the priest is chanting holy mantras. This means that they will be together for the next seven generations. It doesn't matter if they fight or live happily together during this time because even death can't separate them.

The one part of the wedding called "vidaai" is a very emotional part. This is because the bride leaves her father's house.

### ***My Life's Story*** **Clifford Henry**

I was raised in Florida. When I was a little boy, I walked barefooted and had no shirt. I used to eat clay. My grandma kept me when I was little. My parents migrated a lot to get work. They worked on the fields picking apples, cucumbers, peaches, and grapefruit. They didn't have any education. Up to when I was about ten years old, I went to different schools.

I have one brother named Sam. We both were very close to each other. I moved from Florida at the age of fourteen. We moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Then we moved to New Jersey. My father and mother separated. My mother was on welfare to support us. She had faith in God that everything would be all right. My mother kept us in church every Sunday.

I was in special education in Montgomery High School in Newark. At the age of sixteen, I had to find a job. I left home. I worked as a janitor at City Hall. The amount of money they were giving my mother wasn't enough to pay the bills. My mother got very sick. We didn't have anyone to help us. By the grace of God someone helped us and gave us some food to eat.

At the age of seventeen I met this beautiful girl named Cynthia. She was my first love. We went to the same church together. We were engaged. It didn't work out. She broke my heart.

I had a difficult time in my life. I couldn't read and write. I wanted a better life for myself. People told me that I could get an education in the Military. I went into the Army National Guard in 1979. I took the test three times to get into the Military. When the sergeant came up to me and told me I passed the test, I was so happy. I

went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for basic training. It was a big struggle for me. The sergeant had to repeat things over and over. For the grace of God, I passed basic training. I graduated from basic training and went home. The plane landed at the airport. I caught a cab to the church. When I walked into church, everybody was happy to see me. I went back to my mother's house.

I met a beautiful girl named Diane. She had two small kids. We dated at least for three years. She had my first son named Clifford JR. We got engaged to be married.

I got a job as a cook at Ground Round. I went to take the test to get my driver's license. I passed the test the second time. I bought my first car, a Mustang. I went over to my friend Gary's house to show him my car. Gary said, "It's a nice car.

How much you pay for it?" My response was \$1,000. The next morning I went to see Diane and the baby. I rang the bell to her house. "I have to show you something. I bought a car."

My life was a mess because I couldn't read or write. I could not fill out an application, read my mail, or read signs. I got a tutor but I dropped out because he told me I would not learn to read and write.

I got married to Diane. I had five boys and two girls. God blessed us with a beautiful house. We lived there for eight years. It was a struggle for us to pay the mortgage because my wife lost her job. The house went to foreclosure. I tried to get all the help I could to save my house. I had to get a second job to pay the mortgage. I had 30 days to get \$3,000. I got on my knees and prayed to the Lord to save my house. I went to different places for help. My mother gave me the money. She gave me all her savings. I said, "Thank, Jesus. I saved my house." I applied for a job at Houlihan's as a cook. I got a phone call from the manager saying I was hired. He said, "I need you to come in tomorrow by 8 o'clock. Bring in your photo ID. Make sure you'll be on time." I was working at Bennigan's too. I was told I had to go to Cuba for one year and two months as a soldier in the National Guard. This would be the first time I ever left my family for so long. It was very difficult for my wife to see me leave. I was scared to go to Cuba. It took us twelve hours to get there. My job was to work in the prison in Guantanamo Bay. I called my family every time I got a chance to tell them I loved them. I was happy to be back home with my family. When I came home, there was a parade for the soldiers.

Everything seemed so different when I get home. It took me about three weeks to come back to my normal self. I went back to my normal routine working. It was good to be back safe at home.

I went to Florida to visit my folks. When I arrived at the bus station, my uncle was waiting for me. I put my luggage in the car and we drove off. Before we got home,

we grabbed something to eat. My uncle drove me around to see everyone. I had a great time seeing my old neighborhood where I was born. It had been ten years since I'd been home to see my folks. The next morning I went to church with my uncle. I went to see my brother at the prison. We both were glad to see each other. He said, "Tell Mom I love her."

"I love you very much, bro."

I had to go. "Bye."

"Don't forget to tell Mom I love her."

I was told by my First Sergeant I was going to Iraq. I went to Fort Bliss, Texas to train. When training was completed, we went to Iraq. We flew from New Jersey to Germany. We flew from Germany to Baghdad. We drove in a bus to an airport and caught a helicopter. We got out of the helicopter and went to the barracks. I stayed in the barracks with eight soldiers. I was so scared being there surrounded by soldiers carrying weapons. I had to be tough for my family because I wanted to come back alive. I worked in the prison where the Iraqis were held. I went to the gym three times a day. I carried an M16 and a 45 pistol. I called my family for the first time. My family was glad to hear from me. The food was delicious. I went home after a year and three months.

I was behind on my mortgage. A man came to my house. We all sat around the table and discussed how to save my house. He said to me and my wife, "Read the documents and sign here. I need \$2000 before I can process everything." I was happy he could save my house. I went to the bank to get the money. It was my whole savings. I gave the man the money and he left. I didn't hear from him anymore. I lost the money.

I visited my friend John. I had a great time seeing John and his wife Sue again. I had met them in Iraq. John and Sue are the nicest persons I ever met. John came to my bedroom and said, "Michael Jackson is dead." I did not believe him at first. Then I watched it on TV. I was a big fan of Michael Jackson.

I am still in the Military now in the Reserves. I spend three weeks a year training army cadets at West Point and one weekend a month at Fort Dix. Education is very important to me. It was killing me so much when I knew I couldn't read or write. I went to Literacy Volunteers of America. Going back to school changed my life. I have an amazing tutor named Joan. I'm going to push on to continue my education. The Military will pay for me to go to college. It is amazing how far I came.

*Untitled*  
**Filipe Jaco**

It was 10:00 at night and Precious, our dog, was wagging her tail telling us it was time to go out for a walk.

I opened the gate and made a right and I always head towards the high school. The sidewalk was not level and I tripped. I had pain in my index finger, it was bleeding and was sticking up in the air.

I went home to Susan, my wife, and then we went to Jose our landlord who said it looks like it is broken and " now we are going to the hospital".

We got to the hospital about 10:15 and waited until 1:30 in the morning, it was a long time. I had to take X rays. The doctor said my finger was dislocated. The doctor popped my finger back in and then my wife fainted.

We took the taxi and got home about 4:00. I was out of work for three weeks. My finger is good now and I can write again.

***My Mother Susan***  
**Sabrina Johnson**

My mother Susan Boyd was born on April 6, 1952, and was the mother of five children. She passed away on February 4, 2013.

All the things she taught me cannot be explained in this brief notation, but things she taught me, I use them every day; they make me the woman I am today. They keep me going and help me instill the same values and morals in my children today. They are; caring for others, sharing with others, being disciplined, being concerned about others, respecting others, and the most important one, loving me!

To love myself is the most crucial one. She always said, "If you don't love yourself, how do you think someone else will." That's one of the same things, I find myself telling my children and grandchildren today.

Just love yourself and everything else will fall into place.

With that being said, I thank you for your time in reading my brief message, in the memory of my mother Susan, who will always be an inspiration in my life. I always hear her telling me to go on and never quit or stop loving myself.

I am Sabrina Johnson, a 44-year old woman mother of 4 children and grandmother of 5 and a wife for 26 years; am also going to get my high school diploma soon!

### *Trip to Paradise on the Earth* Surya Kandiyan

Las Vegas is my dream place ever since my childhood. But I haven't imagined of a visit to Vegas, even in my dreams. So, when my husband asked me about my opinion for a trip to Vegas, I was so thrilled and that moment was like, a dream is going to come true for me. This is the story of my memorable trip to the Paradise on the Earth with my better half.

After waiting for one long month, finally that day came; the day to go to Vegas. I was so happy and checked the hand baggage again and again that was packed the previous day itself, for our three days trip.

We had started our wonderful journey from the Newark airport. I was so excited and only thing in my mind was Vegas. Unfortunately, there were not enough food for every one in the flight, but still I didn't feel hungry out of the excitement to reach Vegas. Even though it was a six hours flight, time just flowed in seconds. My husband and I talked only about the plans to do at Vegas during the journey.

Whenever I think of Vegas, the first thing that comes in to my mind is none other than the casinos. Still it was unbelievable to see the slot machines inside the airport. Yes, slot machines and games inside the airport just like in the casinos. I resist myself saying, wait for some more time, hundreds of casinos are waiting for me outside, in the Vegas strip.

But finally, when I reached the Vegas strip, I understood that Vegas were much more than the casinos. It was so active; full of bright lights everywhere, mind-blowing architecture and I felt like I'm in the heaven. All in one place; major attractions in Paris, Rome, New York, Italy everything can be seen in the Vegas city. The casinos and the hotel over there had the architecture of some of the famous places in the world. We could see Egypt's pyramid, Statue of Liberty, Eiffel tower of Paris, canals of Venice everything over there. I marveled how a desert turned out into an attractive city within a few years.

We booked our hotel in the center of the Vegas strip, which made us easier to walk around the strip. Our room had a wonderful view of the Eiffel tower, which resembles the one in Paris. It was so attractive to watch it especially during the night with full illuminations on.

The night was colder than expected. The strip was very active and busy. I could see people from different parts of the world, everyone wearing coats and jackets and they all looked jubilant and enthusiastic. There were many people on the side of the strip; a man was doing street performance, another man was drawing cartons and paintings and a few of them were selling hand made products,

and still that place was more filled with tourists than the common people over there.

And the sad part was that being such a big and developed city, there were people who were asking change for their one time meal. It was really sad and upset to see them. It was hard for us to walk in the cold, then how about the poor homeless people sleeping around the corners of the building, that too in the intense cold without even having a blanket?

While returning back to the hotel, we watched the fountain show at the Bellagio casino. Even though I had seen fountain dance before, that was so enormous and one of the fabulous show I had ever seen. It was fascinating to see the water dancing at the rhythm of the songs. As we were so tired of travelling, we went back to the room and waited for the next day with much hopes and desires.

\*\*\*\*\*

That day was very windy and we were in two minds whether to go to the Grand Canyon or to pass the day at the Vegas strip. Still we took the chance and decided to go to the Grand Canyon. It was two hours' drive from Vegas. We spent the whole day at the Canyon.

I was mesmerized by the beauty of the Grand Canyon. Actually I don't have any words to describe about this magnificence landscape. It is indeed, a real natural wonder of the world. One of the most beautiful places on the Earth, and I wondered how beautiful my planet Earth really is. The canyon is so gorgeous and peaceful. There was also a glass bridge built over the edge of the side canyon called Skywalk; beneath it we can have an amazing view of the astonishing canyon. There were plenty of areas to explore near the canyon, and we could also see some Native Americans there. We also went for a small hike at the Guano Point in the canyon.

We missed the helicopter ride over there because they closed it in the afternoon. We were late by one hour, we had planned and reached there as per our schedule, still I didn't realize why we were late. I got upset because I wished to fly in the helicopter and see the nook and corner of the Grand Canyon. But, I had missed it and later I realized that Arizona does not follow day light savings.

But still the scene I had was delightful and overwhelming. I was really happy and took many photos from there. I wish to bring my entire family over there and they would be really excited to see the majestic canyon. I think it's better to travel and experience than just describing it in words. If you get a chance to visit canyon, don't miss to go to this incredible place. With the fruitful memories we had, we drove back to Vegas with much more to explore the next day.

\*\*\*\*\*



That was an awesome day for me. We covered some of the great casinos at the Vegas on this day. We went to see the Caesars Palace casino. The scenery over there was so attractive. Its main attraction was the Colosseum theatre built like the ancient Colosseum in Rome. The fountains and the pools inside it were astonishing. It had many statues from the roman period and also the statue of Julius Caesar's. The sculptures were simply superb, we watched the rotating statues show; it looked so real and it was unbelievable to see the statues rotating and talking. When I looked up, I could see the sky and then I realized it's not the real sky; it's the ceiling of the casino, but it looked just like the original sky. When you had visited this place, you don't have to go to Rome again. It was worth watching.

We had a relaxing evening in the water gondola at the Venetian casino. It depicts the water gondola ride in Italy. It was a romantic ride in the gondola under the Grand Canal built in the Venetian casino. The water gondola took us near the shops and restaurants, beneath the bridges and balconies; it also took us inside as well as outside the building. It was a twenty-minute relaxing evening for us with the romantic songs of the gondoliers.

High roller is yet another ride you should not miss at the Vegas. It is the world's largest observatory wheel. First I was scared to go inside seeing its height, but it was thirty minutes slow ride, so there was nothing to worry about it. It was the best view to see the entire Las Vegas strip. As we went during the night, the view was spectacular with full of lights everywhere. The pod, which took us above, was big and roomy and we could enjoy views from all the sides through the window. It is best to go in it during the nighttime.

Even though we were so tired, our legs were hurting after walking down the strip; we didn't give up. I said to my husband that we would go to the casinos and would play for an hour and then we will return to our room. But in the casinos we played for almost six hours; we went back to room only after 3am. The games were so addictive and irresistible. Actually, I practiced Black Jack for a month, and the good part was; I was winning while playing Black Jack, which made me to play for long hours. That made me so addicted and I felt like a successful gambler.

\*\*\*\*\*

Next morning, in spite of less sleep during the night, I didn't feel tired but I felt little unhappy because that was the last day of ours at Vegas. That thought made me more energetic and enthusiastic; I wished to explore all the places in Vegas and have maximum fun before I leave that place.

As soon as we had the breakfast, we went to see one of the famous magic shows. I always had craze to watch magic shows but this was the first time I had seen a magic show in real. So I was keen to see the play and enjoyed a lot.

After that, we went to see the dolphin show at Siegfried Secret Garden. There were many dolphins in the pool; some of them were jumping, dancing, playing with the ball, whistling each other; a way of their communication. I got a chance to kiss a dolphin among them and my husband took a photo of it. It was a fun filled show and had an unforgettable experience with them. There were also other creatures in the garden like white tiger, leopards, tiger cub and even peacocks. I was so happy to see all of them together.

We decided to spend our last few hours of Vegas trip at the casinos; playing games. Just like the previous night, I thought I would win today also. But it was a bad day for me; I played Roulette and Spin Wheel. I was so unlucky that I lost all the profit I made in the previous night, and then I had determined to get back all the money I lost, which ended me to loss again. My husband was winning that day which made me happy. And the sad part was that we even forgot about our flight because we were so addicted to the games within two days.

Finally, we checked out and got into the taxi, but unexpected traffic jam further delayed us, which made us realize that we were going to miss the flight. My husband was worried about the flight, but I started thinking the other way. Actually I didn't feel like going back from Vegas and I wished to spend one more day over there, so all the crazy thoughts came in my mind. If we missed the flight, we could have spent one more day at Vegas. But I just kept that secret to myself. Anyway, we were lucky that we got a nice taxi driver. He was familiar with all the routes, and he took us through a different route which made us reach the airport thirty minutes before the flight. We ran to find our gate from the terminal in the airport. While running I said a final good bye to the slot machines in the airport. We were the last one to complete the boarding and somehow got into the flight. If we didn't have that taxi driver, we would have definitely missed the flight.

\*\*\*\*\*

When my husband asked me which place I wish to go for the next trip, I said none other than Vegas. Till today, it is the same for me. If I have a chance to choose between places I haven't seen before and Vegas, I will definitely chose Vegas. I wish to go there once again. As known, Las Vegas is definitely the Paradise on the Earth.

**Weidong**  
**Lucy Liu**

My cousin, Weidong, who is two years older than me, was my neighbor in a rural area in China in the 1970s. At that time girls' status was still lower than boys'. Many parents didn't allow their daughters to go to school, but boys could.

Although I am a girl, my parents let me go to school when I was seven years old. I have never forgotten my first school day. Weidong wanted to go to school too, but her mother refused her. Weidong held her mother's one leg and begged her mother to let her go to school. Her mother became very angry and shouted at her "Stop! School is not your business."

The following days Weidong always came to my home when I was back home from school. She was sitting next to me and watching me while I did my homework. If I read my books she would read after me. Weidong was such a smart girl that she could understand what I read. But this situation only lasted a short time because her mother wanted her to do their housework, so she couldn't come to my house and learn from me anymore.

Two years later Weidong's younger brother was old enough to go to school. She looked at her brother with longing. Weidong often stood in front of the door and watched her brother on most school days until she couldn't see her brother anymore.

My whole family moved to the city when I was in grade seven. I have not seen her since that time. I only got some messages about her from my mother. Weidong married an honest farmer and had a daughter and a son and both of the kids went to school. Her daughter went to college last year. I can imagine Weidong must have had a bright smile at that time, she was proud of herself and her daughter.

***My Journey To Get My Education Back***  
**Mariella Mamone**

I have always been told by my family that I should go back to school. They said that it was going to be the best decision that I could ever make and one I would not regret.

Once I enrolled in this school, I did not feel confident about it. At that moment, I did not believe in myself. I thought I was not going to make it because I didn't know anything. I had to push myself over and over again to learn how to start believing in myself.

In the beginning, it was very tough. For example, math was very challenging to me, and I had avoided it my entire life. Also, writing was difficult because I could not put my ideas together, and I would go all over the place. Then it got easier. It was an amazing feeling knowing that I could go to school without being afraid of not knowing anything. I started to regain my confidence.

Now, I tend to recall my family's words. "You can do it! It's never too late to start!" These words are the ones that keep me going every day. Also, I came to realize that I am not alone on this journey. I have my family and my confidence right next to me.

### ***A Letter as a Reminder*** **Andrea Mego**

Dear Andrea:

I know it's 2:11 am and you can't sleep, I'm sure you're looking at the ceiling as you look at math problems, the problems you never liked and you never could solve. I also know it's hard to stop overthinking and analyzing every single thing that happened to you today. You are analyzing every word you said, every text you read and your anxiety knows it, so today it played with you. You didn't finish the food that mom prepared for you today, but you ended up with that bag of chocolates that you have in the drawer next to your bed. I also know that it's really difficult for you to focus and that every time you can, you ask yourself: When will all of this end, when will everything be alright again?

I'm writing to remind you that you're living YOUR life, ONE life. You must be aware that your anxiety will appear from time to time, but I assure you will learn to control it. And right now you're wondering, but when? Well, when you least expect it, it's that simple. In this life you will be knocked around, you'll have the darkest moments and you'll feel that there's not enough light to clarify. In that moment, remember my words: You are strong enough, don't you remember?

When you were waiting for your flight in your gate at the airport in Lima, you were crying and talking through the phone with your dad. He told you to be strong, daddy's little girl was always a big girl, and big girls don't cry. Remember how hard was to say goodbye to your grandmother who was practically your dad for many years, when he decided to leave you because he wasn't ready to deal with such a big responsibility. Remember how it took you many years to forgive him, to learn how to love and trust a man who seemed so afraid to be next to you. He told you he loved you that day and you, for the first time, believed in his words. Don't you see it?

I also remember how difficult was for you to start a new life with your mom and your little sister here in the United States. Remember that time when you went to your English classes and you had a really bad day, because your grades were so good that one girl started to bully you? She tried to sabotage your final exam, so you could get a zero, I'll never forget her. Anyway, that day you decided to walk home, it was summer and you had to walk for about twenty minutes. You felt thirsty and decided to go and buy a bottle of water, but you remembered that you had to talk in English and you were embarrassed to talk, to looked at them, to let the know that your life was conditioned because you were afraid to talk broken English. I remember how you cried and how useless you felt. I also know that you just wanted to run away, to take a plane and hug your dad, your friends and to have your life back. But you couldn't, if you did that, your whole green card process was gone. You will have to wait until immigration decided to solve your case. They said four months, but due to problems they had with paperwork, it became a year. You just wanted to go and hug dad. He was dealing with your grandfather, who was really sick. You thought that he was going to die and that you weren't going to be able to say goodbye. All because of a plastic card that ironically means everything for you: your future, your family and your dreams. Although, life was preparing you for better things. You gain a lot of confident when you started to get lost in the city, to walk without direction to find the right path. You were feeling lost, but at the same time you were finding a way to make it work.

You decided to take English classes and you went directly to the library, that was it. You started to feel comfortable and you met people who taught you how to order a cup of coffee. I remember it clearly, the next day you run to Dunkin Donuts and asked a small hot coffee with cream and sugar, your English wasn't so good, but the cashier understood you. You smiled, your smile was the key of your freedom. I need to tell you why I think you're so strong? Mom is so proud of you, mom is studying English almost eighteen hours per week and she tries to be strong to support you. You are now aware of that, especially now that your green card just arrive. You are completely free.

You see? You'll move on, just breathe and act according to what your heart tells you to do, act with kindness. Remember everything you've been through. There will be people that will break your heart and you'll feel that you're not able to trust anyone like you did before, because you just don't want to feel bad again. There is no solution for this, but I want you to know and trust my word that not everyone acts or feels the same, you will meet others who are simply not prepared to deal with such a big heart like yours and you'll meet others who are just mean. They'll come into your life to teach what you don't want to know about love. So, little by little and with time you'll learn to know which is the person for whom it is

worth fighting. In addition, you will fight in scenarios you've never imagined and even act in ways you never thought you'll do. But always keep in mind not to lose your essence and remember what is in your heart. Please, remember all the things you have done in just a year.

My purpose in writing you this letter is to give you this message: RELAX, everything will be fine. Yes, now it's difficult to see when it will get easier, but I promise you that everything will be solved. You'll be able to keep smiling; just don't forget to walk with your feet on the ground and with your dreams in the sky. Love your family and appreciate every second with them, always act with your heart full of kindness, but don't forget to connect it to your brain (this is the most important thing to do at your age). Never stop dreaming and never repeat to yourself that you can't do something. Believe it or not when you say that you can't, YOU are acting as your own obstacle. Don't hate anyone, you don't deserve it. Finally, remember that at the end of the day YOU CAN COUNT ON YOURSELF and don't worry, whenever you feel that you can't move anymore, read this and you'll be surprised of how strong you really are.

Loving you everyday, here with you forever.

Andrea Mego

### ***What A Time To Be Alive*** **Eriel Montesino**

My brother Abel, 18 years old, is a transplant recipient, meaning two kidneys were donated to him. His kidneys failed due to a mixture of medicines that he drank when he was sick. He was invited to an event where kids with the same problem came together and talked about what they'd been through. They told the kids to make a wish. Abel wrote his wish on a piece of paper. One month later, he got an email saying his wish had been approved by the Make-A-Wish Foundation. It surprised him, me, my mother, and my pops. His wish was to go on a cruise with his family. They gave us four tickets to go on any cruise we chose and everything would be paid in full. We are deciding what place we would like to go to.

### ***Change of Mind*** **By Curtis Moore**

I am sure that many of the people that I have come across in my life believed in me. None of them stood out because they never expressed it. When I was at the lowest part of my life, my grandmother was really the only one who truly believed in me. She would talk to me about the terrible cards I had been dealt, and she would tell me that she knew I could get out of the situation I was in and move forward in a more positive direction. All I needed was a little help. Thankfully, she was there to give it to me. She let me move in with her to get away from the negative environment I was in so I could feel more comfortable. That led me to having more ambition to make my life better. After I started this class, I felt like I was actually trying to make a difference in my life. Now I have a more positive mind set, and I am out of my depressed state. Things have started to affect me in a more moving way because my head is clear and I actually comprehend and feel emotionally. Before, I would block a lot of things because I was in my head too much. I am so thankful for my grandmother for actually believing in me. It is leading me to a better life and a way better state of mind.

### ***Watch Don't Ask*** **Jaelixa Narvaez**

Being the oldest child in a home run by a single mother has really kept me on my toes. My mother never told me about any of the struggles she had been through, but she did not know I had been watching. By watching instead of asking, I have learned about responsibilities. Most people say that you learn from your own mistakes, but I have learned more from watching carefully what others do.

When I turned 17, I knew I had to start working. I went to school during the day and worked weekends. I was eager to help my mom make ends meet, so I started saving money for rent. At first my mom did not like the idea of me giving her money, but we sat down and talked about it. I told her I would rather help with rent than waste my money on junk food. I had enough of seeing her come home exhausted and not have time for herself. I felt strongly about wanting to help her more and rent was the first thing that came to mind. It took her a while to accept that she needed help from her daughter, but when she finally caved in, she seemed more relieved.

Soon after, we ended up with no food for a couple of days. At only 17, I did not understand how something like that could happen. I had no idea how hard she

had to work to make us a plate every day. That is when I came to the conclusion that I could help out with groceries, as well as paying rent. After school, I started working nights and weekends. One day without my mom knowing, I went food shopping. Even though I had never gone shopping on my own, I was confident I would do fine. When I got to the store I picked up some frozen pizzas and a few meats for me and my sister. I felt that the items I chose were perfect for us because they were simple enough for us to make while my mom was at work. Not knowing what my mom would think about me food shopping on my own, I was excited to get home. When my mom got home that night, she saw all the food in the kitchen and went to the other room to cry. Knowing that it was tears of joy and gratitude, I continued to do it.

Eventually things got better and we moved to a bigger house. The place was perfect for us. My sister and I finally had our own rooms. We loved the house even though there were a couple of flaws. It was run down and a little old, but that was nothing my mom and I could not handle. Every once in a while when we had the chance, we got together to talk about how we could improve the place. With a lot of hard work and dedication, we knew one day our house would be a home.

All I can remember saying as a child was that my mom was a superwoman and I enjoyed every minute I spent being her side kick. All the stuff that I have helped with has made me confident that one day I will make it on my own. It really is all thanks to her. I wish all children could understand that it never hurts to help out at home. Imagine if everyone at home took the time to notice things and then helped their families. It would pay off in the end.

### *Untitled* Oluwamayowa Oshodi

My name is Oluwamayowa Oshodi, Means (Joy). Long name but hey I'm from Africa, and giving long names are common. I was born into a family that to me is the best. I am also the second child of three, i have an older brother and a younger sister. I grew up in a City called Ibadan, and that exposed me to the reality of life. There are rich people and there are also very poor people, there are different religions and different beliefs. But then everyone talked to each other, we children loved and played with each other, Celebrated Birthdays. All having fun together. s time goes on some of the families moved on to better locations and some remained in the same neighborhood.

My Family left our big house because my Parents businesses folded up. So we moved to a very far and remote State. To me that was eye opening, The



trials and tribulations was so much that myself and my sister went to work at a Hospital selling Pastries. We were so sad because we had to work and could not go to School. We were not used to such a hard life, on a faithful evening I went to sell Pastries at the Hospital, a big van drove in filled with dead bodies, both young and old that was involved in a fatal accident.

I was so afraid and cried so much that, here i was complaining about work but there are dead people in that bus including babies. From that day i became very grateful to God for what I have.

My father fell ill and we eventually lost him, to me it was like the world had come to an end because he meant the World to me. Well things got worse for my family, But loosing my father thought me to Appreciate life. Respect people and Love people. Because you never can tell, it could be your last time saying I Love you or Goodnight. You never can tell if you will stay rich forever.

I learnt to be a better woman today with all, the good and bad experience of life I witnessed growing up. I made up my mind to Leave Africa for the USA to get a better Education, best decision Ever.

### ***The Day I Became A Mother*** **By Rhonda Sanders**

One day, my niece asked me to babysit my great nephew. I was so surprised. She knew I never had a child, but she trusted me to watch over her five-month-old baby boy five days a week. In the time I took care of him, I would let him watch Mickey Mouse, which was his favorite show. Then I would make time for learning with animal flash cards, numbers, and also we would study family pictures and call out the names. I taught him the song, "Yes, Jesus Loves Me." I would take him to the park, funerals, and shopping. I would comfort him when he didn't feel well. He was part of me for eight hours a day. I took care of him for two years, until he went to preschool. It was like I was given the chance to be a mother in my lifetime. I was so honored that my niece chose me and no one else. And as of today, he is my "shining star." He is the little boy that I always wanted to have.

### ***My Memories in a New Country*** **Maricela Sandoval**

I was born in Puebla, Mexico in December 1972. My parents and grandparents raised me; my childhood was beautiful. I attended elementary school and middle school in my hometown. I received my diploma as a nurse in 1991. My parents were proud because I was the first member in their family to graduate.

I began my first job in 1991 at a small hospital. In October of that year my father died. I left home and lived by myself. Leaving home was one of the hardest decisions I made.

I started my second job as a nurse in 1992. It was perfect because I learned from both good and bad experiences.

I have known my husband since the first grade but in 1993 we started dating. After one year of dating we got married, and one year later we decided to migrate to the United States. It was the hardest decision that I had to make because the idea of leaving home and my family and moving to a different country was terrifying. We arrived in this country in March of 1996. In September from that year my first child, Melissa was born. Two years later, I started to attend ESL classes at Brookdale Community College for two years. I didn't speak or understand any English and I was depending on my husband in my ways. My girl was three years old and when she started preschool she didn't speak any English! She only spoke Spanish and she would tell me that the kids don't know how to speak, I didn't want to go to preschool. It was funny but at the same time it was stressful for us.

The time went by and she learned English and forgot Spanish. While I was working she would have some fun. One day I realized that I was missing out on my little girl's childhood and only giving her material love and even worse, I wasn't making enough money. I was upset about many things and that didn't help the situation in those years.

In August 2001 we had our girl, Diana. It was a very hot summer. In March 2003 my girl, Andrea was born. It was a beautiful spring day. It was an important turning point in my life because I became a mother of three girls. My husband and I were blessed and that meant I had to work more at home.

My girl, Melissa was in the Gifted and Talented program at school. We were so proud of her. When she was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade we noticed a change in personality in her. I worked as a babysitter and my husband didn't have a job. He only worked a few days but we were okay. While I was working as a babysitter, my daughter was having serious problems and she didn't ask for help. Her grades were bad. Perhaps she was being bullied or even worse but we couldn't help. During those hard times she was taking art classes and she was excellent at that. My husband helped her in

many ways to recover from being scared of being bullied. In junior year of high school we noticed that my girl was different again. Her grades were good again and she became responsible. She won 1<sup>st</sup> place at the Monmouth Art Society competition and won a scholarship. Doors were open for her again.

A major event in my life happened in 2014 when my girl, Melissa was accepted at The College of New Jersey. She gives ESL classes to adults in Trenton, NJ, she volunteers a lot and is a Bonner Scholar. In June 2015, my girl, Diana sang the National Anthem at her graduation from 8<sup>th</sup> grade. My girl, Andrea went to an International competition of Future Problem Solvers in Iowa.

Nowadays, my girls and I volunteer at the local thrift shop in Freehold. Since 2014, I have attended ESL classes at Brookdale Community College Monday's and Wednesday's. I am working fulltime at a Laundromat. I realized that to migrate to this country was for a reason and it is not possible to have everything in life.

We are thankful to God everyday for what we have now and not worry about what is going to happen tomorrow.

These are my memories and my half life in this country.

### **Memoir**

#### **Jean Emile Souffrance**

I arrived in the U.S. on April 24, 2015. The plane landed in Miami after a 4 hour flight from Haiti. It was spring. I was with my family – my sister, mother and father. My parents came with us to help but they returned to Haiti. Now we live with our cousins.

My first day in America was very bad because our plane landed late and we missed our Jet Blue flight to New Jersey. We had to sleep in the Miami Airport while we waited for the flight to JFK. It was very difficult for us.

My first day at JVS was good but at the same time, I was nervous because I didn't understand anything. Thank God I had a nice teacher. Her name was Merrill. In three months, she helps me to understand a little bit. I am so happy for this.

When I think of my native country, Haiti, I miss my family, friends and my bicycle! My biggest problem in America is to learn English. In the future I hope to speak good English, find a good job and help my family.

**Memoir**  
**Kedner Suffray**

I arrived in America on 3/17/2015. My first day was very important because when I arrived at JFK Airport, my cousin, sister and my wife came to pick me up. Then, when we arrived home, we made a big party.

My first day at JVS was great for me because I started to learn English with my wonderful teacher. At JVS I met different people of different colors and different nationalities.

Sometimes I think about my native country where it never gets snow and never gets cold at any time. I miss the sun, the natural air and my family. My two biggest problems in America are the cold temperatures and speaking English. In the future, I hope to get accustomed to my new country of the United States.

**My American Dream**  
**Zhi Sun**

In spring of 2010, my family moved to beautiful America with a dream of a better life in the future. Our three goals were that I could have a job soon; my daughter would enter an Ivy League college after she graduated from high school; and we would have our own house in the next few years.

We started our new lives in Jackson, New Jersey, a peaceful rural area in the middle of the garden state. We lived with my brother's family. My daughter went to a local middle school, and she learned English quickly. After one month, she could speak English well. Her teachers were patient and often encouraged her. She loved them and studied very hard. Soon I didn't worry about her any more, but worried about my English. I had learned English in China, but I only could say some simple English. Helped by my brother, I began to learn English again. He told me that I should spend more time watching TV programs, to imitate the American pronunciation. After three months, I could understand more and more English when I was watching TV.

That summer, I found a part time job at a Walmart store. It was an over-night maintenance job. The store manager thought my English was not good enough, so he gave me work that didn't need a high level of English. Honestly I did not like this job, but I thought it was a good opportunity for me to learn English with American people. So I began my first job, and I was the only Chinese worker in my store. Step by step, I was not only talking with my co-workers, but the customers. They were so kind to me that nobody was surprised when I spoke broken English. Some of them showed me how to pronounce English correctly. I appreciated them for helping. I

liked to help my co-workers and the customers, and I always worked hard, I believed that I should always do the right thing.

I kept learning English every day. Fortunately, in 2011, I met my English tutor Mrs. Anton. She was patient, and always encouraged me to practice more English. I learned a lot from her, and improved my ability to communicate with American people. I also learned some American culture that let me know more about American society. I appreciated her very much.

2014 was an important year for my family. In February, helped by my parents and brother, my family moved into our own house in Jackson; In June, I became a Walmart full time worker; In December, my daughter was accepted by University of Pennsylvania. All my dreams came true. My family sincerely appreciated everyone who ever helped us. America and American people are great.

Today I still remember what my father told me before I came to America: "If you can't live well in America, there is no excuse".

### ***My Experience in the Running World*** **Laura Padilla Tellez**

On February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, it will be two years since I started to run. I think running is the best experience I've ever had. I love running-not just because is one of the two more complete sports, but because of the way it makes me feel when I do it.

I started to jog alone in a track near to my house. I did it for almost two months, and then I joined at Ificlo's Running Club. My coach used to tell me that I have a special aptitude to run; in spite of the fact that I had never practiced this sport when I was younger. Over time, I realized I had the stamina to run as fast as I believed I could. But that was only the result of my discipline in my workouts. Through time, running gave me lots of satisfaction; made me feel energized and even helped me to lift my mood when I was depressed.

I used to train for 1 ½ hrs. Monday to Friday and most of the time on Sundays, my friends and I used to trail run in amazing places full of vegetation and animals. In simple words, I went to wonderful places that could take everybody's breath away! Also I used to go to participate in some races in other cities of my state with all the Club's members. We ate delicious dishes, met very kind people and learned about their traditions.

After five training months, I placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in a 5km women's race. I was really proud of myself. In that moment, I knew I was an aggressive runner and I could do it even better. Also I got 2<sup>nd</sup> place in a 10km trail run. Both races took place in Mexico. Then I moved to the USA. To be honest, I still miss my friends because

they're now part of my family; I miss my coach and all the races in my lovely country.

When I arrived in this country I had mixed feelings. Life is a little complicated because you have to work very hard to reach your goals. I felt so lonely for a couple of months, but then I got my courage back and I started to run. It really helped me to relieve accumulated stress. When I run, I can literally run away from my problems. During my stay in this country, I've run a 5km race in Pine Beach, where I got a 2<sup>nd</sup> place in my category; that one was on July, 2015. My second race was the "Seaside Hights Half Marathon" on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015. And the last one was the "Frozen Bonsai Half Marathon" in Central Park New York, on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015. It was a difficult race, with many ups and downs, but I still reached my goal. There were 1285 runners, unfortunately I didn't win any place but, I was very satisfied because I was number 350 overall. I was 111<sup>th</sup> female of 707 women, and in my category number 48 of 288 runners.

I learned from this experience that it doesn't matter how fast you run, how good you are, or how many medals you have won, as the best recognition you can have is , when you cross the finish line and say "I did it". If you ask me about how I felt when I got the medal at the end of a race, I couldn't say much; it is something indescribable.

My next goal is to run the "More Shape Women's Half Marathon" in Central Park New York, on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I think I'm an aggressive runner, I love to compete, but the best part when I run is to feel the freedom, I feel relaxed. I leave behind every failure and every negative thought. This encourages me to do my best in everything. That's why I chose running as my lifestyle.

### ***Returning Home!*** **Claudia Trani-Melgar**

It was time to prepare all our belongings and pack for our trip back home. At this particular moment in the morning, I didn't want to leave. "It is never enough time..." I whispered.

I was sleepless all night telling myself to be strong, to be happy, and not to let this gloom take away the memories of my visit to Bolivia. My children had a great time with their grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends and family; however, my thoughts remained focused on the next day. Melancholy feelings occupied my mind once again.

A few hours ago, my parent's house was filled to capacity. It looked like a party, with all my relatives visiting us for the last time before we returned to the

United States. We experienced the love, and my children sensed their importance to their Bolivian family.

It was a long night (no doubt about it), but nobody wanted to leave. Children noisily played outside while the adults shared some funny stories about the trip we took the week before to a farm. It was a great excursion, all of us having fun with exotic animals, drinking “ambrosia”, eating marshmallows around the fire, and tasting fresh milk directly from the cow; it was amazing!!

All these experiences are leaving with us. They will come back every time I set my eyes on a pretty flower or my children talk about their cousins. Not every single minute was perfect, but families are not perfect, and my family is not an exception. We disagree on conflicting topics from simple issues such as preparing foods to more complicated subjects like politics or religion. My siblings and I realize we are getting older, and we can't have the same opinions anymore. Life and time has reshaped all of us, and it is hard to accept all these changes owing to the fact that in my heart they are the little kids I left behind.

Sometimes I wish we went back to that time when I knew every little secret about my younger sisters, or my baby brother. He was only eight years old when I married Douglas and emigrated to the United States. He cried through the ceremony and danced with me all night. We used to share stories every night before bedtime, and he was really close to me. Now we are still close, but I don't know every little secret in his life.

My sisters all grew up to have their own families, we have different paths in life, however, we continue to be a very tight-knit family that loves each other, and help one another regardless of the distance. I am happy and thankful to have been able to share so much time with them this year.

I am leaving again, but now it is different. I know we will be able to come back next year to make these special moments part of our 'book of life'. My children are part of our Bolivian family, and most importantly, will be able to return again every year.

I finally finished getting everything in our suitcases, and dawn is upon us. It will be difficult to say goodbye, but I am looking forward to reuniting with my husband, who is anxiously waiting for us at home.

My heart is pounding in my chest now, and I feel excited to be returning home to my life in the United States. I am thrill to tell my friends, co-workers, and my students all about our trip. Although sometimes I feel we live in between two worlds, two cultures, and two languages, at the same time, this is what it makes my family special, and unique. Life is great!

**Memory of My Father**  
Li Tu

These past few days have been very rainy and it reminds me of my home in Chongqing, China. In my hometown it often rains. I remember one year, my father took my sister and me home from school. We lived in the mountains and the path was very slippery. That day, my father was carrying my sister on his back and me in the front. My sister and I were holding umbrellas and my father was streaming with sweat.

Suddenly, my father slipped and my sister fell off from behind my father. Then he fell on top of me. We were all covered with mud and my sister was crying. My father quickly checked to see if we were hurt and then gave us a comforting hug.

I still remember my father's kind eyes, full of caring and love. That is something I will never forget in my lifetime.

**Reflections of My Life**  
Chin Wang

I was born on January 18, 1973 in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. I have three older brothers. According to my mother, my father always wanted a daughter. On the day I was born, my father asked for days off from the navy and came back home overnight. My father liked to bring me with him everywhere he went even on business trips. I don't know how he managed it though. The first time I rode on the airplane was when I was only four or five years old. It was an uncommon thing at that time especially as we were not a rich family. I didn't remember much of my childhood. But I still remembered the customs agent asking to check my hand bag which had a lot of fake toy bills in it.

I was a very quiet and docile child. An important turning point of my life happened when I was about 4th grade. My mother had two sisters who lived in New York. One of her sisters asked my mother to come to the United States to help in her factory. During the time that she stayed here my aunt also applied for a green card for her and our family. I didn't know the details but my mother was told not to leave the United States during the green card processing. My mother ended up staying in the United States for more than five years. Because the international telephone charges were very expensive, my mother rarely phoned home.



**Senior People**  
**Xuefeng Yang (Staller)**

2015 will end soon. Everyone is shopping to prepare a present for Christmas. Many families decorate with colorful lights outside of their houses. It is very beautiful in the evening. Every year at this time, I always remember an old lady, Chen Wei.

I immigrated to America many years ago. After that I became a Home Health Aide to take care of senior people. Chen Wei was my oldest patient. She was 102 years old when she passed away after Christmas three years ago. She had been an obstetrician in the past in China. Even though I took care of her for only two months, she told me many stories from her past and spoke about her work before 1949 in China. Her life was full of ups and downs. Her husband passed away when she was 38 years old and five years later her son died in Hong Kong. Afterwards she immigrated to America and she worked hard to help poor people as often as possible. When she got older, she lived with her granddaughter. She retired at 70 years old. She complained about only one thing. She wanted to live in a senior center by herself with other senior people around. But her granddaughter insisted that they live together.

Should senior parents live with their adult child? It is a very different concept between America and China. Actually it is a law in China that adult children must provide for their parents when they are older. Many senior parents lived with their children in China, especially in the countryside. But in America it is different.

I had a patient who was an American older man. He had Alzheimer's disease for a few years. His wife took care of him and it was very hard. I remembered one day I went to work and she cried in the kitchen because her husband refused to have a bath. He had not had a bath for three days. His wife felt very helpless. They have one son and two daughters. I asked her why she didn't request that her children help her. She said that they all helped her, but they had families themselves. They had a lot of work to do and she didn't want to bother them.

I also have some Chinese patients and friends here. Although they lived in the senior center, they felt sad and complained sometimes. They thought that since they had brought up their child and had given them a good education in America, that they should take care of them. Now they were separated from their child and felt sick at heart.

Now in Beijing, China many senior parents choose to live by themselves. They would like to enjoy their own life. Their adult children now have the ability to rent a house or to buy apartment by themselves. The times and ideas are changing about senior people, especially in China.

*Through Thick and Thin*  
Anonymous

So many things had gone wrong in my life. At only 12 years old I had already gone through so much. I'm going to be honest with you, guys. There was a point in life where I just felt like completely giving up. I would think of ending it so that I wouldn't have to suffer anymore than I've already had. I mean I'm pretty sure a lot of us have felt like that once in a while, am I right? Anyways, let me tell you about the time I did find hope in the world....

It was early December. I was down stairs at my neighbor's house when all of a sudden I became nauseous. I ran to the bathroom, threw up then came back out.... I didn't see it as anything bad, at first. But as time went by I started becoming more sleepy and hungry. I would throw up when mom would cook something I'd like. It was weird, but after a while I tried to accept the fact that I might have been pregnant.

The first chance I got I ran to the store and bought a pregnancy test. Mind you, I was only fourteen at the time. I was scared. It was weird for me to go into the store so young and ask for a test especially when the people there new my mom. I had to lie and say it was for a friend. When I got home I went back to my neighbor's house and took it there. I peed. I waited. (AAAHHH) I screamed as I dropped the pregnancy test on the floor. It came back positive.

Now I know what you might be thinking. "Where the heck is this girl's parents?" she's so young!" getting pregnant at fourteen!" I know. I was young. I made dumb decisions, but after everything I was going through with my mom not believing me about my abuse and me becoming distant from my family, I just felt so alone. My family treated me so different. My big brother was so disappointed, and my little brother hated me because he really liked my mom's boyfriend and had seen him as his dad. How could he understand, He was so young. I tried to ignore it, but it was hard when I had to live with these people.

I didn't even know how I was going to tell mom. I didn't know what she would say or how she would react. "She can't hit me, can she?" I would think. "I mean I'm pregnant"...than again, my brother used to always say "the baby is in her stomach, not her face. Thanks Jonathan. That helped a lot. Anyways, getting back to the story. When I finally did tell mom, it was with the help of my neighbor Shannon. She explained to my mom what I had explained to her and as you would expect, mom began to cry.

She was so disappointed. She was at a loss for words. She couldn't look at me or say anything, but when she finally calmed down, we had a talk. I was scared. She was scared. But she was still there for me. We eventually decided to keep the

baby of course. I couldn't see my self aborting or putting it up for adoption. Mom stood by me for the whole nine months, and on September 2, 2012, Angelic Marie Ortiz was born. She was beautiful.

After I had Angelic, mom suggested I get on birth control. I also had DCF in my life. For those who don't know what that is, DCF, is the New Jersey Department of Children and Family, which is an "agency dedicated to the safety, well being, and success of children, families, youth, and the communities (State of New Jersey Department of Children and Families , 2016)." Anyways, my DCF worker had agreed with my mother on getting an IUD in plant so that I could not get pregnant for a long time.

I personally feel that the problem with getting on birth control is that there is never a 100% percent chance that you wont get pregnant. I say this because even after I got on the IUD, as sad as it is I still became pregnant a second time, and I know that I could've prevented getting pregnant if I would've used condoms or not had sex at all being that I was still so young, but it happened. Again, mom did not take it well, but with the help of a friend I managed to tell her I was pregnant and even though she was very upset, mom still stayed by my side through everything.

She was there when I gave birth to both my girls. She was the one holding my hand. She helped me get everything I needed for the girls, and I can truly say that yes, mom and I have had our differences, and will continue to have our arguments and our own opinions, but there is no one else I would truly prefer to take her place for the simple fact that through the good and the bad, though not believing me about my abuse, she had her reasons. I had a bad habit of lying a lot, and so I do kind of understand why she acted like that towards me when everything happened. I don't blame her because she too went through abuse and neglect as a young child, and I know that she's not a perfect mom, but even with all the crazy things we've gone through, we are both still here for each other.

## POETRY

*In a Hurry*  
Abid Saeed

We all are in a Hurry  
To Eat To School To Work To Drink  
Forgot about Etiquettes

We all are in a Hurry  
For Survival For relationships For Opinions For  
Conclusions  
Completely lost being Respectful

We all in a Hurry  
To Grow To Love To Hate To Die  
Have no Manners

We all are in a Hurry  
For Job For Carrier For Power For Supremacy  
Lost our Ethics some where

We all in a Hurry  
To Argue To Quarrel To Oppress To Suppress  
No Worth for Humanity

We all in a Hurry  
For Rights For Status For More For Show-off  
Oblivion of our Morality

*Your Peace*  
Ecaterina Birca

Sleep without fear,  
Wake up with a smile,  
Simple and complicated at the same time.  
The smiles of children,  
The clear sky overhead.  
Losing something close,  
Understand, when it is too late,  
You can't afford this or not be late.  
Love with all your heart and soul,  
Do not forget to share kindness with others,  
Remember, together we are a force,  
We can, we want to live in peace,  
All in your hands  
Your wish, your start, your peace!

*Reflections*  
Charles Brown

The pictures I look at which are so dear,  
they move my heart to shed a tear.  
These are the reflections of yester year,  
yes I remember how I loved those days I hold dear.  
The goodness of those who touched my life with no hesitation,  
I take their advice, though the days seem to darken and drift by.  
These memories delight me,  
they will never die.

*Unique*  
Charles Brown

I wonder at times when I am by myself and I think my thoughts are unique,  
when I look at the moon and discern a face while others looked and began to  
trace...  
and out of it all we see the same face. Yet, I think I am unique.

*Perspective*  
Charles Brown

Put everything in its proper perspective even the notes of a song,  
the birds know just what to sing as they perch on limbs so strong.  
Put everything in its proper perspective as the birds take to the air,  
to soar so effortlessly through the sky, but cannot tell them where.  
The strife and wars within our world are lost and some are won, but  
the wars that are taught within us can be compared to none.  
Put everything in its proper perspective and give respect where it is due,  
then life's perplexing puzzle will make sense to you.

*Destiny*  
Charles Brown

Mankind has made so many cities in the world,  
He has made great bridges over wide lakes and rivers curled.  
Civilizations past they still testify of their own greatness,  
although they have been blown by the sands of time floating weightless.  
The sun keeps on shining and the wind keeps on blowing,  
The stars keep on glistening, the sea keeps on rolling.  
Is man destined to be or not to be?  
That which remains we shall eventually see.  
Mankind's technology in this society—it's threat increases day by day,  
while every man, woman, boy, and girl is looking for a better way.  
Soon the bomb will fall, how then will we recall,  
the things in this world that used to be strong and standing tall.  
The ocean sands blast our dreams, our plans, our society,  
oh sun, keep on shining, wind keep on blowing, stars keep on glistening, and sea  
keep on rolling.  
Is man destined to be or not to be?

***Timeless Shade***  
**Charles Brown**

When I look up at the stars at night within a satin sky,  
they look like jewels hanging by strings from heaven up high.  
When the morning comes the angels gather them up far past  
the rainbow through the blackness of the night,  
to be placed in golden shelves until the early morning light.  
Another day has ended and another sunset fades,  
Down past the rainbow and through the timeless shade.

***Thinking Out Loud***  
**Zhnai Davis**

What I thought. I think a lot it's a habit of mine but I think unnoticed therefore I get quite. I thought there could have been something something little nothing major but the peeping is what I peeped lowkey, thinking that something could be. Well thought wrong isn't the first won't be the last, thinking that's how I get myself caught I think to much. Sometimes it's a problem but I think not. I get in my zone a zone that is unknown to most. To most i don't wish to expose. But what's expected of the unexpected of what is thought and what can one think when one is lost. Stop and think and ponder on what's said take your time everything will be alright. As these thoughts are revealed maybe one could have been revealed that night but one is to young as one say but hey all things don't work that way every way but my way. At least that's what I thought. Think wonder into a world unknown searching for that lost soul, being apart of something that is controlled. That's what I thought or have been told.

***Love Forbidden and Overrated***  
**Zhnai Davis**

Love is like eating from the tree of forbidden fruit. Loving someone is an amazing feeling, that love can turn into hate just because thy is afraid to love and be overcome by that power. Love can be blinding and love can be true but I am afraid of loving you. Knowing the truth having nothing to lose but not wanting to change a thing between us two. Is it possible to love and like two different people. Constantly thinking about the what ifs but who cares anymore. Taking chances instead of feeling hatred, hatred is playing it safe and loving is taking risks.

**Mixed Emotions**  
**Zhnai Davis**

The yelling the screaming the crying and the tears. All kinds of emotions are hitting sweat is dropping slowly but disgustingly. Overwhelming pain and joy hitting the inner part of the stomach to the soul. Complaining and bickering for no reason at all. Different kinds of emotions all fall, while others are having a ball. Nervousness kicks in the sweat starts dripping and the world starts spinning in. Then suddenly my heart drops in. Scared of the unknown worried who's on the throne am I'm in control. I feel all alone on this empty world. Seeking to find oneself may take some time but first realize the good and the bad the awful and the sad but what goes through the brain is all the horrible things that has happen at stake. Crying when hurt feeling like dirt but make things work. Maybe there is just another day another day another tomorrow. Starting all over because you don't want to get startled. Feeling like the victim when you always victimize seeing if there will be a surprise when you sit there and wonder why. Maybe some day it will die. Hearing all the strange noises thinking what's going on handling things in situations when things are going wrong. Feeling bad for those who suffer even if you feel like you suffer don't wanna create more problems feeling like the usually. Can't think straight all kinds of unknown things rushing through the mind. Feeling lost don't know at all just feeling tired of all this nonsense. Attitude for no reason being angry for all the wrong reason. Sometimes you just don't know what to do when you feel blue. When too much is going on the mind doesn't function properly. Leaving but don't wanna say goodbye thinking that there will always be another time but some day accept the fact people leave especially the good fun ones life is needing. Frustration and anticipation mixed with aggravation maybe this can be the explanation. Well feeling lost isn't common not knowing what to say isn't common I'm pretty good with words. But not having the time will not make it go by. But as they say fake it till you make it but someday you can break it. Shatter all that has been done don't know when it has begun. But here is a ton take it all in make sure you have some fun but then you suddenly say that the day hasn't begun.



***The Story Behind the Pain***  
**Zhnai Davis**

Most people fear rejection some don't know the reasons why. It may sound dumb but the feeling isn't numb. Rejection hurts after all that has been put into building up the confidence. Conceited that's what some say, but isn't seen that way. The feeling of rejection is unbearable, it hurts deep in the soul. Feeling ugly for so long, not being told pretty. It takes a while to build that back up. Letting guards down, breaking down walls, shaking when called. Don't know what to expect, well rejection. Expect rejection, it happens in many ways. But common in one way to thou, shall I not speak of names, but you, I, he, she, we, they, what else is there to say. Rejection is pretty scary if used to getting anything. The pain deepens, the eyes water, the shoulder needed, but neither is completed. Fear of rejection makes one aware and not care. Mind feelings what one used to say, but what happened to that say today. Only she knows, wonder why the cries and the weary eyes.

Coming from,  
 THE FEAR OF REJECTION

***Rainy Days***  
**Zhnai Davis**

Ahh it's raining for some reason I love the rain. It makes thinking so much easier. The rain drifts away the pain, anger and despair. The thoughts that goes on only one can make them appear. Only the rain brightens up some days but when it's away only thy lord can say I've taken the anger away. My, my look at the clouds cry no one's singing that lullaby. Rain rain don't go away, it is late and I want you to stay. Only I can say that the rain drifts all the negative vibes away. Good vibes stay alive, seeing these tears wondering what made you cry. Lover of the rain hater of the pain only love runs through thy veins. Peace and harmony comes with every beat, the movement of my feet making the water jump with me. These puddles no time to huddle, just release all the beef and make way for world peace. Because when it rains I've become one, one with the moons and the sun, one with heavens and earths, homes of the dwellers. Let it rain but don't rain on my parade, the parade of the day that one can't say without hey isn't this such a great day. Leaving you with nonetheless. May The Lord, God bless.

**God's Gift**  
**Jeremy Johnson**

Life is Amazing!  
To see the beauty of God's creation.  
A magnificent heart beating as it grows to wonder!  
Can't stop the fascination to explore.  
Sweetest thing that your heart can embrace.  
The purity of unknowing so easy to be ignored.  
So I say with a gentle hug I love you more and more.  
Will protect the gift God revealed to me.  
To reassure to my lord with your parental consent.  
I will honor this blessing and never forget.  
This precious gift that you granted me.

**Motivation**  
**Rosa Nieves**

Not enough is said or written today about finishing well. Lots and lots of material is available on motivation to get started and creative ways to speak initiative. Plenty of advice is floating around on setting goals and establishing priorities and developing a game plan. All of it is insightful and needed. Getting off the dime is often a "herculean task," starting well is a plan.

But let's hear it for the opposite end for a change. Let's extol the virtues of stricking with something until it's done. It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the "gospel" it is difficult to sustain the interest. People in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate.

In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is package freshly. There is a great market for religious experience in our world. So many, start the Christian life like a lighting flash, hot, fast, and dazzling. Paul said: Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So, starting and finishing well is a plan.

**Winter Time**  
**Rosa Nieves**

Winter...the ideal occasion to slow down. To invest a few extra hours in quiet reverence, to take a long walk over the freshly fallen with "Manna" delivered earlier to remind ourselves that "our God is in the Heavens".

It is winter right now in the season of our life. Are you feeling depressed, alone, overlooked, Spiritual on hold. Beginning to wonder if your soul will ever thaw.

Take it by faith, friend: He is there, and furthermore, He is neither dead nor deaf. What you are enduring is one of those dry-spell times when you'd rather curl up and cry.

When this winter, season ends, you will be wiser, deeper, stronger. Therefore in reverence, look up. Be still and discover anew that He is God. That He is doing lives, It is winter time.

**Thee**  
**Rosa Nieves**

Not in the doubting throng, not in the boastful song, but kneeling with Christ above me, Humbly I'll say, I love Thee. Not with my lips, alone, not for thy gifts I own, but just for the grace I see, Jesus, my soul loveth Thee.

Every earthly joy with pall, Every earthly friend will fall. Only Christ is to the end, "Altogether Lovely" friend. Do you see His wondrous face full of glory, love, and grace? Look, and all thy need confess: Worship His pure Holiness.

Everlasting, never, ending Age-abiding is my Lord. Never shadow cause by turning, changeless, perfect, is His word. Everlasting God, I pray Thee steady, strengthen, stablish me. Safe from grief and pain and failure, hide me, Everlasting God, in Thee.

**Love Never Dies**  
**Pat Smalley**

Love never dies when you have God on your side.  
Love never dies when you can pray to God.  
Love never dies when you can cry out.  
Love never dies when you can say "I love you".  
Love never dies when you have a loving heart.  
Love never dies when you can be happy inside.  
Love never dies when you live another day.  
Love never dies when you can say that you love me.

**You Never Had a Friend Like Me**  
**Pat Smalley**

You never had a friend like me to lean on.  
You never had a friend like me that gives you a shoulder to cry on.  
You never had a friend like me that you can trust from the bottom of your heart.  
You never had a friend like me that will give you as much hope, joy and love.  
You never had a friend like me because I never had a friend like you.

# FICTION

## *Enthrallment*

George Aguero

There stood a majestic sight, in all the glory of its capacity. Its most illustrious features stood in unison, as if crafted from a single piece of alabaster. Mortal eyes dared not stare at it for long or risk being ensnared in a fatalistic romance. Inevitably, a fool under the pretense of a romantic, ignored the warnings from his predecessors. At first he darted a quick glance towards it, as if to assure himself of possessing control over his desires. Gaining confidence, his gaze intensified, when no sooner did he feel a force unlike any other.

An invisible magnet-like current surged through him, short-circuiting the connection between body and mind. The senses no longer at his command were heightened and racing to satiate his new-found obsession. In his delirium, time came crawling to a near halt, aiding the observance of all minutiae. Ascents and ebbs pertaining to its form were wondrous, awakening bliss incomparable to the greatest climax. His metamorphosis was a true testament of its otherworldly influence; a once brazen stalwart man reduced to mere caricature.

## *A Secret*

Ray H. Irving

In the spring of 2010, Antoinette sat on the veranda of her parents' house on the hillside of Richmond Hill, a suburb of Montego Bay, Jamaica, looking across the bay. As the sun set, the air was filled with the scent of roses from the garden that encircled the courtyard. Her friend Bernadette's car drove through the gate and came to a stop beside the fountain.

"What's up? Are you dreaming about your date last night?" Bernadette asked.

"No, it's a pity he had to go back to Rome this morning," Antoinette replied.

"Then let's go to the Ipso-Facto," Bernadette said. The Ipso-Facto was a club in the heart of the hotel area. It was Lady's Night and the champagne would be pouring all night.

"Oh gosh, Bernadette. I don't want to be preoccupied with too many parties. Remember, we both go back to college next week and my Mom and Dad

are depending on me to ace my exams. I am serious about becoming a lawyer, following in my father's footsteps," she said enthusiastically.

"Honestly, I want to succeed in my exams too and become an accountant like my dad," Bernadette said sadly.

"So, why are you looking so melancholy?" Antoinette said anxiously.

"Dad is having an affair with his secretary. That's why I've been going to all those parties to get away from home because I can't stand the fights between Mom and Dad. Last night they were talking about divorce. I love them both and I don't want a broken home," she replied sadly.

"So how long has this been going on?" Antoinette asked.

"I don't know, but since I came home for break I noticed the fights. I pray they'll resolve this and Mom forgives him. He says he's sorry and showers Mom with expensive gifts. Oh Lord, please... please let it work," Bernadette said.

A day after the girls went back to college, Bernadette's father called her and told her he fired the secretary. This was to facilitate the healing between her parents. Bernadette was delighted by the news from her father, saying to herself that her prayers had been answered.

# NON-FICTION

## *The Boiled Frog (Selections from a longer piece)* György (George) Bartoli

*If a frog jumps into hot water it notices the heat and jumps out immediately.  
But, if the same frog sits in cold water boiling gradually, it won't notice  
the change of the temperature and WILL BE BOILED.*

I am new in the country and in the English language. I came here from Central Europe (Hungary) with my wife and our dog because we got an opportunity to live and work legally in this country. We have been here for two months and a half. This short discussion tells about my experiences in this two months. Two months are very short time in a new country. But in this short time we had some unexpected and strange experiences that are unknown in our native country (YET).

### *How Much Does It Cost?*

The first thing we had to do after arriving at our accommodation was shopping for everything for the next several days. Next morning, we found a food store near our location. The prices were surprising. Everything was very expensive at first look. Additionally, there were no prices on every item. We chose items that we wanted to buy and we went to the cashier. On the receipt the end-price was more than we calculated. After checking the receipt we noticed that the labels on items show the net price.

In Hungary the labels and any information about prices must show the total (gross) price. It is not allowed to write the net price on the item. With this method customers can check their total price before they go to the cashier. Here the tax rate is quite low but not everybody can count the total price. In a food store this affair caused a bit of a surprise because the tax on foods is very small.

When we came here the hurricane Joachim was coming and heading to New York and the Jersey Shore. Our host said that an evacuation could happen in any hour and she was not able to deliver us and our belongings in her car. We had a rented car for a week but we were in the 4-5th day of the week. So we had to buy a car.

You can only buy a car if you have a liability insurance. So we went to an insurance office and made a contract. But Blessed Frog, the insurance cost \$350

per month. My monthly salary in Hungary was \$500. I know it was very small but there it was quite a good salary. We had to give all our personal data to the agent (I don't know why). If you look at the prices on the used cars along the roads you cannot know how much are they exactly. The prices are also net prices. You will know the total end-price in the office but the total price will be several hundred dollars more.

After a month we looked for less expensive insurance on the internet. My wife found one and we started to fill the forms on-line. There was a website of another insurance company. The forms ask much less data about us and the monthly price was the half of the previous insurance. We were very happy. We filled the first form the second etc. and the last one. The total price of the insurance was on the monitor. This was a very friendly price. The program asked us to approve it and go to the payment. OK, we did it. But on the next screen the price rose. We checked it but didn't find the reason. We went forward and on the next screen the price rose as well. There was a short text about the reason but we didn't really understand it.

How do the prices work in this country? Why can the prices change after the customer approves them? Why no regulation about the proper indication of prices? We had to mail our new address to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) within 10 days of our arrival. On the website of the office the on-line form doesn't work. So we had to buy a printer too. When we bought the printer I asked the cashier about the warranty. She looked at me strange and told me I can buy warranty separately. It was very strange to us because all the items must have warranty in Hungary and the total price must contain the price of the warranty (and tax).

I think it would be better if the customers could get the items automatically with warranty and the prices were the gross prices in them.

### *Unions Wanted*

In Hungary I worked for the Hungarian Customs and Tax Authority. I worked from Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm every day. It took 40 hours a week. A young beginner worker has 20 paid days a year for holidays. I worked there more than 21 years. I was a regular officer and I had 35 paid days in a year for holidays. Rarely I had to work overtime.

Here we are looking for jobs for a living. Of course I cannot work here as a regular officer because I am not a citizen. So I have to find another job. Therefore we check the job adverts on the internet every day. In a lot of advertisement we have noticed odd work times.



According to these adverts - for example - a driver of the small post car (USPS) must work 10-12 hours a day. A conveyor worker must work 10-12 hours a day too. Part time jobs last 5-8 hours. Everybody must be a "hard worker" in the adverts. A deliveryman must work 10-12 hours as well. In a medical office, the administrator must be there from 8am to early evening. Blessed Frog! How much do people work in the USA a day? They work often 60 hours or more. When do they spend time with their family? When do the people have time for their hobbies? When do the people have a rest?

In the '50s there were unions everywhere. Where are unions now? How can workers exercise their rights in workplaces? A lot of people don't have a job but the people in workplaces work 60 hours a week. Why? Why does not anybody say "NO more".

If someone is in self-employment he or she can work as much as he or she can. But don't expect the same long work from the employees. Employers could give more rights to their employees. At a big multinational company employees are expected to work minimum 10 hours a day. But they are expected to appear fresh, well slept, and in shape every morning. All the men must always be shaved. Employees are expected to work very fast all day almost without rest. How can they have proper rest? What about their family, children etc.?

Where are the unions now? I think people must have self-consciousness to protect their own rights at the workplaces.

### *Go Vote!*

We had nobody here who we could go to live with. We had no relatives no friends in the USA. We didn't know anything about places and cities for living. We had some books about America and some American cities, but those books were for tourists. As we were seeking the place for living we often used online maps and Wikipedia to get information about places, cities, neighborhoods. We read and learned a lot of interesting things. We always looked - and look now - for the chosen place on the satellite map. We were interested in the history of cities, the population, the crime, the transportation, the political orientation and of course the geography and the climate.

There is an interesting relation between the decline of the industry and the change of population. One of the most interesting cities is Detroit. The population was on peak in the 1950's because of the automobile industry. After the peak of mass production and the rising of the oil prices, the population of Detroit dropped.

A lot of people moved away. Detroit was one of the most beautiful cities in the USA. Look at the abandoned buildings in Detroit, and read about them!

The other interesting relation is between the decline in industry and crime. There are a lot of places where the people don't have jobs. They can't move because they are poor. In these places the crime has risen. These people cannot learn in universities, they cannot save money for the good schools.

But the most interesting information that I could see in Wikipedia was the voting rate of residents. Dear Reader, you can check the facts. Please, open the Wikipedia on your computer and chose a city or township or any place (where people live) by chance and go to the section named "Politics"! Please read the voting rate! You will see that more than 50% of residents don't vote. Blessed Frog! More than 50%!

In the life of a country and in the life of democracy attention to voting is very important! I moved to the USA because in Hungary the most part of people didn't vote in 2010. There few people went to vote (approximately 35-40%). Therefore the Hungarian democracy started to go to its end. In 2010 the extreme right parties got the power of the Hungarian government. Since then the human rights were taken away from the people by the government. The Hungarian democratic constitution was dropped and a discriminating one was done. The separated branches were dropped too. Now all the branches are in the hand of the Hungarian prime minister. He canceled the freedom of religion. He had stadiums built. He has a stadium direct next to his house. These stadiums were built from public money of the Hungarian people and the money of the European Union. He wants to step out Hungary from the European Union. Or he wants to grab the governance of the European Union. This is why I left Hungary. Now, there is a fake democracy in that country. The government cannot be changed by democratic vote anymore.

(If you are interested in this theme look for the work of professor Kim Lane Sheppele. She is an expert on Hungarian constitution law. Go and read about it!)

Going to vote is very important in the life of a democracy so please, feel the responsibility for your vote unless you want to escape too!

*Untitled*  
Daniela Carvalho

The world was surprised in December of 2015 with an announcement from Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive of Facebook, "We will give 99 percent of our Facebook shares- currently about \$45 billion during our lives to join many others improving this world for the next generation." The announcement was made after the birth of his daughter. After his announcement, questions and different opinions about his donation surged. What is it, exactly? That's a good question, and one that more and more people are asking.

The announcement on the Founder of Facebook's page is longer, but additional clarity about the money's future is needed. Mark and his wife Dr. Priscila Chan, formed a new organization, The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, to manage the money through many years. However, they chose three categories emphasizing: personalized learning; connecting people and building strong communities; and curing disease. Many people said that does not look like charity, but an investment for their benefit, or their descendants' benefit, because they started an LLC (limited liability company), rather than a nonprofit organization to further their mission. In the social media network, people wrote comments expressing their concerns: "Zuckerberg is not 'giving away' 99% of his FB wealth. He's 'donating' his FB shares to an LLC that he controls, for minimizing taxes," Twitter user @ollieblog. "And b/c Zuckerberg's thing is an LLC, he can give to political organizations, SuperPACs, all that stuff, w/money that was never taxed," tweeted ProPublica reporter Jesse Eisinger.

On the whole my recommendations, in the face of the today's world problems, would be that the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative focus on science to find cures for diseases; on the environment, because it is one of the major problems in the world (climate change); and on programs to produce clean water (according to recent research, 1.4 million children die each year due to lack of pure drinking water). These are not the only problems the world is facing today, but we certainly need to do something about these problems and make the world a good place to live in. I hope Mark Zuckerberg and Dr. Priscila Chan really will make this world a better place for future generations.

***The Autumn in Qingdao***  
**Shuang Chen**

Autumn is coming  
Winds are blowing  
The Branches of the trees are swaying  
Red Yellow leaves are falling  
Colourful leaves are everywhere  
Beautiful leaves are like butterfly  
Flying through the sky...

This is beautiful autumn in Qingdao, China. Qingdao is a beautiful coastal city. It is surrounded by sea on three sides. Summer is short, autumn is hot.

When the fog disperses, the sky is very clear, very blue. The sea is much bluer than ever.

In the morning, many people walk along the seaside boardwalk, doing their morning exercise and morning swimming.

Autumn is the harvest season. In autumn, the crabs are at their fattest, the markets are full of all kind of sea foods clams, oysters, shrimp, fish, etc., all bigger and fatter.

My favorite food is Shandong pancakes. It is made of corn flour and persimmon. It is very very thin, and it is a little sour and sweet. The corn flour is made into a paste, It is spread on the big pan, then the persimmon is put On it, less than one minute, the pancake is ready, we eat it immediately, it's very delicious.

In autumn, there is an important Festival- "the Moon Festival." It's a day for the whole family to get together, eating the moon cakes, watching the moon. No matter how busy you are, you should go home.

Blue sky, blue sea, red roof top, green trees - this is beautiful Qingdao.

***Mastiffs Are the Perfect Family Dog***  
**Sara France**

I believe dogs are an important part of the family. I have had the pleasure of being owned by several Mastiffs ranging in size from one hundred-ten pounds to a monstrous one hundred and eighty-five pounds. Their size and intimidating looking features tend to mislead people into thinking they are dangerous. The sad look found in their eyes can be confused with being unhappy or angry; however nothing could be further from the truth.

To put their size into perspective, imagine one of my Mastiff's named Kovu, an enormous dog with a square-shaped head. He had big, droopy jowls, and a very muscular body. He could scare the living daylight out of any mailman with his fierce looks, but those who were familiar with him knew he was actually a big baby. He would tower over my three-year old daughter while gazing down on her as though she was his reason for living. He was there to protect her.

Guarding their family is a natural instinct for this breed. These dogs are lovable and loyal. Gigantic as they may be in size, the love they give their family is just as abundant. My life has been enriched by their devoted companionship. Another Mastiff I have named Holly comes to the bus stop with me to pick up my children. She sits by my side, no leash required. She waits contently and greets my kids as though she hasn't seen them in weeks. She enjoys giving hugs and to do that she must stand on her hind legs placing her massive paws on one's shoulders.

Though they were bred to be guard dogs, they often tend to be couch potatoes. Sleeping is one of their favorite pastimes. Holly can often be found snuggled next to me snoring comfortably on her soft royal orthopedic bed. When Holly isn't getting her beauty sleep, she likes to eat from her elegantly raised serving dishes. Her consistent devotion to my family earns her nobility in my house. Her majestic and stately demeanor earns her the best food and veterinary care.

One of my favorite things about Mastiffs is that they are always ready to cuddle. All I have to do is mumble cute phrases to them, and they flip on their backs inviting an old-fashioned belly rub. When not relishing in a belly rub, Mastiff's enjoy going for short walks. I am used to seeing heads turn and then hear, "Hey, do you use a saddle for that thing?" I laugh and smile. I love it.

Mastiffs love to be included in family events. My dogs have camped, gone on vacations, visited dog parks, and even ran through the waves at the beach with my kids. They are very calm, and nothing bothers this breed. They rarely bark and require little exercise. They can adapt to any type of living arrangement. They are well-behaved and dignified. I am proud to share my home with one of these gentle giants.

Simply put, I believe that an enormous Mastiff can be the perfect family dog.

***The Benefits of Learning English***  
**Cesar Peralta Garcia**

I would like to share the benefit of learn English in the United States are too many reasons to do that.

Best communication in work, store, library, transportation service, etc. More happy to be a confident person\* freedom life\* to understand how are the culture, traditions, holidays and have the feeling be part of this amazing Country.

Nothing is easy in the life, but if want to do something in this case we have also sacrifice things like to do for attend class of English and received the argument to feel confident when talk to other people how do not speak our own language also help to others who no speak English any place they need.

Just remember to myself eight years ago don't speak any single word to have communication but many friends, like family motive to learn the own language of United States, now I can tell you the history is different.

Others benefit of learn English is have knowledge is power to do many things in this Country. Is it easy for people to take advantage of you when no understand properly. From my experience I am more confident person to do simple things like making a doctor appointment, listening music, watching television more enjoyable when understand to other people, help to our child with the homework of school, talk to the teachers, etc.

Again like to mention nothing is easy, but in our self is the power to change our life. Feeling free person when no need to depend from others to do activities, because sometimes other people cannot help us.

To learn English is no meaning need to forget our own language is to have more benefits when understand the law, rules, of our tow.

Special Thank you to all people, teachers, friends how help me to learn English!!

***Autumn: My Favorite Season of the Year***  
**Harry Lee**

I love the cobalt-blue sky and the foliage of the fall. Every year my wife and I go to the White Mountain to see the autumn foliage. The mountain has changed its colors to rainbow colors. We do mountain climbing and picnicking on this mountain.

I love many autumn songs. Among these songs, I love two songs the most. "Oh Danny Boy" and "The Autumn Leaves." When I was a little boy, I did not know the real meaning of these songs. Somehow these songs moved my heart. I used to listen to "The Autumn Leaves" sung by Yves Montand again and again.

"The falling leaves drift by the window/The autumn leaves of red and gold." It expresses the beauty of the Fall so well. I love not only the words but also the tune.

The autumn represents the harvest. We as Koreans celebrate the "Full Moon Festival." in autumn. We call it " Choo Suk". It is a Korean version of Thanksgiving" We eat, drink, sing and dance during this festival.

I am so thankful to God who has given to me this wonderful season. I will enjoy this fall as usual. I will go to see the autumn foliage with my friends. It will be wonderful to have a cup of hazelnut coffee while I listen to the Yves Montand's the autumn leaves.