

# INSIGHT 2019

## *The New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning Learner Writing Contest*



# INSIGHT

## Volume Five, 2019

### *New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning*

This is the fifth year NJALL has held a learner writing contest. As in previous years, we received about 75 submissions from all around the state. Most of these were learners who entered the contest for the first time, and in some cases they were representing programs that had not participated in prior years. It is gratifying to see the contest expanding its reach and we hope that each year we can grow a bit more. We also received submissions from students who participated in previous years, suggesting that they find the process to be relevant to their lives as writers. We encourage all learners who are in programs to participate in the contest. Whether a writer's submission received an award or not, we hope that the process of refining their work and taking the big step to submit it to the contest is a rewarding and learning experience.

For the fifth year in a row we invited some of the contest winners to present their work at the annual NJALL conference. The learners read from their winning submissions and then took questions from those in attendance. What was striking this year was how many questions the writers had for each other, and they freely shared their insights and comments. Because writing can be an isolated or individualized activity at times, coming together can provide a much needed sense of community.

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 and celebrating students' work at the conference.

Erik Jacobson

*Chair, NJALL Learner Writing Contest*

Additional 2019 Reviewers: Melissa Backes, Katherine Baker, Jacqueline Simon, Helen Verardi

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# **NJALL Adult Learner Writing Contest**

## **Winners 2015**

### **Memoir**

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### **Poetry**

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### **Non-Fiction**

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### **Fiction**

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# **NJALL Adult Learner Writing Contest**

## **Winners 2016**

### **Memoir**

<i>First Place</i>	Barry Batts	<i>Rising Above</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Anonymous	<i>A Day in the Life Of...</i>
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### **Poetry**

<i>First Place</i>	Alyssa Davis	<i>Goodbye Letter</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Fernanda Contreras	<i>A Christmas Letter</i>
<i>Third Place</i>	George Agüero	<i>Drifting Into Eternal Slumber</i>

### **Non-Fiction**

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

### **Fiction**

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

### **Photography**

<i>Co-Winners</i>	Maricela Sandoval	Anzhela Lukianova
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# NJALL Adult Learner Writing Contest

## Winners 2017

### Memoir

<i>First Place</i>	Abir Alkus	<i>I Would Become My Dreams</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Faten Atfa	<i>The Experience of Deciding to Leave My Country and Come to the US</i>
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### Non-Fiction

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### Fiction

<i>First Place</i>	Maritza Chang	<i>Airam the Fairy</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Clifford Henry	<i>Son and Dad</i>
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### Poetry

<i>First Place</i>	Agapito Garcia	<i>A Plea for the Consideration of the Contrary</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Agapito Garcia	<i>At Least I'm Not Mariah</i>
<i>Third Place</i>	Fernanda Contreras	<i>I'm Waiting for You</i>

### Photography

<i>First Place</i>	Alicia Veleriano	<i>The Turtle</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Maria Greco	<i>Untitled</i>
<i>Third Place</i>	Faten Atfa	<i>Looking for Hope</i>

# **NJALL Adult Learner Writing Contest**

## **Winners 2018**

### **Memoir**

<i>First Place</i>	Seung Kim	<i>Yes, I'd Love to Have Some More Mom</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Amber Sabados	<i>Walmart Adventures</i>
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### **Non-Fiction**

<i>First Place</i>	Guprest Bhatia	<i>Malala – Living Legend</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Seung Kim	<i>How I Became A Library Enthusiast</i>
<i>Third Place</i>	Daniel Sauers	<i>Internet Addiction</i>

### **Fiction**

<i>First Place</i>	Clifford Henry	<i>The Little Supermen</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Sylwia Pawliczuk	<i>Letter to a Friend</i>
<i>Third Place</i>	Akura Morbus	<i>Untitled Christmas Story</i>

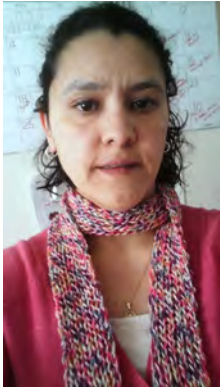
### **Poetry**

<i>First Place</i>	Cyrc Newsome	<i>Resistance</i>
<i>Second Place</i>	Marsha Burnett	<i>What I Lost/What I Still Have</i>
<i>Third Place</i>	Tuwanna Alves	<i>A New Life</i>

### **Photography**

<i>First Place</i>	Lingeswaran Kaliappan	<i>Second Place</i>	Kazuhiko Watanabe
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## About The Writers



**Georgina Alzaga:** My name is Georgina Ramirez Alzaga. I'm from Guadalajara, Jalisco. Mexico. Three years ago, we arrived here in Lawrenceville, NJ to have better opportunities. I love knitting, crochet, walk, listen music and spent my time with my lovely Husband and my adorable kids: Diego and Natalia. I'm studying English in Literacy NJ and as a Volunteer too.



**Linda Barnes:** Linda Mitchell-Barnes was born and raised in Jersey City, NJ and is the oldest of six children. She moved to Plainfield in 1974 with her daughter and husband. She went to Cheney State College and earned credits in education and counseling from Rutgers working briefly as a counselor in NYC social services as well as Project Rebound in New Brunswick. She retired from teaching in the Newark School District after 31 years. She is a volunteer and participant in many

organizations including Literacy volunteers, the Shut in Council, her church and Plainfield's Senior Citizens' Center where she is one of the charter members of the Memoir Writing Club. "Writing is my lifeline it keeps me together alive and well."

**Judith Bermudez:** Not much to say about myself just a simple chick living a simple life. I write short stories/poetry on my leisure. Which I enjoy. I don't think about what I write it just happens pen to paper



**Andrea Calderon:** Andrea Astrid Yessenia Calderón Roa (Bogotá, Colombia, b. August 1, 1992). Colombian graphic designer; graduated from Los Libertadores University in 2014. After working for different companies as a graphic designer in her native country, she went to the U.S. in 2017 through an au pair program (a cultural exchange program) to improve her English, enrich her knowledge and understanding of other cultures. She is currently studying English as a Second

Language at Sussex County Community College and works as a freelance graphic designer. During her spare time, she does photography for passion (especially nature photography) and she works as a freelance graphic designer. Since she was young student she has liked poetry, and her passion for it, started, as she remembers, when she read the poems by Jairo Anibal Niño, another Colombian poet. She enjoys pretty much writing rhymes and short sonnets. Other interests include drawing, lettering, branding and writing.



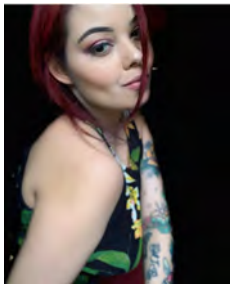
**Sara Chekouh:** Sara, a shy, young woman from Morocco, first came to the United States in 2016 knowing no English. Actually, when she tested for Literacy Volunteers of America Essex and Passaic Counties' ESL program, it took the proctor only a short time to realize this nervous potential student was extremely uncomfortable. It was all Sara could do to remain seated for the four minutes it took her to test before she wanted to get up and bolt out the

door. Fast forward only two years later. An NJALL writing contest winner, and soon, a Basic Literacy student. With the help of her tutor, Sara has blossomed into a confident speaker and writer. Most importantly, she is comfortable with herself which is evidenced by the beautiful smile she always has on her face.



**Martha Diaz:** Martha Diaz, a native of Colombia, a trained CPA, worked as a treasurer in her country. She enjoyed interviewing and photographing Latin musicians in her spare time. Little did she know that one of the musicians she interviewed, she would later marry, and relocate with him to New Jersey. The move proved to be a culture shock for Martha as she had lived for 39 years in

the same house in Colombia with family. “The transition from my country was not so good. I did not know English,” she said. Martha found Literacy Volunteers of America Essex & Passaic Counties and began three years ago as an English as a Second Language student. Now, her speaking, writing, and reading English skills are as high as 6th grade level. Martha works with two tutors and is active in the English/Spanish Language Exchange



**Nancy Diaz:** My name is Nancy E Diaz, I am 28 years old, born and raised in Jersey. Began my passion for art and photography at the young age of 9.



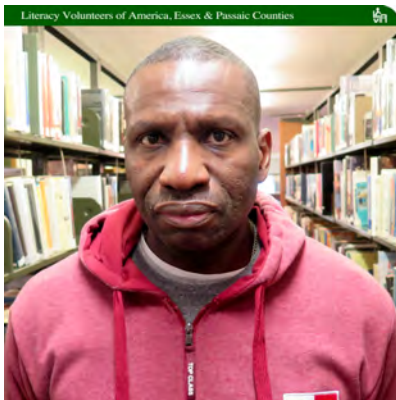
**Vafa Farhang:** Vafa was born on December 17, 1959 in Esfahan, Iran. She is married and has three girls ages 29, 31, and 34. Vafa immigrated to the USA in 2004. Despite extreme hardship to start a new life in a foreign country, her only motive was the betterment of her three girls. Vafa had experienced a lot of hardship dealing with extremists in Iran. Living under extreme prejudice and oppression against women was not something she wished for her daughters.

**O'Donna Y. Fraser** : When my parents moved to this country we located to Southern California. We lived with our uncle on W48th St., until my parents found a house of their own. We moved to 98th St., a stone's throw from the beginning of Compton. This poem is a tiny glimpse of my childhood memory of living on that street.



**Beverly Hair:** Beverly Hair was born in New York City and graduated from Walton High School after which she took secretarial courses at New York University. She and her husband had three girls after they were transferred to New Jersey. She worked for Plainfield Board of Education for 37 years. Now she works with others at Shut in Council, AARP, RW Johnson Health and her church.

Beverly says, “I started writing as a child in my diary, later journaling, and writing letters. Our Senior Citizens Memoir class has been phenomenal. Writing stimulates thoughts that burst into wonderful memories.”



**Clifford Henry:** Clifford Henry, 58 years old, served in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay. He is currently in the Reserves and recently returned from training cadets in West Point. During a similar call of duty last August, scores of cadets and members of his brigade showed their appreciation by singing “Happy Birthday.” At home, Clifford works as a cook in Houlihan’s, keeps fit by going to the gym, and studies to improve

his reading skills. Reflecting on the process of writing a short story, Clifford says, “Relate what you want to express from your own experience. Put the thoughts in your head before writing them down. Everything should be in order. After you write, walk away and think about what will go next. Have a drink of coffee.”



**Melanie Juma:** My name is Melania Juma. I was born on December 31, 1959 in the Dominican Republic. I have 3 children and 7 grandchildren. My brothers emigrated to the United States, just like me. My parents passed away years ago. I have a diploma in Cosmetology and enjoy my profession.

**Shameka Lambert,** born April 18, 1990, raised in Harlem and currently lives in Newark, NJ. She's multi-talented, enjoying singing, dancing, drawing, writing poetry, and doing hair. Shameka currently writes for the NYU Literacy Review and hopes of becoming a writer some day. She is in the process of obtaining her GED and volunteers at a veteran home for the elderly.

**Maricela Medina:** My name is Maricela Medina and I'm a GED student at Brookdale Community College in Freehold, NJ. I am the eldest daughter of five children and the mother of three girls. I am so proud of my daughters. My oldest daughter will start her Master of Social Work degree, the middle child will also start college this fall, and my youngest is in 10th grade. I am grateful to be a part of this class because I have learned an uncountable amount of knowledge that has impacted my life as a person.



**Margaret Minatee:** Margaret Minatee graduated from certificate courses and from Union County College as a senior citizen. She loves volunteering to help others in groups including the Black Heritage parade, Red Cross, Public Library, Senior Center, and African American Museum. Her passions include quilting, knitting, photography, and being part of the Plainfield Seniors Memoir Group. She says, "Writing helps me remember my family's past and experience it through the eyes

of fellow members. Their writing lets me see memories of others who grew up in homes not like my own but with similarities. The Memoir Writing Group is a blessing."



**Kyla Rosen:** I never thought about getting into writing. It's amazing! I'm excited and surprised to win in this competition. I hope the readers will be as inspired as I was when I wrote the story. Thank you.



**Arlene Sutton:** My name is Arlene Sutton. I was born in Orange, New Jersey but raised my children in East Orange, New Jersey and currently resides back in Orange, New Jersey. I am also a single mother of 3 and a grandmother of 6. My children have always been my motivation and inspiration. I love to cook, which I spent a majority of my career doing. I love to laugh and crack jokes daily. I love talking with people. I am very much a people person; my family even says I'm sort of a chatterbox. I live by the motto, "your past doesn't determine your future." That is why entering this contest was a big leap for me and it was definitely stepping out my comfort zone. But not only did I enter it, I won! This has been one of the greatest feelings I ever had especially being that I have never won anything in my life. But somehow, I felt my guardian angel, which is my mom, had a hand in this one. My photograph titled, Lonely Beach Night, was an expression of art in which it relates to me missing my mom, whom I've lost last year.



**Maria Wright:** Maria Wright has been writing poems and short stories since she was 9 years old. Over the years she has developed a natural ability of storytelling and imagination. She now goes to Brookdale Community College for her G.E.D and hopes to follow up do college.



## 2019 Award Winners

### Memoir - First Place

#### *195 Railroad Ave*

#### **Linda Barnes**

I look back on my childhood home with fond memories. My childhood days at were among the happiest days of my life. I was born in 1940 and grew up in downtown Jersey City at 195 Railroad Avenue. My parents separated when I was ten years old. I was the oldest of six children. My mother brought us up in a four room railroad apartment (four straight through rooms). The apartment was eye level with the trains. In my mind, I can still hear the trains barreling by, kicking up dirt and dust. It always seemed that the trains waited for the most interesting part of the radio or television program, to come on, before they came barreling by, messing up the reception. I can also still see the colorful Barnum & Bailey Circus trains and performers traveling to New York city and waving at us, as we leaned out the window to wave back at them while the train sped by.

We lived at 195 Railroad Avenue until the 60s. I remember the children playing hide and seek behind the railroad posts and I can see the boys climbing the posts to retrieve balls. I remember the children playing games like hopscotch, jumping rope, double Dutch, jacks, marbles, and even renting bicycles (because we never had our own), and doing a lot of walking and riding buses (since we had no car).

A lot of people lived in my building. At one time or another many were relatives: my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. So, we had an extended family. We were never alone. Our apartment was always full of love and laughter. Mother taught us to make lemonade out of lemons and to nurture a good sense of humor.

The railroad, along with 195 Railroad Avenue, was torn down years ago. However, I can still bring the building back up in my mind at will.

## **2019 Award Winners**

### **Memoir - Second Place**

#### ***Birthday Memories***

#### **Beverly Hair**

Dear Girls,

Tuesday, April 17, 2018, I sit reflecting on your dad's birthday who was born on the day before, in St. Matthews, North Carolina.

Every year he would say you must celebrate my birthday for two days, April 16<sup>th</sup> and April 17. Although he was actually born and was delivered by a midwife on the 16<sup>th</sup>, the birth was not recorded in the court records until the next day when the midwife re[ported the birth. Apparently the records showed the day the birth was reported and not the date he was born. Therefore all of his documents, birth certificate, school, and military records all reflect the 17<sup>th</sup>. Two days it was. We would say, "Happy Birthday" on the 16<sup>th</sup> and : "Happy Birthday" on the 17<sup>th</sup>. He would just smile and say thank you. Remember when we once blew up about 50 balloons placed them in his clothes closet, and when he came from work and opened up the closet door, all these balloons fell out. He laughed and laughed and it was fun.

Dad loved to celebrate our birthdays and always on the day on which the birthday fell. As the day came he would come home with a Birthday Card, a gift, and party hats. I would purchase the coordinated colorful plates, tablecloth, and a cake, ice cream, and candles. We would have dinner after which the fun began.

Our family consisted of three girls: Tamisha Ashara (Darling/Aggressive) 1<sup>st</sup> born; Akia Nadira (Rare/Intelligent) 2<sup>nd</sup> born; and Tahira Sadiqa (Pure/True Friend) 3<sup>rd</sup> born. Dad and I selected your names when we arrived in the States at the end of his military tour of duty in France in 1967. It was the height of the Black Power Movement. He went to Harlem to a bookstore to look for names. I was six months pregnant. Tamisha's name is African Akia and Tahira are Arabic.

Gee I also remember that he loved Valentine's Day. Every year he would present me with a dozen red roses. (I would fuss because they were so expensive, but he never listened, he bought them anyway) and a large box of chocolates which I shared with him of course. The three of you would get a small box of candy and one red rose. You were always excited and happy.

Dad passed August 20, 1998. I truly miss him, and I know you do also. Now that you are all grown up and have children of your own, I can see Dad's legacy. Close family ties, love for Jesus, caring, sharing with others is being passed on to my seven grandchildren and three great grands. God bless and remember Memories are the oxygen of life.

## **2019 Award Winners**

### **Memoir - Third Place**

#### ***My Earliest Memories***

**Margaret Minatee**

I remember living in the same place until I moved out to be on my own.

I remember sitting in front of my mother getting my hair combed when I wanted to go outside with the other children and play.

I remember my mother's washing machine that after they rinsed you would hold the clothes and put them through the ringer on top!

I remember my mother starching the clothes with Arco Starch, balling them up, covering them and then putting them in the refrigerator until she was ready to iron them.

I remember our dresses hanging in the front room window after she had ironed them so beautifully.

And I also remember my Grandmother who could sew, knit, crochet, and cook second to none!

And specifically I remember a black dress with layers that moved with a rhythm that stayed with me always.

## **Memoir - Honorable Mention**

### ***Proud of My Roots***

#### **Georgina Ramirez Alzaga**

After 40 years to live in my Country, Mexico, one day my husband asked me if we could live in other Country, United States. My answer was YES! Immediately, but I had never traveled abroad or on vacation. Our Son was 4 years old and our Daughter was 2 years old; but we're thinking in our future, better opportunities for all family.

They, my family, have an essential role in this adventure, they give me strengths to overcome obstacles. This change of residency was hard decision for some reasons, first we had to leave our family, friends, our heritage, great moments, unforgettable memories, all. In this part of the country we don't know have relatives.

Second, the language was other big barrier and continue has one of my challenges. I have learned lots of things here. At the beginning, I felt like a baby, I was knowing my new neighborhood, Country's rules, trying to understand what the people said, looking for my Kid's school, places to practice my poor English grammar.

It's totally true when the people say: When you leave something you miss it!. Your vision of the life is totally different. However, we have the opportunity to travel each year to Mexico, we can see our family, friends, simply recharge our energies to continue here. My Country is rich and magic with all kind of weather, food, colorful, gibberish, traditions, colonial and modern cities, places, beaches, mountains, waterfalls, etc. Never before, I had felt more PROUD of my ROOTS and grateful to stay in this beautiful country. Thank you to all people who have helped us in this wonderful adventure called LIFE.

## **Memoir - Honorable Mention**

### ***Remembering Big Momi***

**Judith Teresa Bermudez**

“A very good vision is needed for life.  
And the man/woman who has it, must follow it-  
as the eagle seeks the deepest blue of the sky.”

-Chief Crazy Horse

I grew up in Brooklyn, New York in the Fort Greene Housing Project. I lived in a three bedroom apartment with my mother (Maria Magdalena) and three sisters (Yvette, Marilyn and Cookie). My mom became a widow at the age of 34 when my father (Thomas) died of a massive heart attack at 35. When that tragic event happened I was only 11 years old. My mother was seven months pregnant at the time, and it was two weeks before Christmas. Naturally, she took it very hard when the love of her life passed away. At this point, in order to help my mom manage both her grief and her children, abuelita, her mother came from Puerto Rico to live with us for a while.

My abuelita always made it seem like everything would be alright, and with her around, it was. By February my little sister was born, and my mother was saddened by the fact that she would grow up without knowing our dad. With my abuelita's help, encouragement and support my mother was able to wade through her sadness just enough to get a little closer to her children.

We would soon learn that living in the Fort Greene Projects with four girls ages twelve, seven, five and four months was not easy, but we were never without food, clothes or more importantly, LOVE. After my father's death, my mother was still able to keep all three of us in St. James Catholic School. Since I was the oldest, I was in charge of getting my sisters to and from school in one piece (ha-ha). It was far from easy since I was almost a teenager, and I just wanted to hang out with my friends.

By the time we were able to read, my mother made sure each one of us had a library card, and if we ever mentioned that we were bored, she simply replied, “Go to the library and get some books.” That’s why, to this day, all of us are avid readers; momi was 100% “down” for our education.

By the time I was in High School, momi told me that when she graduated from high school in Puerto Rico, she wanted to attend college. All she needed was \$2 to take an entrance exam, but unfortunately, neither she nor my abuelita could afford it. To this day, it hurts my heart-that but for \$2.00, my momi could have attained her dream of becoming a doctor.

Suddenly, it made perfect sense that momi was so strict about our education. She needed to insure that no child of hers would be forced to forfeit their goals for a lack of education. That ideal was so instilled in each of us, that we all had perfect attendance throughout our school years, and all four of Maria Magdalena’s daughters graduated from high school and went on to college.

I am retired from the U.S. Army and UPS. My sister, Yvette, is a social worker. Maritza is an airline attendant for Delta, and the youngest, Cookie, worked on Wall Street until 9/11. She is currently employed at Script Network as an executive assistant.

Unfortunately, the very foundation of our family passed away from pancreatic cancer on February 16, 2010 - two days before Cookie’s Birthday. Momi’s last Christmas and New Year were filled with so much love and joy. She was surrounded by her four daughters and six grandchildren, all of whom affectionately called her “Big Momi”.

Always Remembered, Never Forgotten, and Most Importantly, **Ever Loved.**

## **Memoir - Honorable Mention**

### ***The Eternal Child***

#### **Aparecida de Fatima Poncio**

Inside the airplane, I hear a calm but demanding voice, It's the flight attendant and she says that in case of depressuring the cabin oxygen masks will fall in front of you, then put yours on first and then help others next to you. It's understandable to do that, you have to be okay to help other people. We often take care of ourselves. For example it takes a little longer to go the doctor, dentist, eat or do something. We leave for later even the most basic personal care like brushing teeth, take shower. It seems that there is always something more important than us, like a husband, work etc. We don't recognize symptoms. The worst thing is that usual we will only realize this discomfort when the engine starts to hit. As result there is a collection of diagnostics, stress, emotion, depression, anxiety. That's why we must always remember to be to take care of ourselves to be prepared when the oxygen mask falls in front of you.

That is exactly what happened nine years ago when my sister- in-law got pregnant for the second time, she was very happy because she was building her own family and it was exactly what she wanted the most at the time. She did all the exams because she was supposed to do. However, she was almost six months when unfortunately the doctor detected the baby had down syndrome, she becomes very sad at first, but the doctor explained what down syndrome was. He explained that it was not a disease, it was a genetic disorder that originated when abdominal cell division produced an additional total or partial copy of chromosomes 21. Unfortunately, it's was very difficult. My sister- in- law was a nurse and she worked with people's disease, but it was different because she had to be strong, the baby would need her more than the other children. He would have to go to physiotherapy, exercise to his circulation and stimulate his body, take medicine. It was not easy for the family, but it was necessary to try to have a normal life. He was a pleasant happy child. He was growing normally but with some restrictions. We knew that he came to us to do something different in our lives. Nine months had passed and he had to go back to the hospital to do new



examinations. This time he had to get surgery. He looked well, but it seemed like he knew what was this happening when the nurse took him from his mother to go to the surgery. He seemed to know that he had fulfilled his mission. He said to us (bye bye) how he never had done before. The surgery took about a few hours when the surgery finished and the doctor came to notify the parents. During this period of time the parents were extremely worried. We never have heard worst news in all of our life, the surgery did not succeed and the baby did not make it.

We knew he came to make a difference between in our lives and he did. He was very kind during the period of time was with us. He came and did not say a word, but with his gestures, he left us a message. We have to be happy and satisfied with our lives because we never knew what could happen to us next, he always was loved by parents, family, and friends.

## 2019 Award Winners

### Non-Fiction - First Place

#### *Appreciation*

**Debra Ware**

How many times have you taken your health for granted, only to regret it once you got sick? How many times have you failed to understand the value of a person in your life until you realized she were no longer a part of it? How many times have you failed to appreciate what you had until it was gone? It's a tragic reality that everyone has experienced.

At some point in our lives, we have all failed to appreciate the value of something until after we realized it's gone. It's a mistake that some make repeatedly. Why do we fail to understand the importance of something until it's too late?

It starts with the little things. For example, our blood pressure is *just* a pair of numbers-until we're fighting hypertension-or worse yet-heart failure. We fail to comprehend the importance of our own mental health until we're forced to battle mental illness, such as depression. We just don't think about the clothes we wear, the food we eat, or the water to which we have access. How often do we take the time to appreciate these things? How often does it occur to us that others in the world aren't lucky enough to have these things-at all?

Forget about tangible objects for a moment and focus on people; the people in our lives, who, to some degree or other, have impacted the person we eventually become. Often times, the values and beliefs we possess were instilled in us by someone who took the time to shape us into who we are.

Do we take enough time to appreciate these people, or have we been taking them for granted? We should think of all the long hours of their own lives that these people have sacrificed in order to give us the attention and care we required, and thank them every chance we get.

When our best friend listens to our problems or simply puts a smile on our face, it's up to us to tell them how much we appreciate it. We can't expect a relationship to work one way. Whether it is a platonic, romantic or a parental relationship, there must be a give and get.

There's no better way to live life than as an appreciative person. No matter what obstacles are faced in life, a person can always find a way to be happy if they're grateful for the things they have.

We must appreciate everyone and everything we are blessed enough to have in our lives. Along these lines, we must also treasure the experiences we get to enjoy, as well as the memories we are lucky enough to remember.

Lastly, we should appreciate and treat ourselves and treat ourselves well. A positive lifestyle begins with a positive mindset and a sense of gratitude towards everything we encounter in the world. It's most imperative that we start today and appreciate all we receive. Let's not hold grudges towards our families and friends; we must tell them how much they are loved each and every day, simply because as we all well know, but too often forget, tomorrow is promised to no one.

## **2019 Award Winners**

### **Non-Fiction - Second Place**

#### ***Dearest Santa***

**Latifah K. Yasin**

Many adults take part in the celebration of the Christmas Holiday, but they grow up and abandon all notion of Santa and the miracle and magic of the Christmas holiday season. As youngsters get older, they tend to let go of fanciful images they so trusted as children. Christmas and Santa Claus are somehow forgotten as are most magical people and places for children. Why can't Santa Claus be for children of all ages?

Although many adults no longer look for Santa on Christmas Eve, they still receive gifts on Christmas. It's often said "Santa brought this for me." This leads one to derive that perhaps adults really don't discontinue their belief in Jolly Old Saint Nick or in the magic of the holiday.

Because some still debate whether Santa Claus ever existed, he is perceived as a mythical character in children's books. This piece is written to ease some of the commercialism of the holiday and to restore the true Christmas spirit for children of all ages, everywhere.

I'd like to thank and encourage all of "Santa's Helpers" who worked all year long to make the holiday a success throughout my childhood, and well into my adulthood. Attached is my version of a different kind of letter to Santa.

#### **Dear Santa Claus,**

I know that I have not written to you in a while, but lately, especially now that I'm an adult, I've been thinking about what, exactly, I would write to you. Would I write to ask for more "adult" things, such as winning a unique contest? Perhaps I would be more practical and ask for a beautifully furnished house.

Better yet, would I ask for a new automobile or to meet a handsome, wealthy gentleman I could marry?

Would I ask to be elevated to the next level in my pulpit ministry? Would I ask for academic and employment success? Truth be told, I'd love to return to college, earn my BS in clinical psychology, and work for a company as an administrative assistant while attending school.

**Beyond and materialistic gifts, however, may I ask for some insight on a few topics?**

What's going on, Dear Santa, with our school system and our society in the US? It seems to me that our public schools have undergone numerous changes, all of which affect our children and their choices. I know how children have a tendency to emulate others.

Consciously or otherwise, youngsters have a tendency to react to certain peer group pressure. I have observed changes as they copy the behavior of these who are "trending" at any given moment. Ultimately, my wish is that children seek more *positive*, rather than, simply *popular* role models.

Additionally Santa, my concerns and wishes for today's children and society are somewhat different than they were for the children of yesteryear. For the most part, those generations seemed, somehow, to turn out alright. I realize my true twofold wish is that children are provided with a good start in life as well as with a fair chance academically. I advocate for their educational success and for fruitful career choices.

On a grander scale, the US has, for the most part, earned the respect of other nations abroad, and the reputation it has achieved is deservedly stellar. Still, within our own borders, it seems there isn't enough respect and gratitude for our fearless soldiers-the defenders of this great land.

Please Santa, instill mindfulness for every man, woman and child that is indicative of a sincere appreciation for our countless military warriors. They deserve our deepest admiration. The United States is the great country it is, due to the efforts of our military on a daily basis.

Lastly, let me add how proud I am to be an African American-a woman whose predecessors survived the horrors of slavery and the tribulations of segregation. Not unlike those before me, I now know what it means to persevere.

Happy holidays to you, Santa, and to all of your helpers who are similar, in many ways, to those who have helped and guided me all these years. I can't imagine how I would've actually been ordained a licensed minister without their help.

To all, a very happy, peaceful and fulfilling 2019!

## **2019 Award Winners**

### **Non-Fiction Second Place**

#### ***Warrior***

**Melanie Juma**

Marlene was born in Colombia. The family calls her “Butterfly.” She came to the USA, and like many immigrants, wanted a better future and a chance to pursue her dreams. She started from scratch with nothing to eat and was homeless. Marlene stopped and looked in the stained glass windows of McDonald’s and other fast food restaurants to see who left crumbs of food on the floor. She entered, picked them up and ran back outside to eat them. Subways and trains provided air conditioning in the summer and heat in the winter. They also provided a place to sleep. Marlene washed as well as she could in public restrooms.

Marlene met another homeless person with whom she had a relationship and later married. While still homeless, she got pregnant and prayed to God that he protects her so that she wouldn’t have to give birth to her daughter in the street or on a train.

Time passed. Due to her unwavering faith she believed that everything was going to change. The day before giving birth to her daughter, a good Samaritan welcomed Marlene and her family into his home. He gave her husband a job in maintenance. He also offered a room complete with everything for a newborn baby.

The blessings continued. Three years later Marlene and her husband welcomed a baby boy. Then came a bump in the road. Marlene was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor. She endured many painful medical treatments. Feeling hopeless, she decided to return to her native land. On the flight home she dreamed of angels who told her that she was healthy, that she was fine. The angels were right! The doctors in Columbia tested her, and to her amazement, said the cancer didn’t exist!

Since then, many years have passed and Marlene is alive, healthy, and lives in New Jersey. She has dedicated herself to spiritual and humanitarian work in Latino communities. She’s an author and loves to sing. Marlene helps people find jobs, get training, and has been

recognized by well-wishers and organizations in New Jersey. Her heart is full of love that transmits to others.

I give thanks for Marlene being a part of my life.



## Honorable Mention – Non-Fiction

### *The Villainous Turning Point*

**Kyla Rosen**

In both the play *Medea* and the movie *Toy Story 3*, there are many different characters playing different roles. Though both works were created in vastly different eras, they both mirror each other in that they contain protagonists and antagonists and each character is strategically placed in order for the story to develop its meaning. While Medea in the play *Medea* and Lotso from the movie *Toy Story 3* are the main characters, they are also both villains who play a key role in the story line. Although these characters play different roles in their communities, in the end they are portrayed in the same way in relation to their similar cultures.

Both characters are shown as extreme egoists in both works, but there was a time in both of their lives when they weren't as vengeful as they are shown to be in the play and movie. They both experienced a traumatic turning point in their lives when an unfortunate event occurred and took their lives off the track it was originally on. For example, Medea wasn't the most perfect woman from the beginning, but when her husband Jason left her for another woman her only goal was to now hurt Jason to get revenge for him hurting her and this was her turning point that she never came back from. Similarly, Lotso was a loved, strawberry scented bear by his owner Daisy and when he was abandoned by her and came to the conclusion that he had been replaced by another strawberry scented bear, his only goal was to take over and be in control that way he could hurt people like he was hurt. Both characters experienced these turning points in their lives that shaped them into the characters they become in both the play and the movie which exemplifies their egotistic qualities.

Throughout both works, each character acts on the hurt they experienced and goes about the rest of the story being the manipulative, egocentric, maniac they are after their turning point moment. In *Toy Story 3*, Lotso the bear ends up at Sunnyside Daycare after he was abandoned by Daisy and decides he is going to become the leader that way he could make the other toys in the daycare suffer like he was suffering. He gets his posse together

which consisted of a handful of other toys he picked as fit. Anyone who wasn't in Lotso's posse was to be looked down upon and would suffer the consequences, even though the members of his posse weren't completely on board or completely aware of his motives. This is similar to Medea, although instead of her being shown as a leader in the story, she was an unimportant foreigner, and she ultimately made her children her posse by the children abiding by their moms rules while unknowingly being turned into murders since she used them as the poisonous gift giver to Glauce (Euripides 31).

Both characters act on their own pain to inflict pain on others which leads to both of them being single handedly responsible for other people's deaths, or near death experiences, for their own self-satisfaction. This is seen when Medea takes it upon herself to finally hurt Jason in the worst way she knows possible which is when she kills her own two sons, and in *Toy Story 3* when Lotso finally reaches the "stop" button for the conveyor belt that is moving towards a ball of fire with the rest of the toys from the daycare stuck on it and he just runs away saving himself to purposely kill the other toys (Euripides 41). Both Medea and Lotso's egotistic personalities mixed with hurt was a recipe for disaster where in the end they both sacrificed the lives of others for revenge which doubled as self-satisfaction that they were able to hurt others as they hurt them.

While both characters are portrayed as the same villain who acted upon mirroring turning points and had the same vengeful motives with similar results, they are drastically different in the role they had in their communities. For instance, while Lotso was looked up to as a leader and held a "king" like status at the daycare, Medea was a disliked foreigner who had to beg for things, whereas Lotso demanded. Although this one significant difference between both Medea and Lotso seems as though they cannot be compared, when their status is looked at in relation to their cultures, their differing statuses make the characters portrayal in the story similar once again.

Since both Greek culture and modern American culture expects oral promises to be kept, the fact that Medea and Lotso are constant liars and manipulators, the way they are portrayed to the viewer is in a negative way where they are unliked and untrusted. This is seen when Medea promises Creon she needs to stay an extra day after he banishes her for the children's sake, yet tells the chorus that she is just using that day to plan her revenge, yet in the end the revenge involves the death of her own children (Euripides 12). Lotso is also seen

lying when he coaxes the other toys into helping him reach the “stop” button to stop the conveyor belt and save all the toys on it, yet when he gets to the button he smirks at the toys who are about to die because of him and runs off and never pushes the stop button. The cultural impact on each characters portrayal can also be seen despite the characters differing roles in their communities is when Lotso turns against his own family, Big Baby and Chuckles. Then, in *Medea* when she sacrifices her own sons which also makes Medea the only kin killer in Greek tragedies. Being that both cultures valued family tremendously, neither character, no matter the status they held in their communities, they were both looked down upon for betraying their own family when family is one of the only things you must cherish, according to the cultural norms of both characters. Where the culture differs, yet the portrayal of the characters remains the same is that in Greek culture it was accepted to kill foreigners and in modern American culture it is not acceptable to kill anyone for any reason. The fact that Lotso attempted to murder the other toys shows him to be a worthless citizen that does not conform to laws and standards while Medea’s culture portrays her to be worthless as well just because she happens to be a foreigner. In her society if she was to be killed, no one would be punished because she wasn’t a normal citizen anyway.

The cultural impact in relation to each characters differing roles in their own societies in very different eras is evidence that some things never change. Although both characters held different statuses in the play and in the movie, when the character themselves is compared to the cultural norms of their society, they are both portrayed to be villains in both works. This is an important conclusion to come to because although the cultures were relatively the same, if Medea held a higher status or Lotso held a lower status in the same work, they would not have been portrayed to be as villainous as they were which would change the entire storyline and make them less important.

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## Honorable Mention – Non-Fiction

### *Master and Slave*

**Daniel Ruga**

Few people today would compare the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Achilles of Homer's *Iliad*. These two characters, however, are strikingly similar when viewed in relation to the characters which most noticeably "outrank" them: the monster's creator, Victor Frankenstein, and Achilles' superior, King Agamemnon. Both Achilles and the monster try to control and are controlled by their superiors. Achilles and the monster are also ultimately defined by their superiors. Even though *Frankenstein* and *The Iliad* originate from two different cultures, the relationship between the monster and Victor Frankenstein is in essence the same as that between Achilles and Agamemnon: Achilles and the monster are the slaves, and Victor and Agamemnon are the masters.

The reason for the apparent difference between the monster and Achilles is *status*: the monster occupies a lower status in his story than Achilles does in his. Unlike the monster, Achilles is the preeminent hero of his story. One can infer the degree of each character's hero-ness merely by looking at each character's epithets: whereas the monster is the "fiend", "wretch", and "devil", Achilles is "dear to Zeus", "the matchless runner", and "bred by the gods" (Shelley 40; Homer 80, 259). Achilles, therefore, is the more respectable slave.

Nonetheless, status is on the whole trivial if both Achilles and the monster fall under the status of slave. Indeed, the evidence shows that Achilles and the monster are slaves: the masters, Agamemnon and Victor, freely strip the slaves, Achilles and the monster, of part of their identity. Agamemnon diminishes Achilles' identity by taking Achilles' war prize, a girl named Briseis: "I will be there in person at your tents to take Briseis in all her beauty, your own prize -- so you can learn just how greater I am than you" (83). Victor Frankenstein flees in fear from -- and thereby dis-identifies -- his new creation: "Unable to endure the aspect of the being I created, I rushed out of the room" (20). By taking Briseis, Agamemnon strips Achilles of his honor; by abandoning his monster, Frankenstein strips his monster of a mentor, a guide, someone on whom the monster can found his identity. Ultimately, Achilles and the monster cannot prevent their disidentification, and are therefore slaves.

Achilles and the monster are powerless, but they are also powerful: they respond to their disidentification by lashing out and inflicting pain on their masters. Achilles responds to his affront by asking Zeus “to help the Trojan cause, to pin the Achaeans back against their ships” (91). Achilles does this and refuses to fight “so even mighty Atrides can see how mad he was to disgrace Achilles, the best of the Achaeans” (91). Revenge likewise motivates the monster. The monster murders William Frankenstein, Victor’s little brother, and frames Justine Moritz, a servant in the Frankenstein household, because he knows that their deaths “will carry despair to him”, to Victor Frankenstein (60). Unable to cope with their own powerlessness, Achilles and the monster try to deprive their masters of power. Nevertheless, Agamemnon and Frankenstein continue to be “creator” and “lord of men” -- they continue to be the masters (Shelley 40; Homer 77).

Maddened by their continued slave-ness, Achilles and the monster narrow their vengeful focus. Either explicitly or implicitly, Achilles and the monster try to force their masters to apologize, to submit. In Book 9 of *The Iliad*, when the Achaeans find themselves in desperate need of Achilles on the battlefield, Achilles rejects the entreaties of Agamemnon’s embassy to rejoin the Achaean lines, saying that nothing will “bring my fighting spirit round”; nothing, that is, except if Agamemnon “pays full measure for all his heartbreaking outrage”, a payment which will not consist in gold (264). The monster likewise wants Victor to pay full measure -- in a word, apologize -- for neglecting the monster, for not fulfilling “the duties of a creator towards his creature” (41). The only payment or apology the monster will accept is a “companion of the same nature as [himself]” (62). The slaves demand a kind of spiritual apology from their masters. In the eyes of the slaves, this apology, this act of masterful submission will set right and negate the slaves’ disidentification.

Naturally, the masters find a way to get out of apologizing. In Agamemnon’s case, he concedes that taking Briseis from Achilles was wrong, but then frees himself of any blame by saying “Zeus stole my wits” (493). In other words, Agamemnon does not say “I am sorry for doing this”, but rather says “I am sorry that Zeus did this.” Agamemnon thus weasels his way out of submitting to Achilles. In Frankenstein’s case, though he nearly goes through with it, he refuses to apologize, to make the monster a mate, and uses human society as an excuse for his refusal: “I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight,

for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness” (70). In spite of the monster, Victor Frankenstein resolves to “destroy the creature on whose future existence [the monster] depends for happiness” (71). In short, the masters ensure that they remain masters.

Since the masters themselves never apologize for disidentifying the slaves, the slaves eventually have to settle for a surrogate apology. In each story, this surrogate apology takes a distinct form. For example, in *The Iliad*, King Priam acts as a stand-in for Agamemnon when he kneels before Achilles, kisses Achilles’ hands, and says “I have endured what no one on earth has ever done before – I put to my lips the hands of the man who killed my son” (605). Achilles cannot get his own king to submit and apologize, so Achilles accepts the submission of the second-best choice: the king of his enemies. The “apology” in *Frankenstein* comes when Frankenstein, while pursuing the monster, dies of fatigue in the Arctic: upon seeing Frankenstein’s dead body, the monster says, “in his murder my crimes are consummated” (95). This is the monster’s way of saying “Frankenstein is dead because of me; he thus apologizes. He, whether he likes it or not, submits his body – and therefore himself -- to me. And because of this I will murder no more.” Frankenstein’s death *is* the apology, the act of submission. Both slaves thus get what they want. But because the slaves had to settle for a surrogate apology, and because the masters never willfully surrendered their power, the slaves are still slaves to the end.

Throughout *The Iliad* and *Frankenstein*, a power struggle rages between each story’s two principal characters. The power struggle begins when the masters, Agamemnon and Frankenstein, disidentify the slaves, Achilles and the monster. Consequently, the slaves rebel, try to overpower their masters, and vainly try to regain the stolen part of their identity. In the end, the masters retain their power. The morning stars, the splendid slaves, try and fail to outshine their masters.

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## 2019 Award Winners

### Fiction - First Place

#### *Welcome to My World*

**Vafa Farhang**

I open my eyes and look at my watch; it's 7:00 am. I get up and make some tea, eat my breakfast, and as usual, check my emails. Between the usual messages, I see a very important email marked, "Urgent". I open it quickly; it is from the governor, she stresses, "Yes, it is true; with the recent passing of a new law, all student loans will be forgiven." I'm so happy for my three girls. I continue scanning down the screen.

There is more! Free health insurance will be provided to the public, and additionally, guaranteed, secured employment will be provided with no worries about benefits and bonuses. I'm so excited, I nearly spill my cup of tea on the computer. This is unbelievable. I decide to check my I-pad. Now that the CNN news page is up, I read. What is printed is too hard to believe. There's no more war in Syria, Afghanistan, or Libya.

There's no more hunger in Africa. I see a lot of happy faces in random photos. Everywhere, people are laughing. In the background, the land is lush and green. There are no fugitives and no more long lines waiting for legal immigration.

I scroll further down; eagerly I read the text. There's something about Iran too; the first thing that catch my eye is an article that says women will no longer be forced to cover up their hair or their bodies. They will be free, from this day forward, to wear what they'd like. No longer will Ayatola lead the people. No longer will religion dictate the state, (no more Mola in power). Finally, democracy is alive and well in Iran.

Oh my! There's still more to follow. In Iran there will be the same positive changes for the working class as there are in this country. There will be no more under-age workers, and safety and prosperity will be available for everyone. I continue reading: no more inflation; no more unemployment.

I say to my husband, "You see, finally there is peace all over the world." Isn't that exactly what

we've always wanted?"

Now I'm relaxed and comfortable. We won't have to anticipate any more bad news. Law enforcement will take effect immediately, and any country that chooses to violate the new rules and regulations will be "dismantled accordingly."

I start to laugh.

I blink my eyes.

I hear a voice getting closer.

Someone is whispering, a little more urgently now—as if time is running out,

"Vafa, Vafa wake up!"

"Did you have your favorite sweet dream again, my love?"



## 2019 Award Winners

### Fiction - Second Place

#### *Unbroken*

#### **Maria Wright**

My life was not easy, my childhood should be a Oscar winning drama. It all started when I was a child I was carefree and happy, like any child should be. It all went south I would say about 4 years old, and the person who ruined it let's call him babysitter. I remember this man gave me my first bruise. He also gave me all the insecurities one child should face. From touching places where adults shouldn't touch, to the name calling. How did it affect me. Let's skip to adulthood, it gave me false confidence. The blackened eyes and the name calling didn't stop with him it just happened with another, just like their frequencies were one. I didn't want to listen because this is all I knew. Drinking and drugs became my safe haven, just like going to church. Pretty soon my safe haven became hell. The man I was going with had his issues too. He was older, stronger, and more broken. He took advantage of me, but I didn't see it because for me it was better to have someone instead of no one at all. That's how I thought until he stabbed me. There where so many fights, so much blood and tears. At that point I became scared I didn't want to go too far down the rabbit hole because I was afraid I wouldn't get back up. I left him after 9 years he told me if I can't have him no one can. I tried to fight, he pushed the knife in my side, and at that point I thought I was going to die. I woke up in the hospital 3 days later, somehow I lost a lot of blood and fell into a coma. I woke up my family was by my side, and I was ready to dig myself out of the rabbit hole. I started with education, I went back to school and I got my G.E.D, while attending school I got a minimum wage job. It wasn't much but I was proud of myself, I was digging myself out of the hole becoming one with myself again. After I finished school I headed on to college, and got my masters for education. When I was in my 40's I met a wonderful man suited just for me, we got married 2 years later and had children. The moral of the story is no matter how low you are no matter how far and deep in the hole you think you are remember there is always a catapult in the deep abyss of pain, anger, and depression.

## **2019 Award Winners**

### **Fiction - Second Place**

#### ***A Man and His Violin***

**Martha Diaz**

Those lilting tones from his violin, and the sweet notes of the music were very special to him. The violinist had gotten his violin when he was a little child, bought from the coins he had saved. His father had given his son a little pocket changes after he finished his chores and small responsibilities.

The little boy's joy in music and love for his country had been so great that nothing could stop him from his chosen task. His mother usually gave him a big breakfast and best wishes every day. She knew what he wanted to do. She believed in, and supported him whenever she could, even though the world saw him as a small grain of sand in the middle of a big ocean.

His family and his ancestors had lived in that same country for many centuries. They were hard working. They had big houses with huge yards and had planted many trees with fruits, other plants and beautiful flowers. His grandfather was a veterinarian, and his grandmother's mother was a farmer. They continued their own paths with their love for nature. The little boy's family never let one of their employees suffer from hunger, until that time when the little one lived.

The country had grown and its population had been filled with smart people. Many of those with high levels of education had pursued and shared their happiness, but others had made bad decisions for the country until eventually freedom was lost for all of them. The little boy had now become a young man, and as he looked around he could not stop the tears from coming to his eyes. His heart held so much emotional pain. He tried to be strong and brave. No matter, his shouts rose from the soul of his violin because he lived in fear and wanted nothing more than liberty. He played his violin for many hours and many days to lift

his spirits and those of his countrymen. His friends shared his ideas and the people around him cried out for their freedom too.

In retaliation, his violin was silenced by officers who were trying to silence his music and stop his protesting voice. Though on that day he was silenced, his fellow countrymen made their own decision to protest.

They went out to the neighborhoods, schools, streets, parkways, and different parts of the country. They tried to get their voices heard by the government, but they weren't heard. The government's answer was to attack them and suppress the protest.

## **Fiction - Honorable Mention**

### ***A Young Boy's Dream***

**Clifford Henry**

The little boy was standing in the kitchen. His mouth was open. He was looking at an elephant that was sitting in the kitchen! The elephant had tiny eyes, big feet, and a trunk, long and black.

Michael woke up and started screaming. His parents went into his bedroom.

His mother said, "What's the matter, baby?"

"I saw an elephant in the kitchen."

"You just had a bad dream. There's no elephant in the kitchen."

She gave him a glass of milk. He went back to sleep.

The next morning at school, Michael whispered to his friend Richard, "I dreamed about an elephant in the kitchen."

His classmate said, "I dreamed the elephant was in my bedroom."

Their teacher, Mrs. Jackson, said, "Richard and Michael, why didn't you give me your slips for the field trip to the zoo today?"

Michael said, "We both had a bad dream. I dreamed an elephant was in the kitchen."

Mrs. Jackson said, "What about you, Richard?"

"I dreamed the elephant was in my bedroom."

Everyone in the class laughed.

Mrs. Jackson said, "You both have to go to the zoo because the whole school is going. No one is going to be here to watch you."

The boys gave her their slips. The bus driver took the students to the zoo.

Mrs. Jackson said, "You two boys come with me to see the elephant."

The boys started crying. Michael said, "No, I don't want to see the elephant."

"Nothing for you to be afraid of. The elephant is not going to hurt you."

The two boys walked up toward the gate very slowly. They stopped and looked at the elephant from a distance.

Mrs. Jackson said, "Come on, move closer to the fence." She put her arms around the boys.

The elephant made a loud noise. The boys jumped back from the fence and ran away.

Mrs. Jackson ran after the boys. "Come back here!" She had lost them.

She and another teacher, Mrs. Collins, went looking for the boys. Mrs. Collins got tired and gave up, but Mrs. Jackson caught up with them. "Why would you run away from me? You almost gave me a heart attack."

Richard said, "Mrs. Jackson, we are very sorry we ran away."

"Let's head back to everybody. They will be glad to see you."

Everyone ran up to them and hugged them.

Mrs. Collins said, "Come over here and have a sandwich."

Michael said, "Can we go and see the elephant one more time? We want to get the fear out of us before we go home. We won't run away again. Please, Mrs. Collins."

Mrs. Collins said, "Okay, we'll go again. We have to hurry."

The boys walked up to the fence and looked at the elephant. Michael reached in his pocket to get his sandwich to feed the elephant. He put his hand through the fence.

Mrs. Collins wasn't paying attention. She was talking to another teacher on her cell phone.

The two boys took another look at the elephant. "Goodbye, elephant."

Mrs. Collins said, "We have to hurry . . . come on. What's the matter with you?"

Michael said, "I lost the lucky quarter my grandfather gave me." He started crying.

Mrs. Collins said, "Look around one more time. If we don't find it, we have to go."

Michael spotted the quarter inside the fence. "Mrs. Collins, I see the quarter!"

"How did the quarter get inside the fence?"

Michael said, "I think when I pulled out my sandwich, the quarter fell out." He tried to reach for it. No luck.

Mrs. Collins said, "I'll tell you what. Later we'll come back and get someone to open the fence and get your quarter."

"Okay."

After school, Mrs. Collins and Michael drove to the zoo and went up to the entrance gate. A man inside walked over and said, "The zoo is about to close, ma'am."

Mrs. Collins said, "I know. I need a big favor, sir. One of my students dropped his lucky quarter."

"Okay, I'll help you." He unlocked the gate and they went in. "Where did he drop it?"

She said, "Follow me." They took the man to the elephant's cage. The elephant had been taken to another area for the night.

The man asked, "Where is your quarter?"

Michael pointed inside the fence.

The man shook his head. "We have to hurry. We are now closed. I can get in trouble." He unlocked the fence. "Go inside."

Michael went in, got the quarter and walked out. "Thank you, I got my lucky quarter back." He was jumping up and down, he was so happy.

When Michael got home, his mother asked, "What took you so long to get home from school?"

"The teacher took me back to the zoo to get my lucky quarter from the elephant's cage."

"The teacher should have called the house. I was worried. Did you get your lucky quarter back?"

"Yes, Mom. Remember the dream I had? I'm not afraid of the elephant anymore."

She said, "Did you have fun at the zoo?"

"Lots of fun. Mom, you think you could take me to the zoo one day?"

"Yes, maybe your father and I will take you."

He said, "That will be great. We will all go together."

Michael put on his pajamas and got into bed. "Good night. I love you, Mom."

He dreamed he saw a lion in the bathroom.

## 2019 Award Winners

### Poetry - First Place

#### *A Memory of 98th...In Southern California*

**O'Donna Y. Fraser**

Crip's apartment building...never sleeping  
Duplex houses...with neighbors always peeping  
Backyard as the occasional drive-by strip  
My Dad's Chrysler Cordoba driving back to W. 48th Street and helping us jump ship. Stylish  
OG's in chucks...jerry curls...and hair rollers  
Sometimes they would give quarters to buy Charlton Chews or Now & Laters  
Tall palm trees sway and drop that stinky orange brown fruit  
On a gangster boo's fresh pressed khaki suit  
Low riders bounce down Crenshaw to the swap meet  
That distinct West Coast sound sweet and unique  
Brownies, Blues, and Bloods throw up signs of allegiance  
This is a memory of living on 98th Street.

**2019 Award Winners**  
**Poetry - Second Place**

***My Kitchen, My Home***  
**Sarah Chekouh**

My kitchen is where I feel warm.  
Ginger, turmeric, meat and couscous mix together  
in a sweet smelling cloud.

My kitchen is filled with flavor.  
My mind is filled with memories of my mother's kitchen in Morocco.  
When I go to cook I forget everything bad, everything sad.

New neighbors smell my flavors through the walls and  
into the halls and say it is good and I am happy.

When I am in my kitchen I know I am home.



## 2019 Award Winners

### Poetry - Third Place

#### *Addiction*

**Judith Teresa Bermudez**

Mourning  
No sleep,  
Wandering  
the streets  
Angry.  
Sad.  
Sick.  
Helpless...  
Hey!  
You boy or girl?  
Choose.  
Brown or White?  
Nice  
Soft and warm  
Problems gone...  
Daybreak  
Mourning again  
No sleep  
Repeat...

## Poetry - Honorable Mention

### *Such a Magic Place It Was*

**Andrea Calderon**

Such a magic place it was  
where the sadness never fit  
all the things we could imagine  
made us never ever quit.

From a huge and fluffy castle  
where on top we all could watch  
a short tunnel made from chairs  
and the cover that didn't match.

We were having some tea parties  
bringing all that we could gather  
but we didn't know what tea was  
so instead we just had water.

We never cared about being fancy,  
we had houses made from silk  
they said we were kind of clumsy  
'cause we were spelling all our drink.

Our concern was just to enjoy  
with all the things we did  
our innocence was not destroyed  
just to sleep, have fun and eat.

Now those days are just a memory  
and the castle is in ruins  
It's a plain and boring couch  
no more soldiers, no more queens.

And the only tunnel now  
is that one where I am trapped  
trying to find the light that guide me  
like I always pray to God.

Now the cover that I have  
is the one that's full of pain  
from the fear that I still wish  
can be vanished with the rain.

And my innocence has gone  
and it's not gonna come back  
like a jar that once was broke  
but there's still more than one crack.

I guess I have to enjoy  
all the stages in my life  
and the childhood that I had  
was so short but a fun ride.

When I have kids one day  
while they're playing on the bus  
they will tell to their friends  
such a magic place it was.

Then they'll play just like I did  
where the sadness never fit  
all the things they could imagine  
make them never ever quit.

## Poetry - Honorable Mention

### *Harlem 116th*

**Shameka Lambert**

Mommy kissing her daughter  
Fire hydrants bursting out water  
Play street rapping for the quarter

Chanting and drums from our parade  
All I see are masquerades

Birds chirping  
Old man Larry burping

Window guards up for protection  
Grandpa pointing us in the right direction

School was a must  
Run to catch that bus  
Bells ringing  
Icy carts chingling.

Harlem 116th

## Poetry - Honorable Mention

### *The Mighty Oak*

**Maryanne Rondholz**

It was a cold damp night,  
Fog thick with a dewy spray,  
Wandering thru the thick air, wondering what lie ahead.  
A piercing light split the night,  
The power it portrayed, deep lines in its body  
Showing every season it endured.  
Arms outstretched to what seemed like endless grasps, Tips just hanging,  
As if saddened by the unreachable ends,  
The image it portrayed,  
True to itself,  
Only it knew how it felt.

**2019 Award Winners**  
**Photography – First Place**



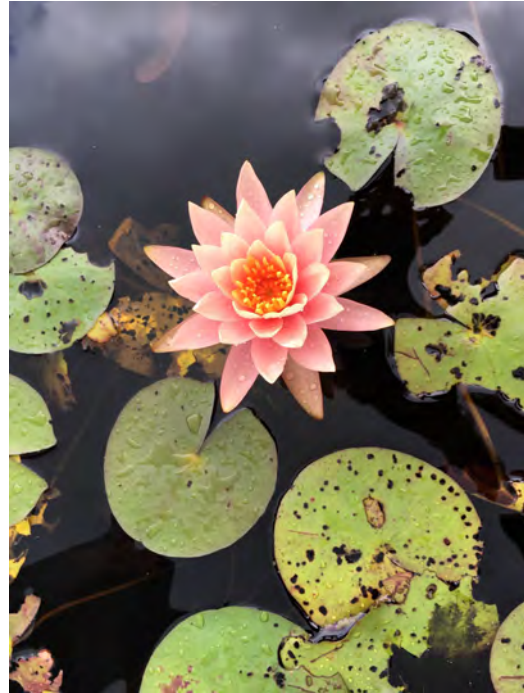
***Lonely Beach Night***

**Arlene Sutton**

**2019 Award Winners**  
**Photography - Second Place**

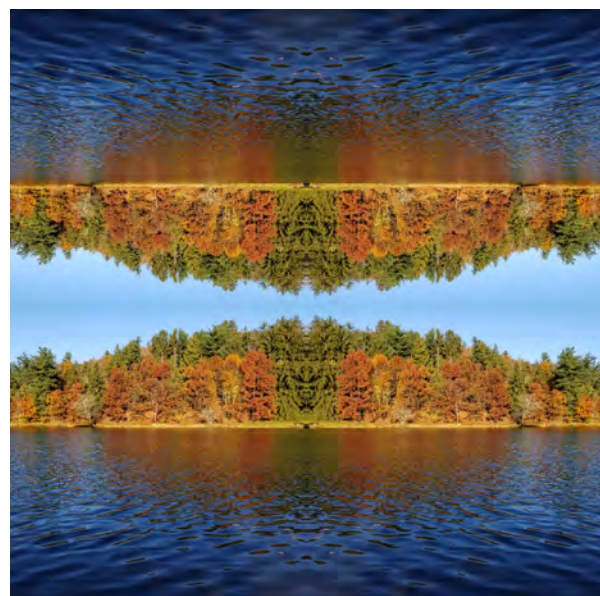
*Unexplainable Beauty*

**Marcela Sandoval**



*Reflection*

**Gemini Dawn Deal**





## 2019 Award Winners

### Photography – Honorable Mention

*Untitled*

**Nancy Diaz**



*Wonder If They Can See Me Here*

**Bienvenido Reyes**



**OTHER SUBMISSIONS - MEMOIR*****Trying to Play with Dolls with my Sister Rosy*****Belkis Abad**

When I was a child it always was a good time to have a play. Especially after lunch; when my mom used to take a nap, a sacred moment.

My sister Rosy liked to play with dolls. She liked to make a doll house tent with many scarves in my little sister's bedroom closet, below the clothes. And she kept playing all day until the sun when to sleep.

One day I decided to join her in a play, to see how much fun I could have. She was having a doll's tea party. I grabbed a doll and started acting like a guest in the play. "Would you like a cup of coffee", she asked me, starting the dolls playing.

Once I had been there for five minutes, trying to follow Rosy in the play, I could not understand how she could have fun sitting down playing with dolls like in a solemn ceremony. It was the most boring thing for me to do.

"I have to find a way to get out of here", I said to myself. Suddenly I had an idea. I proposed to her that we go in a car ride with the dolls to go somewhere. It was my best bet I thought. Without giving my sister time to think, I improvised a doll's car with one of my father's shoes and showed it to her. She agreed with the proposal. In one second I planned it all in my mind.

With my second idea I volunteered to be the driver. Now I had control and I decided to do it my way. The action started. I put the two dolls in the dolls' car and left the bedroom and turned in to the house's hall to start the trip. When we were on our way to the trip, in the middle of the hall, the car had a car accident: I took the doll's car and I threw it against my little sister's bedroom concrete wall. The impact was so strong that Rosy came out from the bedroom to see what happened.

The dolls flew into the air. The dolls' clothes were all over the place. A doll with a broken leg and another one with a broken arm were lying down on the floor. Rosy could not believe what she was seeing. She was in shock. "Call the ambulance!!", I shouted to her. In that moment she realized what was happening. I looked at her and she was looking at me like

a dog watching an unexpected visitor, her eyes were big, almost popping out of her face. I could hear her huffing and puffing like a bull chasing her bullfighter. In that moment I started to fret. Something was not right. In three seconds I heard the most terrible scream; “Momyyyyyy!!!!...” and then I realized that she didn’t like my idea.

### ***My American Dream***

**Mary Agboola**

The United States of America is known as the land of milk and honey. This is the place that most people in third world countries dream of. When I was growing up in my native land of Nigeria, I can recall endless hours spent chatting my friends. “One of these days, I too, will travel to US,” I’d say. Little did they know how determined I was. In reality though, fulfilling this dream seemed very challenging because of the legal requirements, and I had no idea how I was going to meet them. Still I kept focusing, and I held on tightly to my faith.

In my early 20’s I met my future husband who would help me fulfill my childhood dream, and soon after we married, we moved to this great country. Since then, I have possessed a priceless internal fulfillment that no amount of money can buy.

It is said that we all have dreams or aspirations at one point in life. Some dreams are fulfilled, while others remain pending. My strong advice is that you never discard your dreams; no matter what life throws at you, hold on to your visions.

Though immigrating to the United States was always a goal, making the move was a huge transition. I left behind nearly all of my loved ones. My cultural background proved to be hugely different, and the adjustment took me quite a while to make. I missed my parents and siblings all the time, but what kept me going was my dream.

Not too long after I arrived here, I encouraged myself to accept my new life, and one of my tools for doing this was to see things in new way. I went to my local library almost every day to meet other people; this would soon come to be my new social environment. There, I was able to share my ideas and learn about different aspects of life and living in this country. With my new found process, I realized that my new life’s journey had just begun, and the meaning of a “self- fulfilling prophecy” became clear. In other words, if we

anticipate that a negative outcome is inevitable, that's just what it will turn out to be; likewise, if we view our journey as positive, that's precisely how it will unfold. I have learned that being successful in life often requires sacrifice. I was willing to get out of my comfort zone, and do things. At the same time, I remained focused on my dream. I was grateful, and I thanked God for each step I took whether the result was positive or negative.

Today, 25 years later, I continue to count my blessings; among the things I'm most grateful for are my closet friends whose help has both empowered and launched me in my daily successes. Even what may seem insignificant to others has been most transformative for me. I realized that in fulfilling a dream, one is often met with obstacles and tribulations, and fear of the unknown can disrupt our vision. If the mind and heart aren't clear, we become paralyzed in our path. Fear is one of our most threatening enemies, preventing us from true fulfillment.

If you should ever doubt where your dreams may lead or if they'll go anywhere at all, be willing to sacrifice. Let go of your creature comforts and never ever forget where you came from because ultimately, this will contribute to the person you were always meant to be.

### ***A Trip Worth Taking***

**William Bunch**

My trip to Mexico was an unexpected pleasure. I had no idea what it had to offer. I was very uneasy about going there-especially because of all the negative press it had gotten lately. I feel my personal discomfort stemmed from our current immigration problem.

The United States President, Donald Trump seems to have run amuck with his demands. He wants to build a wall to keep the Mexican immigrants from entering the United States. Even though I'm a citizen of this country, I still felt uneasy about going there.

Once we landed in Cancun, and I found out that the wall was miles and miles away from my destination, I felt a little better. I was finally able to enjoy myself.

Cancun was everything I ever dreamed it would be. Our resort was phenomenal. There was a waterfall at the front to greet us, a river with beautiful animals strolling around and a beach directly behind the hotel with crystal aqua blue water and white sand as soft

as baby powder.

The cuisine was extraordinary, with a variety of cultural dishes and decadent desserts. I was in heaven.

The only element of this getaway I could've done without was the number of iguanas and lizards that flitted about. The worst was when I least expected it, and it more often than not, my own antennae weren't up until the end of my stay- at which point- I'd mastered the art of "reptilian anticipation"

All in all, the trip was amazing. I'm so glad I decided to go despite my initial apprehensions, I would definitely return - any time.

### ***My Dream in the USA***

**Edlima Cardenas**

Do you have a dream? Do you have a goal? If you want, you can do it. When I came here to the United States in 2006, I already had a master's degree in business administration and I was a professor in Colombia. I was 42. My challenge was to "learn English."

I used to wear a beautiful and fancy suit and heels to work in my country because I taught in beautiful classrooms. But when I went to work in the United States, I worked in warehouses. I worked with a lot of immigrants like myself. We were working hard because these kinds of jobs are physical. I was wearing sneakers and ugly clothes.

The conditions of the warehouses made a bad situation much worse. The buildings were extremely dusty, hot in the summer, very cold in the winter. The workers had to stand for eight hours or more doing very physical work like cutting boxes, making boxes, lifting and carrying filled boxes. It was exhausting work bringing me to tears as I tried to do my work.

Beyond the physical challenges were the social and emotional atmosphere I was forced to work in. Male managers were abusive and harassed women, myself included. There was no support from other female coworkers either. Instead, they harassed other women they thought were weak or not up to the job. They physically fought with each other and bullied women like me who were small. I am 4'9" tall. When people try to hurt you, you need to be better than them and not fight.

I was frustrated and sad, but every single day I told myself, “I will be studying in a university in this country and it will be better to learn English so I can find a better job.” Because I could not speak English, job opportunities were limited. So many companies fired me. Then, in 2012, a jewelry company laid me off and I thought, “Okay, this is my opportunity to learn English.” So, I went to college and I studied grammar, pronunciation and reading. And I took all the English classes free and I advanced. I feel more confident. I’m not too afraid to speak English like before. I’m trying to improve every single day with my teachers like Joanne, Bob, and the workers in the LVA office where I volunteer.

I am happy because life is good now. I stopped working in warehouses and moved on with my new life. Life in America is not easy. You need to be strong to survive. I learned to survive by learning English. And I continue learning because we never finish learning. Overall, if you want, you can do it. Follow your dreams.

### ***The Long Overdue Visit***

**Sean Cassidy**

In the summer of 2005, I had an opportunity that not many people get. As I was doing some research, I found that I had family who were still living in Belfast, Northern Ireland. After finding their contact information, I called them and explained who I was and why I was calling. The phone call lasted for about a few hours, and before we hung up, I was invited to visit. I’d saved some money, and with the help of my father, I was able to purchase a round-trip ticket. When the day came, I couldn’t believe I was actually making a transatlantic journey to the “Emerald Island” – the home of my direct ancestors.

From the airport, I took a taxi directly to my relative’s. Outside their home, on either side of the door, were two flags, flying high. One of the flags was the provincial flag of Ulster; the other was the tri-colored flag of the Republic of Ireland. Depending on what side of the conflict you were on, you either flew the Irish flag or the flag of the United Kingdom. The conflict revolved around whether Northern Ireland should continue to exist (separately) under British rule or reunite under the Irish Republic. I walked up the steps to the front door, rang the doorbell, and waited for someone to answer. Within a few minutes, a middle-aged man came to the door and asked me who I was. Upon explaining how we were related, I was

welcomed with open arms. My cousin took me into the living room where everybody sat attentively, awaiting introductions. At that point I was introduced to everyone in his family. It was there and then that I was dubbed, "Our Cousin from America." Everyone was generously hospitable, and after sharing photos and reminiscing over years gone by, we had a traditional homemade dinner consisting of bacon and cabbage. Eventually, we made our way to the local "public house" to talk, laugh, knock back a few and have some more fun.

Over the next few days, we did a lot of sight-seeing. I was taken to various family landmarks including the cemetery where all the family, dating way back to the turn of the 18th century, were laid to rest. They also gave me a tour of the city, which included dozens of points of interest. Ultimately, we ended up taking a drive to the western side of the city. There I was overwhelmed by the many political murals which had been painted all around the buildings by amateur and professional artists years ago.

The saddest part of my visit was having to go. I didn't want to leave the family I'd just met for the first time and so easily had gotten to know. Looking back, I had the most wonderful time in Ireland. The memories made there will be carried with me, always, and the time spent with my loved ones will most definitely be cherished for the rest of my life.

### ***My ESL Experience***

**Meral Cicek**

English as a Second Language education should be personal. Each student is at a different level. I have attended Passaic Public Library ESL lessons for two terms. Later I attended The Philip Ciarco Jr. Learning Center for Intermediate II lessons. I also attended Passaic Community College Foundation and Prep classes afterwards.

There were 17 units in our book. I studied first eleven units three times. My teacher advised me to skip to the second level. The registration office didn't let me pass .

I graduated from the University of Theology. I was teaching my religion and our Holy Book to my students in my country. I taught them personally. We made many practices. Now, I am going to church two days every week to practice English. We have conversations lessons and we read new units. We can change our class or our level.

The students are motivated if they have personal education at their level.

*The Summer of '17***Chris Jones**

The summer of 2017, around the beginning of June, I had plans to go to a festival in Pennsylvania with two of my good friends, but everything didn't really turn out how it was supposed to. Before getting picked up, I'd freshened up for about 45 minutes and then spent a whole extra 30 minutes just trying to find a "good outfit" to wear. Before long, John called me to come outside, so I quickly gathered everything I needed, and dashed out of the house.

As we were heading up the Parkway, I turned on the Bluetooth and started blasting some music. We had a long drive ahead of us, so after a while, we just sat back and reminisced, sharing memories and stories of long ago. As usual, it wasn't long before we were laughing and thoroughly enjoying ourselves.

Out of nowhere, odd vibes surged through my mind, and for a few seconds I wasn't feeling right. There was no reason, I thought, why I was feeling this way. An aura seemed to surround me, and I sensed negativity swelling up and then totally engulf me. While everything in that moment was swiftly captured by my eyes, all movement continued in slow motion.

And then I blanked out.

Blinking my I realized I was no longer inside the car. As I regained my vision and felt the throbbing of a migraine, my vision was momentarily blurry. I could barely walk as my limbs went limp beneath me. Cars whizzed by, and then lights were flashing, and people I didn't know mumbled meaningless phrases in the background.

"CJ!!CJ!!"

Still in shock, I snapped back to reality, to the smell of gasoline and smoke. My burning eyes focused long enough to capture the car crashed and mangled. In its wake black lines left streaks on the newly flattened grass, and beyond that, was a jeep barley dented. Holding me up, was my friend Dante. As he supported my weakened body, Dante asked repeatedly, "Are you all right?"

I was at a loss for words. I didn't know what to say. He proceeded to prop me up against the car and took a picture of the whole grisly scene.



At his suggestion, I looked at myself in his phone and focused on two huge lacerations on my forehead. Blood continued to gush down my face. I couldn't even feel the pain.

Soon after, John called for an ambulance, and we waited for a little while. Before the paramedics even got there, my mother arrived at the scene followed by the ambulance. I was quickly laid on a stretcher. Then I was rushed to the ER where I was immediately taken for a CAT scan.

A concussion had caused me to black out, but luckily, it wasn't severe. I received stitches as I awaited the doctor's verdict. Ultimately, I would be ok.

To this day, though, it sends shivers down my spine to think about this incident. Initially, I thought I hadn't fastened my seat belt; as it turned out, I had buckled up. I can only imagine how hurt I could've been if I hadn't.

If nothing else, this accident taught me that as much as I dislike being restrained, I'll never drive without fastening my seatbelt-even if it's just to the corner store.

### ***A Precious Moment***

**Lassana Kante**

The day we first held our new-born baby was the happiest day of my life.

How could I possibly forget the day my world changed completely? Early that morning, on August 14th, my sweet wife of two years was just about nine months pregnant. I felt so bad that she had to carry all the weight of our child during this past steamy, sweltering summer.

Barely recovered from a night of too little sleep and too much pain she was definitely ready to bring our little girl into the world.

From 10:00 AM, her contractions became more and more regular, so we decided we were ready to go to the hospital. Once my wife was settled in, a nurse came into our room regularly to check on her. The nurse's reassurance that everything was ok made me feel so much better; I wish I could say the same were true for my partner.

Finally, by midnight, just when she thought she couldn't feel much worse, my wife's contractions became more frequent and more painful. At 1:00 am the doctor came into the

room and said it was time for all of us to prepare for the delivery. I was so nervous I could barely contain myself. And then-before I knew it, there she was: a bundle of pure innocence-so sweet, so soft, so very fragile. After I cut the cord, I really at my wife, and together we cried-pure tears of joy. Our gift had finally arrived, swaddled securely in the arms of her mother, a more precious moment, I simply could not imagine.

### *My Life*

#### **Fechal Mohammed**

I have three brothers and four sisters. My father and his wife live with us, as do my grandfather and my uncles and aunts. My mother lives in Togo, where I am from. America is an El Dorado for many people, a place where your dreams can become a reality through your desire for success. Thus, for me, my great dream will be to adapt early to American English and to continue my university education here.

For people who look like me in this country, I advise them to avoid bad friendship, drugs and alcohol. These things can cause many problems and can make you lose sight of your objectives.

The day of tomorrow is my dream. I hope to have my own family. I want to have a career as a medical doctor or in criminology, working for the FBI. I like to help people that need help. I like to solve problems and would like to cure people of disease.

My advice for a person coming to America is to be positive. America is the best country in all the world and gives everyone hope for the future.

### *Here I Come*

#### **Pradthana Nuan Ngam**

How often does a young Thai girl of 17 receive a letter from the United States Embassy? It was night time when I returned from the market fair with heavy bags for the night's supper. Just as I stepped in the house, I saw a large envelope on the floor of the empty living room. The envelope was addressed to me in English, and I immediately discerned that

it must be from the U.S. Embassy. I had been waiting to hear from the embassy for weeks after my visa interview for entry to the United States.

I enthusiastically opened it, and there was another envelope inside containing my passport and guiding information. My American Visa was stamped inside the passport. My heart was pounding and my brain was telling me to scream out loud. I wanted to tell everyone that my dream was about to come true! Should I post this great news on social media? I did not. I was too excited to do anything except think about starting a life with numerous exciting and brand-new opportunities.

The next day, I went out to a travel agency to purchase a plane ticket right away since my parents were already in New Jersey and they did not know how to get one for me. The travel agency offered me some options. However, none were appealing to me. I struggled with on-line ticket choices and after hours of research, I found the perfect date: May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Unfortunately, the tickets were not the best price - \$1,200.00, one way! I actually had 3 tickets because I had to take a plane from my hometown in Thailand to Bangkok; from Bangkok to Narita, Japan; and from Japan to Newark, New Jersey. It was such a long trip awaiting me.

My best friend, Sunisa, who I knew for 10 years, almost cried the night before I left. Would we miss our frequent park visits, giggling at the movies, and driving at breakneck speeds on our motorbikes? I didn't have many hours left, so I started thinking about what to take, and I hurried to pack. There were just a few clothes, two stuffed animal toys, an English dictionary, and Korean instant noodles in my shabby suitcase.

The day had arrived, the day that I had been dreaming of since my father left Thailand. It was 5 pm and I was leaving my beloved hometown. I acknowledged the feeling of sorrow despite my thrill of the future. As I was riding to the airport, I was thinking of my younger self and telling her that I would never forget who she was and where she originally belonged, and I just hoped I would not be forgotten. Once I reached the airport, it was almost time to depart, so I said goodbye to my relatives who came with me, especially my dear grandmother. I gave them all hugs. Everyone wished me a safe flight and hoped that prosperity would come to me in my new life.

The long journey then began. I entered the narrow plane. I was so frightened. I had never been in a plane before. I anxiously looked for my seat, and settled in. After that, I was

shaking and feeling weirdly sick in my stomach. Shortly, I figured it must be the feeling that an inexperienced person would have on a first airplane ride. It was just like riding a roller coaster with a lid on. But there was not anything to do except live with it. Almost thirty draining hours passed. My body was truly exhausted. At last, the plane landed in my new land.

I'm here. Opportunity awaits me! A new chapter of my life has begun.

### ***Welcome to My Life***

**Rosalia Portorreal**

My name is Rosalia and I am from the Dominican Republic. A big part of my family still lives in my native country but I came here, to this country for my best future for my life. In the Dominican Republic, there is not much opportunity for education, work or to have a lot of money.

When coming to my new country, my first problem was the language. English was my second language. For the first two years in school, I cried every day because I wanted to learn English so fast. I worked very hard to learn new words, and to listen to the news. Because of my dedication I was able to graduate from Orange High School. Now at JVS I continue to learn English.

### ***Women's Voices Matter***

**Ellen Smith**

Yes, because women seem to be able to see both sides of the fence.

While men see only one side. It's either yes or no. It's either this side or the other, no in between.

Women seem to be able to understand where both sides are coming from by believing parts of both sides without betraying either side.

We give others the reasons for our decisions giving them a broader chance to understand.

Men will side with each other. Whereas we don't mind others seeing us on the other side or even in the middle. We seem to think of what's best for all more often than not.

We don't join each other just because we are all women. No, but because what we believe in we believe in. And ten chances out of ten we can back it up without hurting anyone's feelings.

We should teach our daughters to speak out without being argumentative or backing down from what they believe in to always be spoken from the heart.

***Women's voices matter.***

### ***My New Life in America***

**Chunyan Tan**

I was born in China, I'm currently studying ESL at Brookdale community college. My English teacher Milagros encouraged me to join in this writing contest, I think it's helpful to my English study, so I'd like to try it.

I had a dream, when I was a kid. I wanted to visit America when I grow up, I can't believe my dream had come true now, I came to New Jersey with my husband and daughter on July 19, 2018. We lived with my husband's parents and grandmother. I like to live with the elders, Because they can teach me a lot of things. and they are enjoying to play with their granddaughter. New Jersey is a beautiful city, I love it here.

In the still of the night, happy memories come my mind again. Three years ago, I worked in my sister's husband's company in China, my sister's husband is from Taiwan, my husband is his cousin. I know my husband through his introduction. At the time, I was in China, and my husband was in New Jersey, we had only seen each other on video, we chatted on line every day, we shared happiness and sadness with each other. He told me about life in New Jersey, and I told him about life in China. We chatted about six months, and both were looking forward to meet because we found that we share a lot of interests.

On September 1, 2015, It was my husband's first time to China. I still remember our first time meeting, My husband's flight took about twenty-two hours to arrive. Even Though he was so tired, he still did something that moved me. When I waited for him at the airport, I got bit by a mosquito and it was very itchy. My husband saw me scratching, he

immediately took out the ointment and smeared it on my itched hand. He was so sweet, I was very touched. We fell in love at first sight. Maybe it's the predestined love .

After we discussed our plans with our parents, we decided to get married in China. We then got a marriage certificate, not a wedding because his parents were in New Jersey. My husband stayed in China for two months. however, he had to go back to New Jersey for work. I couldn't get a visa, so I had to stay in China and waited for the immigrant visa. I had to wait at least two years, But it didn't matter because I knew my waiting was a wait for happiness.

It was March 18,2016, My husband and his parents, grandmother came back to Taiwan, this time he would take me to Taiwan, and we held a wedding, Even though the wedding was simple ,It was the most beautiful moment of my life. after one month, my husband flew to New Jersey again. and I continue to wait for my visa in Taiwan alone. We speak Chinese in Taiwan and China, I didn't worry about life in Taiwan, I just needed a little time to adapt to a new environment. When I got familiar to Taiwan, I very much liked it there. There are many kinds of delicious snacks and specialties and life in Taiwan was very convenient.

Time passed very fast, and January 2017 came. my husband got three months vacation, we finally had a honeymoon in Hokkaido, it was a pleasant and unforgettable trip. After the trip ended, we went to China with my sister, sister's husband , and two nephews. we celebrated the spring festival with my parents and two brothers. my parents were very happy, and our family had a wonderful spring festival.

Spring festival is also called Chinese New Year, it's celebrated according to the lunar calendar. It's the most important traditional Chinese holiday. This is an occasion for the family to get together, and have the reunion dinner. The spring festival has many traditional customs, such as put up couplets, eat dumplings, light firecrackers and send best wishes for the new year.....children are the happiest. because they have new clothes and get many red packets, (this red packet, in which we put money given to a little kid as a lunar year gift, means good luck and happiness) from their parents ,uncles, aunts and so on .

Three months vacation came to end. and I had to wait for the visa alone again. We would miss each other very much. Though it was so sad , I had exciting news, I found out that I was pregnant. My husband and my family were glad to hear of my pregnancy.

Pregnancy is a long process of pain and happiness, but when your baby kicks and punches in your stomach, you feel that little life is magical !

Ten months of pregnancy, the due date was coming soon, my husband and his mother came back to Taiwan accompanied me to greet the baby as she arrived on November 25th 2017. My daughter was born, tears of joy and happiness came to my eyes as my healthy, beautiful daughter entered this world.

A New mom is always a mess, thanks for my mother-in-law's help me, who taught me how to take care of my baby. She's a great mother, she takes care of me and my baby very well. When my daughter was just one month old, my husband went back to work. I still stayed in Taiwan with my little baby and waited for our visa. On June 2018 ,we finally got our visa. I waited for more than two years to reunite with my husband.

A new environment, a new challenge, a new life , everything is new. Language is the biggest challenge for me, I went to high school in China ten years ago, I almost forgot the English I learned. Now I have to learn English and take care of my daughter. My family speaks Chinese, so it's more difficult for me to study English. Though everything is not easy, I'll try my best to do it.

There's a Chinese saying: "Fate brings people together no matter how far apart they may be." After the test of time and distance, we love each other more and more, we learn to cherish. Life is a test for everyone. we should learn tolerance, respect and comprehension. I feel very satisfied. because I have a loving husband and a family, and I also have a lovely daughter.

### ***The Things We Bury***

**Wadeline Volcy**

When I was two years old my grandmother had to take me in because my mom had become ill. Two years later, my mother passed away, so I never really got to know her. Since my dad never offered any information about her either, my own mother and I were strangers. As a youngster, I was raised by my grandmother, my aunt, and my uncles while my father lived in another city. At that time, my cousin, Ana lived with us as well. We did nearly everything together, and I can remember being very happy. When I turned seven our living situation changed again.

One by one, my grandmother, my aunt and my uncles were compelled to move without me. By the time I was eleven, my living situation had completely changed. At that point, I was forced to stay with an older cousin named Roy. Although we had met before, I was never quite comfortable with him, and once we began living together, I felt like Cinderella in the popular children's story. Being with him day after day became a living hell.

He was filled with animosity, and no matter how hard I tried to be accommodating, nothing was ever good enough. He treated me as if I were worthless. When my father inquired about us, his words were never kind. He always accused me of being uncooperative, disrespectful and lazy. My father usually accepted his words for truth and never once asked me what I had to say. He made it clear he was on my cousin's side. Sometimes he'd be so upset with me based on my cousin "report" he refused to send money—even for food.

Eventually, Roy even tried to turn every member of my immediate family against me, but I believe this didn't happen because there is a God. Ultimately, things also turned against him. Now Roy is living under the same conditions he tried to impose on me, and since we are no longer living under the same roof, I'm living my best possible life – just as I always dreamed it.

When I look back, I realize that even as a child, I had the insight not to hate Roy. I believed that deep down, there was a good person who'd temporarily allowed the devil to take control of his soul. I continue to abide by a similar philosophy to this day, and whenever I encounter individuals who are mean-spirited, I simply remind myself their issues are beyond my control, and their negative behavior has nothing to do with me personally, but everything to do with their own “inner demons”. Consequently, rather than believing I can somehow control their behavior, I have to acknowledge the only thing I can control is myself and how I react to them.



**OTHER SUBMISSIONS – NON-FICTION*****A Life Lesson*****Thatina L. Audan Fils**

Some years ago, while I still lived in Haiti, I had a great conversation with my friend Analisa, about poverty. Little did I know what a universal condition being poor really was. Two years later I made my way to the U.S. One day, there-after, I woke up early; the sun was in the sky, but I felt so sad. Eventually, I went to the store; in front of this building a thin old man had taken a seat on the ground. Spread out all around him was probably everything he owned. By the time I arrived, many people had come and gone. In the meanwhile, he begged, “Give me a quarter, please!”

As much as I tried not to, I was forced to focus on this man. Never had I imagined I’d see such a thing in this country. I decided to step back a little bit to observe what would happen next. I waited and I watched, and I watched and I waited some more. Not one person reached into his/her pocket to give this poor guy anything. Two hours passed, and I said to myself, “Let me give him something.” I just couldn’t believe this situation was real - not in this country. How could a person who seems to need so much receive so little?

I thought back to my conversation with Analisa. I’d believed in this country poor people would not be easy to find. And here I was, in front of this store while one very, very sad man begged for his life. As I began to walk away, I realized how little my pocket change would help him. My heart felt so heavy; it reminded me of the overwhelming sadness I’d felt earlier in the day. I decided that even after I’d given him something, by the end of the day, he’d probably be hungry again, so I ran home, and then I raced back to the store to give this unfortunate stranger something more. My additional money certainly wasn’t going to provide a lavish three-course meal, but at least, it could help him a little more.

By the time I got back to the store, the old man was gone. Perhaps he’d been chased by the police, or he felt he could find a little more generosity at another location. I wasn’t sure, so I asked around. Nobody knew anything. Some people looked at me very strangely, as if my questions were absurd. (“Who would even care about such a displaced soul?” they criticized with their eyes).

To this day, I've been back to that store many times, but I've never seen this man again. I often stop and wonder, "Is this poor soul still around? Is he in someone's care, or is he cold and alone and hungry? If only there were a way to take care of those in need...no man woman or child would ever go hungry-or homeless again!

### ***My Personal Struggle***

**Shakila Coleman**

Reminders of babies are everywhere. They're in movies, on TV programs and in lots of advertisements. (After all, who can resist an adorable, little baby?) Babies appear in every Face-Book post of friends I went to school with, whose babies look exactly like they did. And here I am knowing, deep down, I may never have that.

Within the past two years, I've experienced three miscarriages; the most recent occurred in August of 2018. Since then, I was diagnosed with "Diminished Ovarian Reserve" (DOR). I have only a few follicles left, and they indicate poor egg quality.

Moving on, despite this reality, has been quite the uphill battle. Understanding infertility is difficult; there are times when I don't even understand everything-despite my best efforts to educate myself with professional, medical advice and countless hours of research.

This struggle has provoked intense and unfamiliar feelings in me. Life is teaching me that I am not always in control.

My infertility makes me feel isolated. It's a tough pill to swallow.

My infertility makes me feel guilty.

Too often I forget that infertility is a medical problem, and it should be treated as one. Ironically enough, insurance doesn't treat it like a medical condition, which-in turn- adds more stress to an already stressful situation.

My infertility makes me feel angry. I'm angry at my body.

My infertility makes me feel sad and hopeless. It makes feel unsettled.

My life is on hold.

Lastly, My infertility makes me feel rushed and impatient, and with every year my chances to conceive are more and more diminished.

The more I struggle with my infertility, the less control I have. I believe the only things I can do is to keep informed and take the best possible care of myself.

We all know someone who's fighting the "good fight".

I just wish people would choose their words with more care.

I hate it when they say, "Just relax. As soon as you stop fixating on the issue-Bam! It'll happen." Or, "You really should consider adoption-just in case."

Those who are less in the know continue to badger, "What's taking you so long? Are you sure you want to have a kid?"

I know most peoples' intentions are good, and often times they have absolutely no idea what to say because it's considered a "female" problem, and many people just don't feel comfortable discussing it-especially in mixed company. The truth of the matter is, this is not "a female" problem; it's a "human problem", and the men in our lives must also be patient, and supportive, as well as educated and informed.

I truly believe that eventually, I will have moved beyond this struggle, and when the time is right, there will be two-maybe even three little ones (who looks just like their momma did when she was their age) running around-everywhere. Each one will be a reminder that there's still so much to be thankful for and way too many blessings to count.

### ***The Things We Take for Granted***

**Yokasta De La Cruz**

When I arrived in this country I was very impressed with the transportation system in comparison to the one I used in the Dominican Republic (my native country). There we call the bus, guagua. I remember during the course of my trip to another city, using the guagua there was always a young man who helped the driver collect the passengers' money.

He would literally hang in the door and shout the destination of the bus, "Guaricano, Guaricano", he would say, even though the bus was full he would continue: "Hey, hey you, come on this bus! It's empty, I have space for more, come ..., come" he said it in whatever way he could to get people to move further into the bus.

When the bus was full, I ignored the young man's calls typically because there were about five people already halfway in and halfway out, holding themselves from the door bars. I ignored them with the hope that the next bus would come with fewer people.

Finally, a bus came with room enough to get inside; however, most of the time the only seat available was the divider seat where everyone goes through to get off of the bus. Because so many people used the bus, it was always beat up, so when I sat down I would be sideways for the whole trip- which most times- was more than an hour. By the time I arrived, my body would be aching and my muscles completely numb.

I also remember that none of the buses had any air conditioning, so it was very hot; therefore, I would feel very sleepy; however I couldn't go to sleep because I had to be cautious in case someone tried to pick my pocket for my wallet. I was clever. I always had some money hidden in my shoes-just in case I was robbed. I can say that I was very lucky that no thief ever took anything from me, but some others passengers were not as fortunate.

Whenever I finally reached my destination, I had to rush. I had to get off the bus rather quickly -actually, within 30 seconds-because the driver would not even allow enough time for passengers to get off as normal human beings. Once I stepped down, off the bus, I had to cross a very dangerous road. This road had a traffic light, but I think the drivers must not have known that the red light meant stop because this never happened. I learned in school about the traffic lights, but reality was very different. I waited for others to cross the street, and when I saw some others crossing I joined them. Together we had to challenge the drivers to let us pass. Sometimes they gave us the right of way, but not before yelling and cursing us to the devil.

Now in the US, I see the difference at least in some parts of New Jersey. If need be, I can use my cell phone or fall asleep the bus without worrying about someone taking advantage of me or taking my belongings.

This recollection is true; however, the more important issue is that it was never as bad for me as it still is for others in my country. As it stands today, an average of six people dies on a daily basis due to public transportation accidents. This is truly a tragedy. The fact remains that until some basic progress is made, this sad realty will affect too many lives in the Dominican Republic.

*For the Love of My Mom*

Yasmine Diaz

“Ouch!”

Have you ever loved someone so much that you constantly wished and prayed that somehow, all her pain and struggle would just go away? Not a day went by when I wouldn't have done *anything* to help my mom as she fought her battle with cancer. The chemotherapy she was forced to endure brought her a kind of suffering that I could barely watch. My beautiful mother, the honey blonde with the Colgate smile and the pretty little gap between her front teeth was reduced to so much misery. I hated seeing her that way. As if it were yesterday, I can remember asking “What can I help you with, ma?” It was all she could do to moan or quietly cry-tears in her now sunken-once sweet, pretty eyes.

Day by day she grew weaker-her energy- depleted, her will- defeated. Even her silhouette seemed hopeless as she navigated her way to the nearest rest-stop. This (second) time around, all bets were off, gloves on, but for all appearances, she was nearing the end of this round. Any hope she once had was down, down for the final count. She knew each day to follow would lead to nothing but another rough night. She was ready to let go-to go in peace.

As she lay in a bed that she knew was her “last stop”, she and I both knew her time was coming, but as long as I was fighting for her to hold on, she wouldn't let go. She had to be sure I'd be ok.

Not long after I'd accepted what was in store, God made it right, and my mom made her peace with this world. A battle fought-not once- but twice, challenged us in ways we never thought possible. Philosophically I believe: “That which doesn't kill us-only serves to make us stronger.” I can't say with certainty that time has yet to heal this wound left by the loss of my mother, but I can say this: Love-of any kind- cannot be selfish. Doing our *own thing* rather than spending time with loved ones-is- ultimately selfish.

As for my advice: To anyone whose mother is still alive, you only get one mom in this life, and she's irreplaceable. If you're reading this, and your mother's still alive, consider yourself lucky. Cherish her and value your time together. Remember, the day will come when she won't just be a phone call or a kiss away.

*The America I Thought was Great***Juliette Kim**

America is called “Mi-Kook” in Korean. It means “beautiful country”. I always thought America was special. I visited the United States for the first time when I was 10 years old, and everything was amazing! Trees were taller than ours, people were bigger than us, their attitude was nicer, and even the grass looked greener to me. Since that trip, America has been a great country to me.

As I grew up, I got to know an America that was less than the idea I had in my head. However, I still thought America was relatively great because it seemed to know what could make it great again, and was constantly in pursuit of this renewed greatness.

During my working as a correspondent in New York for four years, my opinion has changed a lot. America does not currently represent “Mi-Kook”, nor does it even resemble a great nation. It seems like one day, out of the blue, America started appreciating all things expensive but not valuable; favorable but not righteous, and divided but not united. It seemed to lose its generosity towards those in need around the world. It became isolated rather than being a leader. It lost its long term perspective and started being narrow minded. It hadn’t lost its power, but failed to be great.

Unlike the Obama administration, which gave innocent dreamers an opportunity to get a path to citizenship, the Trump administration took that opportunity from them. This administration decided to exit from the Paris climate accord which I think is very important for the future generation. It recently chose to withdraw its troops from Syria but it didn’t give much evidence that it defeated ISIS. It stopped supporting innovation that is necessary for the future and started backing industries that are favorable to this administration. It is on trade wars with many countries just insisting that it has enormous trade deficits, but it has not counted its huge demand for imports. It has been dividing not just foreigners from nationals, but nationals from nationals.

The America I thought was great four years ago pursued value, not price. It at least tried to prioritize what was right over what was just profitable. It knew how to compromise and harmonize with others without losing too much. It wanted to be a pioneer rather than be a bully. It was strong enough but didn’t threaten others all the time. For the most part, it used

the strength of all, not just itself. It was so generous that it shared its opportunity with all people who dreamed of it.

Despite all this, I believe strongly that America can regain all the glory I first saw in it when I first came here. Maybe its greatness has not gone to anywhere but it has just been covered by darkness.

### ***Waiting for Blossoms***

**Nur Light**

When I was a little girl, I wanted to become a doctor. I don't know why. Probably there were two reasons. First of all, my dear father is a good doctor. He loves all the people, and he dedicates his life to help his patients. Moreover, my choosy mother loves my father very much, and she loves his job as well. I think she wanted to see some of her children continuing her beloved better half's profession. Maybe that's why I wanted to be a doctor. In my high school, I was tempted to interest in language and literature. Then I was accepted to Istanbul University, Literature Faculty. I liked my school because of its very spot in old Istanbul, which was the place our magnificent ancestors had lived in. I could find a lot of time to visit historical and cultural places by foot with my two best friends. Thanks to Allah, I spent a good, happy, unforgettable, and successful college education in Istanbul University. I finished my undergraduate degree in 1996. Afterwards, I applied to the same school to get a masters degree. At that time, my department didn't accept female students to graduate school because they thought females couldn't finish that process. However, a friend and I worked very hard so that we both were accepted.

After the first academic term, the universities' war broke out. You didn't read wrong. The war was between some universities, including mine, and the female students who wore the headscarf. They didn't accept these kinds of students to classes. Police officers waited in front of the school and asked students to take off their headscarves. If they wouldn't, they couldn't get into the school. I refused to take off my headscarf. That's why I couldn't finish my masters degree.

At the same time a new door was opened to me. This was absolutely a milestone in my life. I met a giant-hearted gentleman who was smart, educated, elegant and very

compassionate. His mission was “less talk, more work.” He and I had the same life goals. I found his one sentence fascinating: “Actually I have serenity in my current life; in addition to this, I want to get married to increase my serenity with a new serenity.” He gained my heart and my family’s heart ,too, which was important for me. After nine months we got married.

Until I came to the US, I had lived a meaningful life, thinking and working every day about how to help people, not only in my country but in the whole world. My husband and I believed that the most significant value in life is education. We were both teachers, therefore we wanted to help everyone around us for their education. Our thoughts about universal education lasted for years and years, even while we were raising our three children. We had to take care of them and we did, while we were trying to reach our life goals. According to our beliefs, if there are any people anywhere, anytime who need help, you should be there for them even after midnight. We lived under the light of our beliefs. I loved my students, and they loved me. They were like my siblings. They were also my close friends. We were like a big family who help people with love and compassion.

In recent days, I had to leave my parents, all my friends, and students. Each one has different sorrows now. Some of them are suffering, like me, from homesickness in several countries, and the others are suffering in my country both as a consequence of the political discrimination. Most of my friends are fired from his or her jobs. In addition to that, they are arrested without any evidence of doing some wrong things. Some of my colleagues are in jail now and even their husbands. Worse than that, if they have babies, the babies are in prison. Some grandparents have to take care of their grandchildren because both parents of those children are in jail. I can’t understand why. What have they done wrong ? Their profession is teaching; they’re just teachers. They are the most honest, helpful, lovely and compassionate people that I have ever met in my life. They don’t share the same ideology of the current government, especially with the man who decides everything in our country. That’s why they are called “guilty”.

Today, the most overwhelming and poignant fact in my life is feeling the absence of my beloved, passionate husband. To make matters worse, I don’t know where he is or what has happened to him. I have never heard anything about him for two and half years. Everyday, when I look at my three children’s faces, I feel an enormous heartbreak in their eyes.



I was a teacher, now I 'm a student, student of English. I must not give up. I believe Allah with all my heart. I believe these dark days will end and will leave only good things, more brilliant ways and achievements.

Night never lasts forever. There is a day after every dark night. Winter has to give over its place to spring; I'm waiting for the blossoms in spring with patience and tenacity.

### *Old Age*

**Wendy Moses**

I'm afraid of getting old, becoming a senior citizen and depending more on others. You know, as a mother, you hold your family together the best you can; for me, that meant raising two boys, who are grown and have families of their own.

I never thought the day would come when I'd feel my sons had forgotten me, but most recently, that's just what seems to have happened. Sadly, they didn't call me for Thanksgiving, Christmas, or for New Year's.

This is not how I raised them.

Among other things, I taught my sons to respect their elders. Naturally, this would mean reaching out and connecting with loved ones. I also tried to remind them, "Never start a fight" and "Everybody is *not* your friend".

Through the years I bailed out both of them from more situations than I care to remember.

Trying to keep them out of trouble, I'd hoped they'd learn from their mistakes. I've worked most of my life. I never anticipated I'd have such a hard time collecting *my* Social Security.

A little while after the World Trade Center came down in December, 2005. I made up my mind to move from New York to New Jersey. From then on, I continued to work-until now.

These days, I'm so tired. All I want is to retire and enjoy my life with my kids and grandkids.

Tell me: Is that too much to ask?

**OTHER SUBMISSIONS – FICTION***Ancient Dimensions***Dy'Qai Ferguson**

Long ago before the life of new beginnings there were 6 demigods. Their roles was to make sure the ancient raider which is a powerful eye that connects to 2 different dimensions one was called the Dream World and the other is Sanctuary that causes mass destruction to anything it sees. The 6 demigods name all together spelled out LENGTH the first demigod Leoni is an omnipotent SS classed ranked god. Leoni is from the planet called Paradise the Light of The Deities rumors were told that the planet is so evolved in power and energy it pushed their sun into deep space. The second Demigod Emperor Z is a omniscient X classed ranked god. Emperor Z is from the planet called Immortal XCIX this specific planet is the core of darkness and creations of black holes. Even a SS classed Sanctuary Deity can't find this planet as it's shielded darkness covers it. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Demigod is named Nomi and Grief these two ancient Gods are from a Royal blood line called Python a poison based destruction user they planet is filled with black market use and extreme amount of magical poison training. There were thoughts of changing the planet name to Critopia the Fallen Goddess of Life and Death but Nomi and Grief wanted to keep their Royal blood line name Python instead. Tyrant and Hope were the last 2 Demigods but when both came back from the dimension Dream World what use to be planet Legion that they both destroyed without any hesitation. Everyone wonder people talked but the main question was why would they destroy a planet they both made by just using 2% of their power. Tyrant and Hope are both Omnipresence the power of being present everywhere this is what the people feared upon a Demigod turning rouge not only is it one but two. It's been 5 years since the destruction of planet Legion Hope and Tyrant disappeared off the radar for a while. Little did they know Tyrant was always power hungry even though he was beyond his limit of power. He would go to the dimension Dream World like it was his home constantly trying to open the other dimension Sanctuary. Hope tried to explain to him in order for that dimension to open you will need all 6 Demigods to open such a dimension that shouldn't be open in the first place. Tyrant had a quick thought he said "what if I can consume each demigod and become Yin &

Yang as one”. Hope replied “that’s a marvelous plan but who would you go for first”? Tyrant left eye began to change into the color of a colorful galactic stars with a symbol of hope on his pupil while his right eye changing into the color pink with a white symbol of strength.

Tyrant looked at Hope and said “I need to build an army and once I feel the need to attack we will hit the planet Python first”. As hours go by Nomi sense massive amount of power from 800 light years away Grief calmly meditates and says “no worry my sister they is coming and we will be prepared”. Nomi begins to close her right eye and lift her left hand as all the toxic energy consumes the right side of her body. Nomi disappear within a flash right next to Hope with a shock look on her face. Hope bursts in laughter and says “so you really think that little transformation could scratch me” Nomi dashes at Hope with a lot of force Hope stands there calm as Nomi swings with her toxic hand full of anger and confusion. Hope stops her with just her pinky finger and says “BE Gone” Nomi fly’s back feet sliding on the ground. Tyrant jumps in front of her saying “you know better not to come to this dimension alone” as he picks her up by the neck. Nomi goes into 2<sup>nd</sup> transformation she yells out “RECALL” poison gas and needles burst out of her skin within a blink of a eye Tyrant laughs saying “look into my eyes may the galaxy free you”. Grief comes in and saves Nomi but there’s something very different about Grief that caught the eye of Hope and Tyrant.

Hope begins to say “well would you look at that like father like son you finally using your Royal blood powers. Grief body glows yellow and red hate consumes his eyes as anger builds rapidly Grief charges at Tyrant with all power knocking him back into the tomb stones. Tyrant gets up wiping the rubble off his shoulders he says “ooo what a impact”. As the 2 clash and clash the dimension shakes with power a bright light flashes blinding Hope, Tyrant, and Grief Nomi looks at Grief with tears in her eyes and tells Grief to run as her body lights bright green a symbol emerges at the top meaning self destruct Grief sadly declining no I wont leave you Nomi walks to Grief and touches his shoulder while saying a few words “may this seal protect you” a black bubble emerges from the ground as Nomi causes a huge blast that can be seen from the planet Immortal XCIX.

### *About the Dragon*

**Pat Smalley**

Once upon a time there was a little dragon living in the castle, but he didn't have any friends. Kids came by. He said, "hello!" and they said "hey!"



The little dragon said, "Can you be my friend"? "Can you tell me a story?" So the kids said, "yes and we can tell you a story so you can sleep well".



And the dragon said, "Thank you for being my friend". The kids replied, "You are welcome because we love you."

As the kids told the dragon the story, more children came by right after school. And they also wanted to be his friend, because he was a nice dragon to be around. Also, the children were happy to play with him and be his friend.



**OTHER SUBMISSIONS – POETRY***Make Amends***Alexandria Buchanan**

I love how the only thing here to mend my broken heart  
Are a few scripted words on  
“How to deal with a kid losing grip on reality  
Losing faith in humanity”  
As my brain loses density  
My stomach pain has reached max intensity  
And I'm ready to blow  
And by blow  
I mean puke  
Because my life has become so surrounded by sleep And games  
And games  
And school  
With food  
Oh food  
It makes me happy  
But stresses me out  
Because the size of my thighs  
Is the only thing that counts  
If they're too big your fat  
If they are gapped  
You're a rat  
There is no winning in a world of perfection  
Where beauty is the size of your bust  
The mass of your butt  
If you're thick and curvy  
You may be empowered to be a god  
While others only see you as Godzilla

And if you're skinny  
Many will think you're a model  
While others think you're a terrible role model  
Either way you're the problem  
Not the people who tell you who to be  
It's your fault that you're weak  
And yes it is my fault  
However all the punches you've thrown at me  
Have not help  
Because now i'm a plump pumpkin that nobody wants Cause I'm covered I'm bruises from  
people's Careless drops  
You may not know that I'm bruised  
You may just think you dropped me  
Softly  
So I'll be fine  
Some one else will want me.  
Don't get me started with that  
Because no one wants a girl with scars  
And even though there are no scars on my wrist Its embedded into my mind  
And have damaged my wits  
And as I stand on the edge all I hear is  
“Do a flip”  
Because to you it's a joke  
Because if I choke  
I'm worthless  
And my mouth is wordless

*Things I Associate With You*  
**Alexandria Buchanan**

In the darkness  
I found a light  
One that came out of nowhere  
That lit up my life  
It led me to a field of flowers  
That smelled of spilled ink  
Sounded like the chiming of bells  
All encased in sunlight  
The world was one that made me feel safe I found a home after being homeless  
I found love when I'd been loveless  
I found friends when I'd been friendless  
I found life when I'd felt lifeless  
And at night there was a moon  
A moon that seemed to cure my loneliness  
One so bright it could've been a sun  
I became a star and I thought I was the brightest star in their sky But I was simply a regular  
star to them  
The moon that once brought me comfort  
That made me feel less alone  
Became a source of loneliness  
And in the night when the moon disappeared A storm appeared  
In the moment of fear  
And sadness  
I found comfort in the rumbling thunder And strikes of lightning  
Wrapped in my jacket I walked into the storm Stared it in the eye and smiled  
And in that moment the storm became a comfort The thunder spoke to me  
It gave me answers no one else seemed to have  
It lulled me to sleep and when I awoke the moon was gone But the storm was still there

The field of flowers shared her petals The galaxy shared her stars  
The ink shared her ideas  
The bell gave me his chimes  
And the storm gave me his rain  
And in a jar I keep one of each  
Memories of the things I associate you with And in your jar of memories  
I hope you will keep a snowflake



***Better than OK***  
**Theresa Damiano**

We never can tell just who we will meet  
And sometimes we are blessed in a beautiful way.  
When it seems like friendship is an impossible feat  
Like it's here today and tomorrow it's gone away.

But once in a while we will greet someone that's neat  
And they're different from the others in every way.  
You can tell right away that they are not a trick or treat  
The kind you hate to leave or the ones you always want to stay.

And almost never is it ever this sweet  
To where you want to be with them every second of the day.  
For a change it feels like they are yours to keep  
Friends that are true, sincere and way better than OK.

***Too Late Too Soon*****Theresa Damiano**

I may never find my pot of gold  
Or ever stop feeling blue.  
And I can be happy and not be rich  
But I'll always have love for you.

I may fall short of that other side  
You know that side of life for two.  
I don't want to lose  
And not have tried for a chance to be with you.

I don't ever not want to be a friend  
But if your friendship won't do  
I would rather die trying  
And in the end pray that my Lord still sees me through.

I hope my heart won't be my doom  
While I'm hoping for love to bloom.  
But chances are that it's too late  
And too late has come too soon.

***Love***  
**Areesa Din**

Roses are red, violets are blue,  
I feel cherished,  
When I'm with you.

Words can't describe how much you mean to me,  
My heart was locked,  
But you had the key,  
That set me free.

Our love grows stronger all the time,  
Your smile is brighter than the sunshine,  
I will always be there for you anytime,  
My love for you is infinitely divine.

To be in love with you,  
It's like magic,  
The whole world can see it too,  
Just how much I love you.

My heart yearns for your love,  
Forever and always,  
Every day it will continue to evolve,  
Together through our days.

***My Beautiful Flower***  
**Gwendolyn Drakeford**

Planted in my heart before I knew you,  
My beautiful flower.  
My heart leaped with joy when I heard you cry  
Oh what a ***great gift!***  
My beautiful flower.  
I nurtured you with love, gave you food for nourishment, and kept you healthy, vital and strong,  
In spite of all the rain, I made sure you felt the sun shine.  
When you got too unruly, it's true, I had to pinch you back.  
Other times I pruned you as you chose the wrong direction  
Yet you continued extending your reach.  
As time went by you grew strong, learning not to lean on others.  
As you came into your own,  
You blossomed  
Into this beautiful flower, my daughter, my Lisa,  
You make me so very proud every time I think of you.

***Coney Island***  
**Gregory Ernest**

Around the sandy boardwalk in Coney Island Wet swimmers take a sunbath  
In the hot white sand without lather.  
Crazy birds fly to land Anywhere food stands.  
Packed amusement park entertains a happy crowd Smelly kiosks sell fancy hot dogs.  
Tired soccer players are shaking hands  
After scoring a few goals in the moist white sand.  
From the sea, the wind blows its cold blessing On the whole location  
To announce summer time in Coney Island.

*Life*  
**Deborah Garrette**

The universe looked lit and bright  
when I entered the world.  
No drugs created me.  
I was born to be as free as a bird,  
filled with options in this life.

In life I must make a choice  
to do right or to do wrong.  
However strong is the wrong,  
I will choose the right way.

When I've to go to school,  
I will practice the rule, and not be a fool.

Do the hard work every day,  
and not have my own way.  
I know I will make my teacher glad  
by the efforts that I make.

Life is a prayerful journey.  
We have many risks to take, so  
So I will not hesitate  
to make my life great!

*A Mother's Love*  
**Tujuana Hubbard**

When you think about it,  
Your mother is really your first love  
She's with you from day one-  
and forever.  
Hers is the one love that never leaves you-  
Ever.  
She is with you through all of your firsts:  
from your first cry, to your first smile, and your first words, your first steps, and your first  
tooth,  
right on down the line.  
She's there to wipe the tears and make you laugh-  
Teaching you how to use the bathroom and tie your shoes.  
Even when you don't agree, the **love** doesn't go away.  
She is there on your first day of school,  
holding your hand  
giving you a hug and smile-  
Assuring you, "*You can do this!*"  
So on you go.  
Knowing that she will be standing there waiting for your return  
makes it easier to hear the door close behind you.  
Yes, a mother's love surrounds you no matter where you are.  
You draw comfort in it, and just thinking of her makes you smile  
Because her love for you is endless-unconditional and without end.

*Being a Woman***Quanisha Ncneil**

A woman is all about femininity  
That's the "stuff" she's made up of.  
She has within her  
Layers, of depth to her thoughts and feelings  
She reminds you of an onion,  
Seemingly translucent, she tantalizes your imagination  
And tempts you to uncover her  
many layers  
As you can see,  
There's so much more to be revealed.  
She's never one-dimensional.  
That's not what she's meant to be.  
Her layers serve only to protect  
The very core of her being.  
Her deepest soul is so well hidden  
From the harsh glare of the unenlightened  
Generously, she shares her feminine being-  
Only with those she trusts .  
You can only let go  
As long as you resist her many charms,  
Or be swept up by her multiple facets  
What an astonishing woman!



*Nobody Seems...***Khailiah Nevius**

People out here committing suicide  
But nobody seems to be talking about that  
Young adults and children taking their lives  
But nobody seems to care about that.  
Being humiliated by their peers  
Having your business all over the internet  
But nobody seems to be paying attention to that.  
Nobody seems to care that this person  
Is attempting to kill him/herself  
Nobody seems to care  
Until it's all said and done.  
Now everybody so-called cares  
After he or she commits suicide  
Nobody seemed to care  
When he or she decided that they couldn't take it anymore  
Nobody seems to care.

*Understanding the Pain***Khailiah Nevius**

Understanding the pain  
Of a black person  
What we go through  
The guilt  
The pain  
That's so insane  
Those are the words  
Going through my brain  
Through the brain of a black person

Finally having someone  
Who understands the pain  
That's going through our brain  
A President who  
Can make a change  
Then arrange  
Someone who we know  
Is going to make a change  
The man who is going to make a change  
President Barack Obama

***Who Was She....Really?*****Maryanne Rondholz**

Her hair flowed like silk streamers blowing in the wind  
Her eyes as blue as the sky  
Her skin was as soft as cotton and white as milk  
The curves she wore-an hour glass-  
never ending  
Her long lean body spoke of beauty-unlike any other  
Her spirit radiated a glow that blinded  
Yet in her eyes, behind the pool of blue, and her strong demeanor  
lived a scared girl  
fearing the unknown.

***My Angel***  
**Arlene Sutton**

I miss my mom's love every day.  
Every time I turn around I see her face.  
I miss the talks we had.  
The things she said.  
The advice she gave.  
And most of all the laughs we shared.

Now when I think about her and all her memories  
It makes me sad.  
Sometimes at night I toss and turn  
And then wake up screaming,  
"Is she really gone?"

Yes, she's really gone,  
But I still feel her love around me.  
The love I felt since birth.  
The love that helps me to keep going on.

Now she's in heaven.  
I know she's here with me every day.  
So I look forward to turning around  
Just so I can see her face.

Sometimes I even look up in the sky  
To see my Angel flying by.

***The World and Me*****Bi Lin Wei**

The earth wakes up at the time in the Chinese lunar calendar called ChunFen (the spring equinox). Everything in the world comes to life. Crocuses first poke their heads out of the ground and raise their little lavender faces. The tulips hurriedly straighten up and bring their colorful colors to the world, facing to sun. The cherry blossoms then blossom with bunches of pink and white flowers in full bloom on their branches.

The world is wearing its new clothes in green. Walk into nature and lift up your head to see the trees, their leaves are talking to the wind. They are shaking their heads and laughing. The wind makes leaves feel so happy.

The beautiful colors disappear from people's gaze. The leaves wither and turn to yellow quivering in the late fall. They do not want to leave the trees like babies who do not want to leave their mothers. But, unfortunately, they are falling down to the ground from the trees. They seem so sad. The sound of their falling is the sound of their crying. Everything is wrapped in silver. It is snowing, the snowflakes are dancing in the sky. They turn to the left and turn to the right. A moment to turn in circle, a moment to fall straight. A few snowflakes are flying toward the window, they seem to say "It is winter time, stay inside where it is warm."

I feel that the world is one with me. It is me. I am it.

People, if you feel that the world and you are one, how can you have the heart to throw garbage everywhere. If you feel that the world and you are one, how can you have the heart to cut down a vast forest and leave it bare under the sun. If you feel that the world and you are one, how can you have the heart to make war that destroys everything.

The world is us, we are the world.

*The Concert of the Fireflies*  
(Anonymous)

The dusk is yet to come.

A group of fireflies twinkling up and down  
on the string of a musical instrument.

Dancing swiftly and even pleasantly.

Are they ever tired?

Bouncing up and down feverishly!

It's a competition I hear the hear Handel's Messiah.

An orchestra of a dozen players, playing andante with twinkles. My heart follows their  
movement.

At last, I join their movement.

Oh!

The beautiful and coolish summer night festival of fireflies.