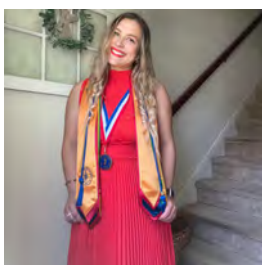
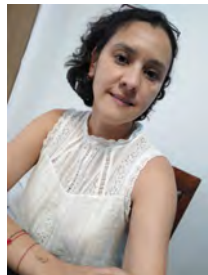
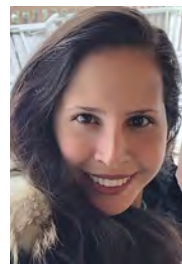
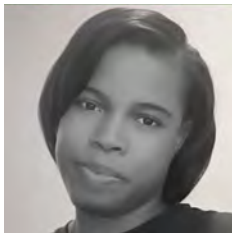
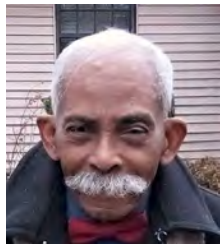
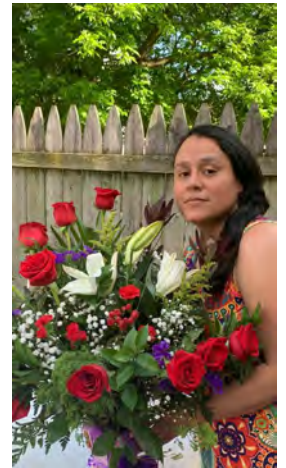
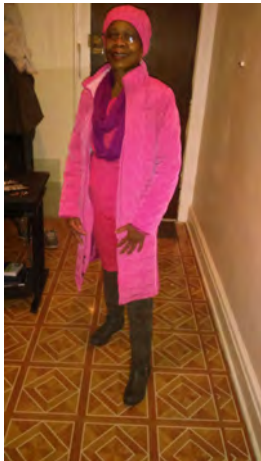


INSIGHT 2022

The New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning

Annual Learner Writing Contest



INSIGHT
Volume Eight, 2022
New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning

This is the eighth year NJALL has held an adult learner writing contest. We continue to be grateful that we can provide an audience for adult learners across the state. This year we had over 75 submissions, and we would like thank all of the writers for sharing their work with us. We would also like to thank all of the teachers and tutors who encourage and support their students. We hope that more students feel that this contest is something they would like to participate in.

Our annual conference was virtual this past spring, and in keeping with tradition we invited a number of the winners to participate in a session in which they read their work and talked about their writing process. The session was well attended, and attendees felt inspired by what they heard. Although being together is certainly preferable, even in Zoom space it was great to be able to come together around a shared love of writing.

We look forward to reading the submissions for next year's contest and celebrating students' work in whatever capacity is possible.

Stay safe.

Erik Jacobson

Chair, NJALL Learner Writing Contest

Additional 2022 Reviewers: Melissa Backes, Shirley Suzuki

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About the Award Winning Authors

Ruihong Cheng



Ruihong Cheng is a member of the Twin Rivers Writer's Group. She teaches Chinese at CACA-MID-JERSEY Chinese school. She is also an ESL student in "Writing in English" through Literacy NJ. She loves writing poems and stories and sharing thoughts with others.

Nadege Dardompre

My name is Nadege Dardompre, and I am in the ABE group at JVS. My goal is to continue my education.

Cleber de Oliveira dos Santos



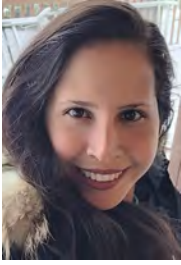
My name is Cleber de Oliveira dos Santos. I am from Brazil. I have been living in Cherry Hill New Jersey since July 2020. I live with my wife, Cristiane, and my daughter Sophia. I am a Brazilian Navy Officer, and I am working in the Us Navy representing my country. My mission will run out in August 2022 when I will go back to Brazil. I would like to express my appreciation to my teacher and friend Ms. Christine, who has been my tutor since I started the ESL program, as well as all support I received in Literacy Volunteers of America in Camden County, such as a Book Club which I took part in. Thanks, Ms. Shyamoli, and Ms. Victoria for all support. I am so grateful to NJALL for this opportunity to present my ideas and take part in this contest. I will never forget this moment. My favorite hobbies are playing soccer and making friends.

Megan Kazier



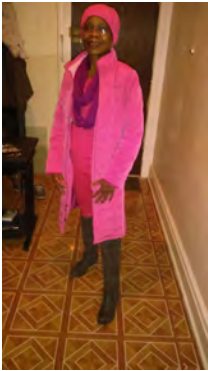
My name is Megan Kazier and I just graduated from Atlantic Cape Community College with an Associates in English. I hope to publish my first novel before my 30th birthday in November.

Estefany Mendible



I was born in Venezuela, a place that I miss with nostalgia. The last five years I lived in the Dominican Republic, which is my mothers' native country. I like to hike, ride and walk in nature. I wish one day to be able to work again in my field which is law and keep building my home with my husband in this beautiful country that opened the doors for me at the end of the year 2021

Vera Muhammad



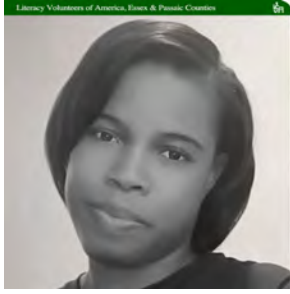
My name is Vera L. Muhammad, I was born and brought up in Jamaica West Indies. As I reflect on the current pandemic, I have observed that some families have lost more than one family members. This led me to challenge myself to see if I have the ability to carry out this writing endeavor. Therefore, I thought that maybe someone could find consolation knowing that I can personally identify with their story. I would like people to stay strong because the pain of lost will decrease with the passing of time.

Monica Oblites



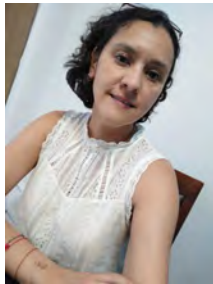
My name is Monica Oblites, originally my family and I are from Peru, we have two children and live in Bridgewater, NJ. My husband Renato and I met when we worked at a Health Center in a town in the Andes of Cusco-Peru. After a few months of knowing each other, we fell in love. Working in that area of my country was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. It allowed me to know a part of my country that I had only read about in books, it allowed me to contribute a grain of sand by assisting and giving nutrition training to the different communities in the area, and it also allowed me to know the rich culture of my country. So one of the volunteers from Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County encouraged me to submit the story I wrote for the LVSC newsletter: Qoyllur Rit'i

Sophonie Pierre Louis



Sophonie was born in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti on Jan. 21, 1993, and moved to the United States of America in January, 2020. She is from a Christian family of five: mother, stepfather, older brother, me and a little sister. Her mother was seamstress and a nurse. Her stepfather was a teacher. Her brother is computer scientist and an accountant. She is a physician and her sister is an elementary school teacher. She now lives in New York City.

Georgina Ramirez Alzaga



This is Georgina Ramirez Alzaga. I'm from Guadalajara, Jalisco, México. I've been living in Lawrence since 2016 with my husband and my two kids. Thank you NJALL and Literacy NJ for giving me the opportunity to share with others one of my passions: taking pictures. I can't wait for the next NJALL Adult Learner Writing Contest.

Andrea Serrano



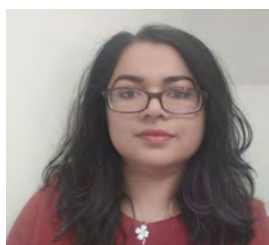
I was born in the coastal region of Costa Rica, I have memories of walking barefoot, playing with my 6 sisters in the sand, riding a rusty bike, playing ball on that empty lot and eating an ice cream in the plaza. My father was a taxi driver and my mother a very humble, lovely woman who never went to school. She did not know how to read or write; I think that is why I fell in love with words, I learned to read very quickly but I felt very happy to be able to read the newspaper to my mother, magazines, or an advertisement, a letter. I think for years I was like my mother's eyes. I have been in this country for twenty years and have been studying English for 2 years.

Alberto Silva



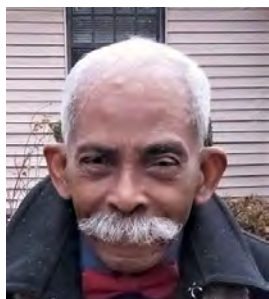
I was born on December 6th of 1947 in a rural village in the north of Portugal, named Bunheiro. I'm the youngest of seven siblings. I graduated from Elementary School in my homeland and graduated from Secondary and High School in a town close to my village. During the dictatorship in Portugal, military service was mandatory so I served the Portuguese army for three years as a junior officer, two of them in Africa. In 1972 I went back to Portugal and my mandatory military service was over. After that, I started to work at a bank until 2004, when I retired. I worked for ten years in Portugal and the rest of the time in the United States. I have just one child, named Miguel Silva, who graduated from and works at N.Y. Now, my hobbies are reading, walking on the coastline of the ocean, and socializing with my friends

Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja



I am Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja, a teaching professional from India; who moved to New Jersey in 2014. My interests include Photography, Painting, Writing, and Travelling.

William Willoughby



Mr Willoughby was born in Guatemala. At 14 he became a seaman and worked on ships travelling around the world. In 1955, he moved to New York where he continued school and began photography. He and his wife moved to Plainfield in 1970. He has been a member of Plainfield Senior Citizens Memoir Writing group for three years.

2022 Award Winners

Memoir – First Place

Hard Times To Learn

Alberto Silva

In my memory, I can't define accurately how old I was when I had started in "preschool". I have the idea that I was between two and two and a half years old, however, I'm sure I walked about one mile and a half between my home and "preschool." Why did that happen in this way?

Back then, what I call a "preschool" in reality was the house owned for two old single sisters, called "masters", who in some way taught a mix of things to children, such as religion, to write, read, and count.

Some girls, who had left from the school, due had been graduated from elementary school, attended that home to be taught to sew and knit. One of these girls was one of my older sisters, Lourdes, ten years old than me, who had had the obligation to look over me.

One day she came to me and said, "Little brother, very soon, I'd like to go to someplace to learn to sew and knit, but you have to go with me, would you like to go?"

"Can I play there" I answered.

"Well," she said, "I'm not sure, but I think you can play most of the time."

So, I said excitedly, "yes, I'll go"

The next week, on Monday, by the morning, there we go. Without first having the mom's advice. "Please, behave well"

In the beginning, and for some time, while I had the company of my sister, I enjoyed it because, in reality, I had been playing most of the time, but the situation would change.

My parents were small farmers and needed to work from dawn to after sunset, struggling to feed all of their seven children, and in this situation, they needed my sister for help with housework, and in the fields. So, within approximately one year, my parents took the decision that my sister must stay home.

My sister was the first to talk to me, "dear brother, I can't go to the "masters" anymore" she said with dismay.

Promptly I said, " I won't go without you.

"No, No darling, you should go", she replied and tried to reassure me. Later, on the same day, my Mom talked to me too, and explained to me the reason my sister couldn't continue to go with me and added " but you have to go, because is very important for you to learn to read, write and count, can you understand that?"

"But mom, the way is so long and I have afraid", I begged my Mom to stay home but didn't worth it.

"Dear son, you need to learn, we have no choice", and with tears in her eyes, she kissed me and reassured me.

My mama always struggled to all of us had gone to school. So, I wound up going alone to "preschool" about three and a half years old. And that's how I had been learning the first letters and numbers. The classroom was old, grim, without light, unless on the sunny days, when the sunlight beams had come in through the one or two small windows that there was on one of the walls. The floor was made of boards covered with homemade, old worn rugs and carpets, where all of us were sitting.

As I said at the beginning, the "tutors" were two old ladies, who had dressed in dark clothes, with so long skirts that we couldn't see their ankles, even they wearing flip flops. Both had completely different features and behavior.

One of them was very sweetie, affectionate, and very fond of us, she was genuinely a nice woman. The other one was bitter, tough, intolerant, and always in a bad mood, a real devil. And the worst that happened was that the bitter one was our "principal" tutor, the other was like "tutor substitute", who just worked with us when the other got absent for any reason, which rarely happened.

The good memory I have is the lunchtime, when the weather wasn't bad and we lunch in the yard, the lunch we had carried from home, and there we could loosen up, socialize and play a little bit for some time because in the classroom we were forbidden to talk each other, otherwise, we were punished.

The " principal" was so tough that, even, often, if I looked at something or some of my fellows, she reacted as a watchdog. "Alberto..., what are you looking for?"

I was so scared that I hardly, couldn't answer, I just mumbled "no... no....no...thing, master" and if I hadn't been hit with a thin long rod before to have been asked, I was lucky.

So, for me, and a lot of other children of my generation in my hometown, the "preschool" was a "nightmare." It was under that conditions that I had been learning to read, count, and pray, for approximately four years.

After that, my Mom had enrolled me in the first grade of the elementary public school before I turned seven years.

The School premises were located close to the "preschool", a little bit close to my home, so I walked approximately the same distance.

The school had two rooms, one for girls and the other for boys. They had been built with cement floors, without power and heating, obviously in the winter season was very cold.

There was a big blackboard on the front wall, beyond there was a desk and one chair for the teacher, and some lines of wooden chairs. Unfortunately, there was also a ruler and a stick, which were used frequently by the teacher, when for some reason he wanted to punish us, the worst was that the government and the Education authorities were aware of it and gave permission and even embolden the teachers to act this way.

The teacher was a man about fifty years old, tall and well-built with a strict aspect, who rarely smile at us.

Almost always we walked to school barefoot, unless, in the winter frigid and rainy days, some of us wore a kind of boots that had been made with a wooden sole.

We waited for him at the school door. When he arrived he had said in a hoarse voice. "Good morning!"

In chorus, all of us replied, "good morning sir teacher!"

The school didn't have a cafeteria. So most of the students, who lived close to the school went home to take lunch, some of us, few who lived farther, brought a small lunch, which was been eaten on the schoolyard.

In one of these lunchtimes, when four of us were lunching we realized something had shocked me, and I never can forget. One of my fellow students had had for lunch three or four little pieces of cornbread with different colors and textures, which gave us the perception that this kind of "lunch" was the result of what he had begged, probably the day before.

All of us share our lunches with him, which he had accepted with some reluctance because inside of him there was a fight between hunger and pride, this sad episode was the beginning of the way I had tried understanding the world with a lot of questions, which has followed me until now.

Despite all, what concerns me now is that all over the world a lot of children haven't basic to live and grow up such as home, food, clothes, health care, and education, that in some way I try to understand because that cost money, but the "worst", and I don't understand and don't accept, they

don't even have a caress, a hug, a kiss even a smile from nobody, which don't cost anything, but a little bit of good-will and tenderness.

Each one of us can do something.

2022 Award Winners

Memoir – Second Place

Anguish and Dismay

Vera Muhammad

My name is Vera, I am writing this memoir on the March 23, 2022. My peers at school called me "Dead and Wake" when I was ten years old. At the tender age of ten, I was faced with adversity. I suddenly found myself grieving because I had lost my two siblings, who passed away just hours apart.

In the early 1970s, my sibling and I woke up feeling excited on a beautiful Saturday morning because our older brother, who was living away from home, had decided to move back home. Therefore, mom and dad had decided to renovate our house. We were eager to assist in any way we could. They had prepared lots of food and other treats for us. We had fun working because big brother Joe is a jovial person and made lots of joke.

At the end of the workday my dad said, "Everything went as planned.", and we were pleased to know that things went well. We went to bed that night thinking that we were going to continue working the next day.

My younger sister Gwendolyn and I had slept in the same bed. I was sleeping soundly when I heard an unusual sound coming from my sister that woke me out of my sleep. I quickly noticed that something was earnestly wrong, so I immediately rushed to Mom and Dad's room to let them know that my sister was ailing. They came and tried to alleviate the problem, but to no avail. Next, dad told me to "Get dressed quickly! I would like you to come with me to seek help!". I did what I was told willingly.

This happened in the wee hours of the morning, and I looked through the window to check just how dark it was outside. It was pitch dark out there; however, dad made a torch for us to see.

I was born on the island of Jamaica and was brought up in deep rural areas. In the early 1970s, there was no electricity in the community. Therefore, we were further challenged due to the lack of

easy access to mainstream medicine. Due to this, Dad sought the help of a female naturopathic doctor who lived a few blocks away, and she was swift in her response.

When we returned to the house, I observed that my sister's condition had worsened in a short space of time. I was dismayed and frantically clung to my mother's arm while I watched in deep despair. I looked attentively as she was treated by the doctor while experiencing a flood of emotions throughout my body. I had to witness the nicest baby sister one could ever dream of having foaming through the mouth while gasping for breath.

I then watched my sister Gwen take her last breath. In that moment, I felt as if someone ripped my heart out of my chest and I suddenly felt the need to run as fast as I could. I looked through the window to see if it was still dark out and it was. The darkness was the only thing that kept me from running away. Gwen was my favorite sister, and I had absolutely no way of knowing how things were going to unfold. That led to the fact that my life would also be hanging on the balance within 24 hours.

I am here writing this memoir on my own accord, relying totally on my memory. I am not ready to inform my older sibling of this undergoing. With that being said, I can recall seeing my mother going into my brother's room at approximately 5:30 am. My older brother Joe was the only other sibling in the room with us while we were going through this ordeal.

I vividly remember hearing my mom scream, "John is not well". John is my brother who is two years younger than I am. I was stunned and wiped out.

I can remember it was after sunrise and the doctor was still there. In the village, where I was brought up, it was customary to start planning funeral arrangements immediately as there was no morgue back in the day. Therefore, they would build a shed outside to temporarily store the body on blocks of ice. The rule was that you must bury the deceased within 72 hours.

My dad was a small-town farmer, who also had pasture with cattle. There is also another custom which has not changed with time; someone from the community would come with one or two goats to be slaughtered. In this case, Joe's and a few friends went to our dad pasture to get one goat. After they slaughtered the goat, the intestines would be washed and both the head and intestines was used to make a soup, known as Mannish Water. Mannish Water is a must have at any funeral or wedding. My cousins and some neighbors took the intestines of the goat to the river to be cleaned as there was no plumbing system in our homes.

I was in emotional distress at that time so; I thought it might help if I went to the river to be around my relatives and neighbors. I was only there for a short time when I heard a cry coming from

my home, "Lord! My God, another one dead!" I instantaneously threw myself on the ground, rolling in the dirt and weeping in bitter tears. I could not find the strength to walk back to my home because of how weak I became. My neighbors lifted me and carried me home. I was in disbelief and afraid to go into the room, where I left my brother John, but I knew that I wanted to see what had taken place.

My heart was racing at the speed of lightning when I slowly put one foot in front of the other and walked into my brother's room. He was covered from head to toe, the pain I felt was just insurmountable.

I then noticed that my speech was slurred, and I felt confused. I am incapable of giving a full account of my illness as I was semiconscious. Later that day, I was awakened and much to my surprise, I was in my godmother's bed. I looked across the room and saw my brother Sonny lying on another bed. I realized that he was also ill. I cannot explain how I felt.

I was asleep when I felt someone lifting me; I tried to open my eyes as much as I could and realized that it was my cousin's husband. He carried me to a car where there was the driver and a female neighbor waiting, they took us to the nearest primary care physician's house. It was on a Sunday afternoon and the doctor was home when we got there. We both got treated and the following morning my godmother informed me that we were there for hours. She told me that the physician wanted to observe us to decide if we should go to the hospital. She also informed me that at one point I was unresponsive.

I remember when we got back to our village; I was still unable to walk and my cousin husband lifted me in his arms and then I heard him saying "She is very heavy, she has dead weight on her". I was afraid to sleep that night because I did not want to die.

I woke up on the Monday, which was the day of the funeral, feeling distraught knowing that neither Sonny or I was able to attend the funeral service. At that time, my brother Sonny and I were still at my Godmother's house. It was hard to think about how I would feel seeing my brother and sister in a casket. My loving Godmother took me into her arms and kissed me on the forehead then said, "Thank God you and your brother are going to get through this".

I was close by to where the service was being held, I could hear the loud weeping and singing. I felt as if I could never be happy again. After all the funeral activities, my brother Sonny and I remained at my Godmother for another nine days then our parents came and brought us home.

When I arrived home the first thing Sonny and I did was to go to the family plot where our brother and sister was buried. We hugged and cried some more and in that very moment, I was reminded that I did not lose all.

A few weeks later, I went back to school and was very withdrawn. I did not want to talk or sit with any of my friends because I did not feel like the person I was before. It felt impossible for me to concentrate; my body was there, but mind was nowhere near. To make a bad situation worse, my peers started to call me "Dead and Wake". As you can imagine, I could not stand being called that name. If that was not enough for me to bear, I suddenly found myself dealing with another loss, my grandmother, who was my mother's mom. As I reflect about my past experiences with tear filled eyes, I have come to realize that some pain never leaves you.

My mother and her mom would often go to the farmers market very early on Saturday mornings; they would sell produce to buy necessities for their families. My mom would go to the market that was about three miles away from home while my grandmother would always go to one ten miles away. Mom had planned to go to her usual market this Saturday but as faith would have it, my grandmother asked my mom to change her plans and accompany her to the market that is call British Market. Mom did not want to go that far to the market as it would take up too much of her time. However, grandma eventually got her to succumb.

It was late Saturday when we got the news that a car hit grandma and she was seriously injured. We were told that mom had experience my grandmother being pulled by the car and my mom had to go with her to the hospital. That terrible incident happened approximately one year after I lost my two siblings. My grandmother had passed away that same day. I was so devastated when I heard the news. Till this present day, I am still heartbroken by the deaths of my two siblings and grandma.

2022 Award Winners

Memoir – Third Place

Experiencing Snow for the First Time

Estefany Mendible

At the end of December my husband suggested we take a little trip to the Adirondacks where we would hike different snow-covered mountains. We would visit different lakes and cities, too. Since I had only been living in the U.S. (New Jersey) for 2 months, this sounded like a great idea, especially since I had never personally seen snow!

That morning, we left home very early. My heart was so excited. The temperature was 28 degrees (at that time, very cold for me). The sun was just beginning to rise and the beauty of its red, yellow and orange tones were reflected with New York City in the distance. Snow sprinkled the patio and areas around me. From that moment I knew that the next few days would be amazing.

On that day, I officially met the snow. All the way I was taking videos and photos of it on the sides of the road. In my mind I could only think about how wonderful this world is and about the things that nature offers us. There are many times we do not see them, or simply ignore them. This was not going to be one of those times!

The great adventure continued as we drove further north. There was more and more snow along the way and my excitement increased. We stopped at a diner for breakfast and in the parking lot some beautiful white mountains delighted my eyes on this perfect, sunny and cold day.

In my brain, two things like snow and sun at the same time were hard to understand. Although I knew they existed, seeing them together was a whole different experience. Since I came to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic, where the climate is so different than here, the closest thing to snow I had ever seen was ice cream!

It had been five hours since we left home when we finally reached our first destination: the base of Noonmark Mountain. Once we arrived at the parking lot, everything started to improve. There was even more and more snow. Snow everywhere! It seemed like a dream in the North Pole! In my adult head I felt the emotion of a 5-year-old child opening gifts.

That day we hiked a trail, which, in total, took us about 6 hours. I cannot put into words how beautiful everything was. As we climbed higher and higher, it got even better. The world was all white, cold, sunny, and beautiful. I even saw a deer (which I love, as I do all nature).

I wanted to take thousands of photos and videos, but every time I removed my gloves, the sensation of cold in my hands was intense, just like my emotions. However, I managed to capture some amazing images. As we ascended, my fatigue increased. When we had only 30 more minutes to reach the top of the mountain, I fell. I was so exhausted that I couldn't get up. But then, thinking of the views that still awaited us, I forced myself to get up. Finally, we made it to the top of the mountain. The great beauty and majesty of the Adirondack Park was an unforgettable experience. It definitely was a trip that I would like to repeat many more times.

The next day we took a simpler, but just as beautiful hike towards Johns Brook Lodge. We crossed different rivers and streams, seeing lean-tos in the middle of the forests and enjoying awesome views. Since snow was so new to me, I felt I had to taste it. It was so soft and it fell apart in my mouth in just seconds. We made snowmen and I took more souvenir photos and videos to share. I fell again but this time, I got up right away. Somehow, I had a lot of energy and excitement to continue to Lake Placid, which was almost entirely frozen. A frozen lake was another new sight for me!

The next day we climbed a mountain near Lake George, and again the incredible views greeted us in every direction. The few people we saw were very friendly and happy, like the radiant and beautiful sun lighting up our day.

For me, seeing snow for the first time was one of the best experiences of my life. Nothing can compare to it. I learned to make peace with the cold and to connect with nature, to the sounds of the forests, rivers and birds. I felt so many emotions but mostly gratitude for life, for these beautiful landscapes and for the company of my beloved husband.

2022 Award Winners

Poetry – First Place

Fog Fills the Little Town

Ruihong Cheng

Fog fills the little town,
Chiffon covers my eyes.
The house in the distance,
Appears true, maybe not.

Morning doves sit in the tree,
Dry leaves hang on the branches.
Several ducks swim in the lake,
They don't talk, are they angry?

I don't want to read the book,
There are no birds singing to me.
I don't want to drink a cup of coffee,
There are no children playing.

2022 Award Winners
Poetry – Second Place

On The Morning of New Year's Day

Ruihong Cheng

On the morning of New Year's Day,
Drops of water hang on the pear tree's branches
like tears of water on the face of a girl
her boyfriend doesn't come back.

A Belted kingfisher on the oak branch
wears a white scarf and a black cap with feathers,
eyes tight to search the water,
It waits for a chance.

The laughter of a group of ducks in the water
swim freely,
Some of them play and roll.
They celebrate the New Year.

Two dark-eyed Juncos speak gossip in the bush,
one of them keeps shaking its head,
seems to say I'll never tell anyone.
Who knows?

A group of robins search for food on the wet grass.
They prepare to survive the cold winter.

Extraordinary Mother Nature nourishes living things.
The cycle goes back and forth, endlessly.

2022 Award Winners

Poetry – Third Place

Costa Rica, Punarenas, Reminiscences

Andrea Serrano

The breeze touches my face,
And the smell of sea and fish is still in my mind.
What beautiful place is in my heart,
Returning my memories of the blue of the sky?
Puntarenas “Dona Ana”, the sadness and happiness where “mama” took us.

My feet sink into the sand,
Running and playing with my sisters.
Mama prepared the simple food.
Who is giving her a hand?

Enormous trees like Giants,
Monkeys hand on the branches,
Looking at you in a defiant way.

The Sun burns your cheeks.
The hot Sun leads to the sea.
The waves play with you.
You find the shells like precious ivory
Building castles in funny rivalry.

Big Turtle in the middle of the Shore, representing majestic love.
Many memories come and go like soft and mad sea waves
I hope one day to return to the beautiful place

Where one little piece of my heart is left.

2022 Award Winners

Fiction – First Place

With God's Love

Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

It's a sunny morning in the spring. A county transport bus had slowly come and stopped at the 78th street near the university campus. Students are getting out of the bus with their chattering sounds. A beautiful girl around 19 years with golden brown hairs wearing a black and white leopard printed dress is among them. She is noticeable with her brown eyes. She walked a few steps and look back by turning her head like searching for someone. All her friends are in front of her and they are already started walking to the campus. But she is searching for some other, maybe more than a friend. These were her daily routine for the last two months.

“Olivia comes fast, it's already late” her friend Aleena forced. So she moved fast to others.

Catherine told to Olivia, “You look so pretty in this dress, resemble the heroine of the movie that I saw in the last week.”

Olivia: “Are you teasing me?” with her natural beautiful smile.

Catherine: “No dear! I am not. Your leopard dress highlights your beauty.”

Aleena: “Yeah! She said it. You look more beautiful in this dress.”

Olivia: “Oh! You too... Catherine, do you remember the name of that Heroine?”

Catherine: “Nop! But that's not Olivia.”

Olivia: “Are you sure?”

Catherine: “Yes!!!”

Everyone involved in that humorous talk and they walked toward their class.

That's Olivia Watson an Italian origin living with her parents in Wauwatosa a nearby town of Milwaukee. Her parents are running a business in the hometown. Her great-grandparents were hailed from Italy, and they moved to here in the last century. Now she is doing her second year of graduation in Literature who had a lot of interests like singing, painting, tennis etc. But she is a ‘jack of all trades...’

While walking to the campus Olivia again turn back; two sparkling eyes were also chasing her. He is Amedeo Radcliff. They travel to the same county transport bus to the campus every day. She doesn't remember that moment when she started noticing him. And her friends didn't know anything about her interest in Amedeo. He is a research scholar, now doing research in ancient 'Maya civilization.' For his thesis work, he may be always at the campus library. So that was one of the main reasons for Olivia to visit there frequently. She found out several reasons for her friends to explaining about her visits, like assessment or reading periodicals, etc. She is a book lover and if got an interesting book; read it in an overnight. Now her main intention is to watch Amedeo from behind the bookshelf. He knows Olivia is in very nearby him. But he is acting like that her actions are not interfering his reading.

After the college, Olivia and her friends were reassembled at the bus stop. When their bus came Olivia and Aleena were standing next to the seat where Amedeo and his friends. The boys are in their own conversations. Amedeo is very active in that. That was the first time Olivia hearing his voice. Till that she misinterprets that he is a less spoken type. Some of their conversations are about the girls who were known to Olivia and Aleena. But they were only the innocent comments. For some comments laughter came to both of their faces; as smart girls, they control that. Aleena to Olivia, "It's hard to control my laugh. How will you do?" From the next bus stop, a boy of around 12 years came nearby Amedeo. That kid looks tired and feeling unhappy. He gave some space for this boy and asked.

Amedeo: Hi, it's nice to meet you. What are you doing?

Boy: I am studying in 6th grade at the Whitman Middle School.

He engaged that kid in their conversation and sometimes kidding gone to him too. Then that boy's mood changed, and he became happy in that group. Olivia is noticing all these things. That incident enhances her impression towards him.

One late evening Olivia and Catherine were waiting at the bus stop. For some emergency issues buses through the 100th street canceled since that afternoon. Both of them are tensed. At that time Amedeo and Maria came there. Catherine and Maria were known to each other. They were from the same church. They talked, and Catherine introduced Olive to Maria. And Maria told to the ladies about Amedeo, "That is Amedeo, my neighbor and one of my childhood friend. Now he is doing research on our campus." Olivia would like to know more about him. But Maria didn't continue further. Then Amadeo also joined the conversation and asked Olivia.

Amedeo: "I have seen you on the 100th street. Are you staying there?"

Olivia: "Yeah. I am staying at the Fountains Apartment."

Amedeo: "with friends?"

Olivia: "No, with my parents. They were running a furniture business in the town."

Amedeo: "Oh! That's good. I have seen a small girl around 4 to 5 years old accompanying you every morning. Is that your younger sister?"

Olivia: "No, No! That is my neighbor Sofy. 'Sofiya' is her name, we called her Sofy. She is in the playschool next to the bus stop. So she came along with me every morning. And we are the best friends."

Amedeo laughed, he didn't expect she talked to him that much. The ice breaking between them happened at that bus stop. Now Olivia feels comfort to talk him. Amedeo visits the nearby public library in all weekends. To saw him, Olivia changed her way to the music class by traveling extra four miles. There is a coffee shop at one corner of the library where he is enjoying his latte by reading a book. Olivia came and sits in front of him by saying "Hi." She has a book in her hand.

Amedeo: "Hi! You are here."

Olivia: "Yep."

Amedeo: "Are you a Book Lover too?"

Olivia: "Yes. Books are my best companion."

Amedeo: "Me, Too. What is the name of this book?"

Olivia: "It's 'HER: A Memoir' written by Christa Parravani."

Amedeo: "I know her. She is a famous photographer too. She made international exhibitions of her photography in many countries."

Olivia: "Yeah, the same one. This is the memoir of her identical twin Cara."

Amedeo: "I have heard about it. I read Christa's interview published in Washington Post. It's so touching."

Olivia: "This book is also touching. It's a good memoir. But I don't want to read it in another time, because it's a heartbreaking one."

Amedeo: "I know, but I wish to read it."

Olivia: "What's your interesting area?"

Amedeo: "I like narrative stories more than fictions."

Olivia: "Me too."

Their conversations are going on. She left from there after an hour. The rest of the year they met at where and there. None of them are planned meetings. All were accidental. On another day she was waiting in front of AMC IMAX Movie Theater to her friend Susan, while Amedeo came out of the theater after finishing the previous show.

Amedeo: “Hi Olivia, How are you?”

Olivia: “I am good. I didn’t see you last week. What happened?”

Amedeo: “I was traveled to Washington, DC, for visiting historical museums. I had to collect some data from there for my thesis work.”

Olivia: “Oh, Ok. There are a lot of museums. A few years back in our vacation trip we visited some of them.”

Amedeo: “Oh, that’s great. After the journey, I was under the weather for 2 days.”

Olivia: “Oh! It’s sorry to hear that. How do you feel now?”

Amedeo: “Now I am Good.”

Olivia: “How was the movie?”

Amedeo: “It’s good.”

While they were talking to each other Susan came. She saw their talk, from the car parking area. Before she reached them nearby, Amedeo says bye and went from there.

Susan: (looking towards Amedeo) “Olivia, who is that guy?”

Olivia: “He is Amedeo, a research scholar on our campus.”

Susan: “Amedeo! I heard this name at first.”

Olivia: “Oh! Yeah.”

Susan: “How did you know him?”

Olivia: “He was Maria’s friend.”

Susan: “Maria, Who is that?” (She was eager to know the details about Amedeo.)

Olivia: “That’s Catherine’s friend.”

Susan: “Oh! Ok. Now I recognized her.”

Both of them take the ticket and enter in the show. It was a 3D movie. After all, it’s really an interesting one, Susan can’t concentrate on it.

After some days Susan came to Olivia with some news.

Susan: “Olivia, what’s the name of that man we were met at AMC IMax.”

Olivia: “He is Amedeo”.

Susan: “I saw him yesterday at the city mall. I don’t think he is a good person.”

Olivia: “Why??”

Susan: “I feel he is always following me. Wherever I go, I can see him. Sometimes I feel irritated on that. ”

Olivia: (feels hard to control her laugh) “I don’t know more about him.”

Olivia didn't want to continue that talk further anymore. So she stopped at that point. But she revealed this incident to Catherine the next day.

Catherine: "I don't think so. Either she misunderstood him or she is lying."

Olivia: "Yeah! I feel the same."

Susan's words didn't change her attitude towards Amedeo. She still loved him from her bottom of the heart. But both of them didn't reveal their love to each other. But they regularly met at the library, coffee shop, or in the bus.

That year's academic days were almost all over. There were no regular classes. So they can't meet nowadays. One Wednesday Olivia went to the department for attending an assessment test. She was alone because she can't attend the regular test due to some personal reasons. After finishing the test she saw Amedeo walking to his department. She called him.

Olivia: "Hi Amedeo! long time, no see..."

Amedeo: "Hi, I didn't expect you today. I thought you were on vacation."

Olivia: "Yeah, it's our vacation time. But I have to complete an assessment test."

Amedeo: "I have to travel Mexico for completing my thesis work. So I will leave here on coming Friday, have to join there on a research team next Monday."

Olivia: "Oh! There is a team waiting for you."

Amedeo: "Yeah. It's an international research project funded by USA and Mexico. Our research teams are more concentrating in central Mexico and Guatemalan jungle. We are expecting to find out the exact width and depth of that ancient civilization."

Olivia: "I hope that place is more suitable for your research."

Amedeo: "Yeah. Sure"

Olivia: "Ok. All the best. See you soon."

They hugged and say a "goodbye" to each other. She didn't ask him about when he came back. She had understood that how much he was involved with his research. So she didn't wish to interfere his other matters. And she didn't want to lose his passion for her love. They can't meet again in their rest of life. Olivia engaged in her studies and came on that flow. She doesn't know where she lost her 'fire of love'. But she always thinks "I have only good memories on my love. That was the happiest era of my life....."

2022 Award Winners

Fiction – First Place

The Little Old Lady

Sophonie Pierre Louis

Annie lives in front of a beautiful gray house that has two floors with large windows. A little old and beautiful lady lives in this house and always looks out the window to wave hello or goodbye to Annie every time Annie goes outside.

One day when Annie was cleaning her yard, the little lady came to see Annie, and said "Well, can we speak? I've been waiting for such an opportunity for a long time and I didn't have chance before." Annie was surprised because she wasn't expecting this.

"My name is Susan," said the little old lady. "I am from New York, more precisely from Manhattan but, my parents were Irish." She also told Annie that she was educated in Chicago and returned to work in New York.

Annie was listening carefully to understand what the little old lady was saying because Annie does not speak English very well. Annie is learning English.

After a long conversation while Annie was sweeping, the old lady said to Annie "You're too young to do all this work by hand, you have to buy yourself an automatic broom."

Annie didn't understand all of the words and she got nervous. "Excuse me," said Annie. "I have to go back inside because I have to do something very important."

The little old lady was speaking very fast, and Annie didn't understand anything. She just heard some words like *pretty, friend, sure, and supermarket*.

The little old lady said to Annie. "Oh, talk to you another time, Annie! Sure!"

The little old lady waved to Annie as Annie went back inside her house.

Since then, every single time Annie went outside, the little old lady came out and started to talk. One day, the little old lady greeted Annie and she started talking about everything. Annie asked her how she felt.

"I feel ok now, but sometimes I have pain in my back and in my legs," the little old lady said.

"I am sorry to hear that" Annie said. The old lady told Annie that with age, you know, it always is like that.

Then she started talking about shopping. Annie was getting uncomfortable. She felt like she could understand some of the words but not all of them. It was confusing. When you don't understand, it feels like the people are talking too fast. Annie was getting upset. When people talked too fast, it made her feel stupid. Annie didn't like to feel stupid. So, Annie escaped and decided to go inside her house to rest. Annie felt bad because she couldn't speak to the little old lady. She wanted to talk to the little old lady but she couldn't always understand what the lady was saying.

Annie started to feel like she was not smart. Annie wondered sometimes if she was ever going to speak English!

On another day, Annie took the garbage out. Annie knew the little old lady was coming. Annie knew that as soon as she went outside to do her work, the little old lady would come and try to talk to her. Annie wanted to take the garbage out fast so the little lady would not have time to come outside to talk to her but, The little lady was faster than Annie.

The little old lady called Annie's name "Annie"! she said "Hi honey".

The little old lady asked Annie how her Christmas was. "It was good thanks," Annie said. "Yours?"

The little old lady started talking about policemen, and something about the garbage. And a car. But Annie didn't understand. Annie had to lie to the old lady. She told her that she had something on the fire. But, that was not true. Annie had to tell her that so she could go inside her house. But the old lady was still waiting outside for Annie.

Annie went inside and talked to herself. "Oh my God." She said to herself. "I don't know what that lady is talking about."

Annie watched from inside her house to see if the lady was still there waiting. Finally, the little old lady went back into her house. After that day, Annie stopped talking to the little old lady. The little old lady went to Annie's house several times after that day, but Annie didn't open the door because she was still afraid she couldn't understand the little old lady. Annie feels bad and she regrets her attitude toward the little old lady. Annie thinks the old lady might feel she is a bad person, weird or hates her.

Annie made a new plan. She prepared herself to go to the little old lady's house to talk to her and explain that she is learning English. Annie wanted the little old lady to slow down when she is speaking to her, so that Annie can understand what she is saying.

Annie walks across the street and knocks on the little old lady's door.

"Hello" Annie says. "Do you have some time to talk?"

The little old lady smiles and opens the door.

“Come in,” she tells Annie. “Come in.”

2022 Award Winners

Fiction – Third Place

An Incredible Traveling Machine

Cleber de Oliveira dos Santos

I have never woken up like that day! I questioned myself: was it really? Everyone noted how I was scared, petrified that morning. The sun seemed to want to talk with me! It was not a normal day in my life. I was sure it was not a dream! I was sure I did everything I had remembered that morning! However, except for the sun, all of the people seemed not to believe in me. That day was so amazing!

It was 7 am when a big and shiny machine came up in front of me. I did not believe it when I heard: “You can set 3 dates across history and go there! Live each of them for 8 hours and enjoy!” I couldn't see anyone, but I heard a sweet woman's voice. I really appreciated it. I could not have believed what that woman said, but I believed. The toughest decision was to choose just 3 dates across history! But I got it.

My first action was to set my first incredible eight hours through the time! I chose to stay in 1453 when the city of Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. I could follow when Sultan Mehmed II led their troops and fought against the Byzantine Empire. I was scared, but I realized that soldiers could not see me. So, I was staring at each moment that was responsible for kicking off the modern period. It was the first time I went to Istanbul!

Back to my fantastic machine, I set to stay my next eight hours in 1915. I went to the place when Winston Churchill decided to plan the Dardanelles Campaign, in the First World War. Known as the Battle of Gallipoli was one the most important battles of this war. Unfortunately, this campaign failed, and many people died. As a result, Germany almost won the First World War. I tried to tell Churchill not to go ahead because I knew that was not a great idea. But I was not sure he could hear me.

After Gallipoli, I had my last eight hours! There were many important historic events, but I had just one to choose from. I set my machine to September 11th, 2001. I could have gone to New York, but I decided to stay at Boston Airport. I followed all moments since the terrorists responsible to guide and hitting the airplane toward World Trade Center arrived. I almost lost my voice trying to warn the

security team to ban them from getting on the flight. To Tell the truth, I've never felt so emotional as that day.

When I realized it was 7 am and I woke up! I did not sleep. I took part in three important historic events in the world. Even though all the people around me did not believe in me, I was sure that everything was real. The sun was confirming! I asked him and he smiled at me. I also asked my wife three questions: What happened to Constantinople? Did Gallipoli fail in the First World War? And, finally, my last question was to know if the original World Trade Center buildings are still in New York.

2022 Award Winners
Non-Fiction – First Place

Qoyllu Rit'i
Monica Oblites

One of the most rewarding experiences in my life has been the pilgrimage to the Temple of the Lord of Qoyllur R'iti. This allowed me to know and delve into the feelings, beliefs, and customs of the people of the mountains of my country Peru.

This pilgrimage is a majestic and impressive event, and it is celebrated every year between the months of May and June and lasts 3 days. It is held between two mountains or Apus: Ausangate and Sinakara located in Cusco.

This festival is a fusion of the different beliefs of the people of the mountains. The Andean people celebrated the stars and their relationship with the next harvest. They also paid homage to the spiritual and sacred mountains or Apus; and the Christians worshiped the sighting of Christ in the place where the sanctuary is located.

Popular belief narrates that in 1783 the infant Christ appeared to a highland Andean shepherd boy, and they became friends, and when the infant Christ disappeared in the mountain left only a stone with an image of the Jesus Christ. In that place was built the Qoyllur Rit'i Lord Temple. To start climbing up to the temple, which is at the base of Ausangate mountain, you must walk 8 km. or 5 miles uphill until they get to the temple.

Each village presents its group of dancers called “cuadrillas”. They practice out of the temple before they get into it taking turns and offering their dance as a signal of respect and devotion.

There are a group of people called “PABLUCHAS”, who represent creatures that are half man and half alpaca. They are intermediaries between God, the Apus, and men. The last day of this festival, Pabluchas only dressed in their costume go up to the Mountain until 6362 meters or around 20800 feet, in pursuit of the Snow Star, which is represented by an ice block. They put it on their back and carry it downhill. All this symbolize the irrigation of their lands and the purification of men in the world with holy water from the Ausangate Mountain

During the festival there is an Illusion Fair, in this fair people play to make their dreams come true, so they buy, sell, or change all they want: houses, cars, business, cattle, judgment, divorces and

marriages. According to their beliefs and to make it happen, you must go three times or three years to this festival.

Here my husband Renato and I played to marry, and we went there three times, so our wish came true and by now, we have over twenty-five years together.

In recent years there has been a rapid growth in the number of foreign tourists, raising fears that this pilgrimage is becoming too commercialized.

By the way, the festival and the pilgrimage are an UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2011.

2022 Award Winners
Non-Fiction – Second Place

Feeling No Pain, Feeling No Joy

Megan Kazier

In the fifth chapter “Feeling No Pain, Feeling No Joy” from *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough* the author, Harold Kushner, shares his experiences and conversations which led him to unite the perception of rejoicing and distress. Kushner depicts an equal explanation of people unable to enjoy love and happiness at its full potential without leaving oneself open to pain and suffering.

Upon being invited to be a guest speaker at an event based on overcoming situations which caused pain and suffering, Kushner not only had the opportunity to discuss his religious views on coping, Kushner had the pleasure of listening to the other influential commentators and how their religion suggests dealing with such matters. A Hinduist accompanied Kushner for dinner expressing a much different perspective of losing a loved one. As a Hindu, he believed pain is subjectable, and with discipline, the hurt emotions can be ignored and unfelt. Relating to Kushner’s past of losing a child, the Hinduist urged Kushner to see there was a blessing amongst the emotions. Kushner respectfully begged to differ offering his sentiment. “When I protect myself against the danger of loss...by teaching myself not to care, not let anyone get too close to me, I lose part of my soul” (Kushner 89).

Another guest Kushner shared a meal with described to Kushner his solution to evading pain. His suggested method of lowering one’s expectations leads him to conclude by reducing one’s expectancy, pain has limited opportunities to interfere. “...lower the level of what you want to that which you already have, or even lower, ... Then instead of frustration and want, you will have tranquility and peace of mind” (Kushner 92). Despite being uplifted by his guest’s philosophy, Kushner argued choosing to lower one’s expectations desensitizes feelings over time. This act of giving up is also surrendering “... the image of God in us” (Kushner 92). Kushner advises living life in such fashion is not worth the price of reaching happiness at its full capacity. “To become less attached ... because life is unfair and unpredictable immunizes me against great pain but also serves to rob me of great hope and great joy” (Kushner 92).

Kushner references growth and one of its characteristics, pain. The growing pains of life could include physical changes such as a person’s body developing, or a woman anguished in pain from

bearing a child. Personal growth can show up unexpectedly as a result of a major life change caused from a job or a divorce, which ignited a fire to pursue their passions. People need to live their lives open to the opportunity to feel pain while also understanding the hurt can lead to a greater outcome, and the flood of unwanted emotions will not last forever. Without pain, people are cut off and denied the ability to give all of themselves to a job they love, a person they love, anything they could possibly ever want to love. Even though leaving oneself open to be hurt and constantly waiting for the floor to drop out is scary, a much more terrifying thought is going through life without ever genuinely being in love due to being too disheartened to even try knowing the possibility of failure exists. “I am afraid ... of young people who will grow up afraid to love, afraid to give themselves completely to another person, because they will have seen how much it hurts to take the risk loving and have it not work out” (Kushner 94).

By closing oneself off to pain, whether that be by avoiding disappointment at all costs, choosing to be numb to the feeling of pain, or by building up walls to protect what’s inside from all the misfortune that could come, also in turn, then forfeits any acceptance of pleasantries making their way to one’s door. “Emotional flatness” (Kushner 98) will be the result of such fearful living, which inflicts souls to be emotionally jaded and blind to the true potential of love and happiness which could be bestowed upon them if only a risk were to be made.

Kushner, Rabbi Harold. *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough: The Search for a Life That Matters*. Simon & Schuster, 1986.

2022 Award Winners
Non-Fiction – Third Place

How the Smartphone Became Essential in Our Life

Cleber de Oliveira dos Santos

Life used to be different 40 years ago. People used to use different products to satisfy their needs, such as looking for a route or even waking up in the morning. Because of substitute products that came out with the technology increasing, the invention of the smartphones changed the customer behavior, unifying different products, improving lives, and turning the best partner of people. Would it be possible to live without smartphones?

Back in the 1980s, people needed a paper map to find an unknown route to reach out someplace. It was nothing easy to stop on the road and figure out the best route to arrive in the desired city. It used to take a long time to get to our destination. In addition, if people wanted to wake up early, they needed to set an alarm clock. Taking a picture was possible only if people had film camera photography which took time to reveal. Listening to music or watching a movie also was tough, because we had to have a specific product.

According to Michael Porter, a famous American author who published an article at Harvard University in 1979, there are five forces that can affect how the companies make profit related to the behavior of consumers. One of these forces is called “Threat of Substitute”. This article showed that new products will rise to replace others based on customer necessity. Porter predicted it in 1979, before the tech boom we had in the 1990s. In this context, substitute products would affect all industries, forcing companies to reinvent themselves to survive. Did Porter predict smartphones as a substitute for many products?

One decade later when Porter had shown the world the five forces competition, the world saw a truly technologic revolution. The 1990s were marked by many inventions, such as the internet. The smartphone was invented in 1992 by IBM and released in 1994, the same time as the internet boom. It was a disruptive time for companies because the world was being reinvented. As the smartphone was being improved, mobile left to be only a phone, and added many other functions, like an alarm clock, for example. Would Porter be right in his prediction?

Nowadays, people can set their destination on their smartphone and can be precisely guided with GPS. Important to say that GPS had already replaced the map in the 1990s. After the smartphone, GPS suffered the same effect and was replaced as well. If people want to listen to music, they can listen directly from the same smartphone that they set their destination. This same smartphone helps people to wake up every day. Why should people buy an alarm clock? Taking a picture or recording a video is much easier today and we can use the same smartphone, which has been becoming increasingly smaller, lighter, and flexible.

Smartphones are and will be present in life forever because they are increasingly gathering a variety of products. As a result, people can satisfy their needs in just one small product, such as listening to music, taking a picture, or even getting the bill paid. Michael Porter is considered the genius who predicted how the threat of substitutes could affect not only the companies' profit but also the consumer behavior. I can't see my daughter looking for a destination on a paper map!

2022 Award Winners
Non-Fiction – Third Place

In Memory of Titi
Nadege Dardomppe

This is a story about the bond between a mother and her daughter.

Some time ago, I had the opportunity to care for an elderly lady, named Eva. Though Eva had severe memory loss, she was still very active.

She used to go to the Senior-Care Recreation Center. She'd always crack jokes at her table with friends, and after having breakfast, she'd usually ask for a sheet of paper and then start coloring beautiful pictures.

She was really good at drawing, coloring and painting. She also enjoyed making beaded bracelets. Whenever she made something, she always said, "One for me and one for Titi," and she'd bring it home for her daughter.

Eventually, I had the opportunity to meet Titi. She was very friendly. She told me how her mother called her name non-stop, especially at night. Titi was a very patient woman.

Titi often said she was going to retire soon- just to take care of her mom. And yes, with time, she did just that.

Sadly within five months of her retirement, Titi suddenly passed away. I was very sad when I got the news about her passing.

I always think about this elderly mother, Eva who was so attached to her daughter... Still calling her name, "Titi,Titi"...looking around for her, with no way of knowing she will never see her again.

It's so very sad that Titi died before her mom.

I decided to write about their story, because it is, indeed, devastating and painful for families who have loved ones suffering from memory loss.

On the upside, being there with them, and being patient are the best gifts we can offer them.

2022 Award Winners
Photography – First Place



Sunset
William Willoughby

2022 Award Winners
Photography – Second Place



Catrinas Smiling
Georgina Ramirez Alzaga

2022 Award Winners
Photography – Third Place



Cacapon Mountain
Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

Other Submissions

Memoir

In Front of the Mirror

Georgina Ramirez Alzaga

One day I was looking at myself in front of the mirror while my kids were watching cartoons, but I didn't understand all the dialogues in English. At that moment my mind was confused and trying to understand. My brain was receiving information in English and translating in Spanish at the same time. My thoughts were like a big and tangled yarn ball where I tried to find the beginning. However, I said to myself, one day I will be able to understand more English and when I see a TV program or cartoons I won't need to turn on the subtitles. I know that because I'll work hard. I'm here in the United States and I'm going to learn and practice English as much as I can.

My way hasn't been easy. Six years ago, I wanted to go alone with my kids to the mall, which was 10 minutes from our hotel. My husband will pick us up later after work. I felt happy to do it by myself. Even though my husband and the concierge told me how to get the bus and where the bus stop was, there was a lot of snow and we're freezing outside. We never found the bus stop, and nobody was there to ask. So, I came back to the hotel. I was sad, frustrated, and I was crying.

After this adventure I thought: maybe the best idea is to go with my husband all the time, because it is safe and comfortable. After that I was thinking, what am I going to do when I need to go to my kids' teachers to talk about my kids or when I need something at the grocery store, or talk to the doctor, or make an appointment for the dentist, etc. I can not always expect him to take me places, so I must do something.

Since that time, I've been working hard and taking advantage of opportunities to learn English as often as I can. My English is not 100 % perfect though I'm conscious that every day I've been learning more about this language. I can watch tv programs and I understand more. Now I catch some words and sometimes I laugh at jokes. I have been improving my English without fear but with a clear mind. And now I realize that everything is possible if I really desire it.

Speaking more than one language is for me like a special power where I make the connection or bridge when I translate English to Spanish and vice versa. I've learned about other cultures, traditions and have had conversations where we share our thoughts and concerns about issues, and I

have found amazing people. I've been disciplined in my desire to learn more English, and now, I can express my ideas in English and my life is fuller. ...Learning French is my next goal.

Untitled

Trena Anthony

I am an addict, and my name is Trena. I have used drugs for nearly half of my life, and I am now fifty-five years old. This is my story, and this is my truth.

During my active addiction I lost so much. I lost myself, my children for two years, I lost my nieces and nephews. I lost my parents and their home, I lost life-long relationships. I'm talking about relationships with family members, most importantly my siblings. I was simply living in a cloud and haze, waking up every day to get high. At the time nothing else seemed to matter to me. My actions back then showed that I had no love for myself, or anyone. What a horrible way to live. I also burnt a lot of bridges along the way.

When I was growing up, I had dreams and goals for myself. I never dreamt that I would be an addict. I came from good parents, and a good home. My parents were hard working, loving, caring, and nurturing, and they would do anything for my siblings and I. We had a very good upbringing, and they did their best to steer us all in the right direction. For the record, I must say that they never failed me...instead I failed them. Even though I never meant to.

I lost my mom on July 15, 1999. She had a massive stroke in Pathmark in South Orange, NJ on July 4, 1999. When this happened a very big part of me just wanted to commit suicide. She was taken to Saint Barnabas Hospital in Livingston, NJ and placed in critical intensive care and put on life support. This was a day that my siblings and I were not prepared for at all. Our mother, our matriarch, was gone. "The shell" of our mother lay in that hospital bed with tubes everywhere. What really left an image in my mind was the tube in her mouth and the machine beside her bed keeping her alive.

Oh how badly did I want to hear her speak and say that she was going to be okay! I never could have imagined that when my mother left the house that morning to go grocery shopping it was going to be the last time I would see her alive. My mother always told my siblings and I that if something were to ever happen to her that she didn't want to be on life support. With this happening to her, it left my siblings and I in a difficult position. We went against her wishes because we so desperately wanted her back. We had the hospital keep her on life support until July 12.

But my mom was a fighter! After being taken off life support she hung on, and we hoped for a full recovery. But on the morning of July 15 at 7am I received a call from her doctor at the hospital informing me that my mother had passed away. My family was devastated. I remember being the one to tell my father what happened to my mom, and he just cried. I couldn't do anything more than cry with him and just lay my head on him while he laid in his bed. The best and most important person in our lives was gone just like that.

My world was rocked by this loss. My mother was a Jehovah's Witness so there was no funeral, only a memorial at the Kingdom Hall in Newark, NJ. She once told my siblings and I that she didn't want to be buried, she wanted to be cremated. She didn't want us to spend the money it would cost to bury her. We honored her wishes and my oldest brother has held on to her ashes since her death. My mother would have wanted it that way. After all, he was always the most responsible of all her children, and still is today.

When I think of my mother's death, I remember the last time I laid eyes on her. Someone at Perry's Funeral Home had brought her out on a stretcher dressed in her hospital gown. That hit us all very hard. My father was so sad and broken-hearted that he wouldn't let us take him to my mother's final viewing, or her memorial service. I still believe that he wanted to remember my mom just as he had seen her that morning before she left the house.

Deep down inside I felt responsible for my mother's death because she knew I was using. I was always going to her for money, and she was so hurt by my actions, which in turn started stressing her out. I didn't see it at the time. How selfish of me. My siblings also knew that my mother was becoming stressed out by my actions. This is where I believe that my relationship with them turned sour, and at the time I didn't realize it, or even care. I was horrible. The addict in me was out of control.

My use of drugs continued after I lost my mother. I continued to get high while still being pregnant with my daughter. I named her Miracle, and she is truly that, a miracle. She is twenty-one years old now. I wanted to name my daughter after my mother, but because of my drug abuse I gave her my mother's name as her middle name instead. I gave birth to Miracle in the toilet at home, and by God's grace and mercy she was born breached. I believe that's what saved her life. The EMT's said that my placenta bag acted as a pillow for her, and she never submerged headfirst in the water. I believe that this was God working for me. How bad of an addiction did I have to be getting high during my pregnancy? It was bad. But little did I know that God had a plan for Miracle, and a plan for me as well. DYFS officially came into my life and just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, they did. Not only couldn't I take Miracle home from the hospital, DYFS came into my home and removed

my son, and my nieces, and nephews who I had custody of after my mother passed away. Now this is when I believed that everything was total chaos for me. I'm that addict that would think that this was chaotic, instead of how I was living.

Through all of this, I also had my father to care for after my mother's passing. He had already suffered two strokes, had one leg amputated, and lost his speech after his second stroke. My mom had been his caregiver, but immediately after my mother's death I went to see their attorney and got power of attorney over my dad. God knows that I did my best to take care of him in spite of my drug use. I honestly did the best I could under the circumstances.

I believe in my heart that my father died broken-hearted. He held on for just a few months, and he died in his sleep. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. My great nephew came home from school, and he always went into my father's room and he called out to me Pop won't wake up. My heart dropped into my stomach, and I ran downstairs to his room and found him still sitting in his hospital chair where I had sat him down after I bathed him and fed him breakfast and lunch. I thought that he had fallen asleep watching tv like he always did. I called out to him and he didn't respond, so I walked over to him and touched his arm and he was still warm. I immediately called out to my children's father to come into the room and to bring the telephone so that I could call 911.

Once I was on the phone with the 911 dispatcher I told her that my father wasn't waking up. She asked me where he was, and I informed her that he was sitting in his hospital chair and told her about his medical conditions. She told me that I needed to get him out of his chair and onto the floor. During this time, I was pregnant with my daughter and I told the dispatcher this as well. With the help of my children's father, I put my dad on the floor and she instructed me to tilt his head back and to begin giving him quick breaths and talking me through CPR. I was a mess but doing everything that she instructed me to do. All the while I was crying and begging my father to wake up. As God is my witness and my secret judge, my father's eyes opened for a minute and I remember looking into them but what I saw (and truly believe to this day) it was actually his life leaving him. I will never ever forget it. All the while the dispatcher is still on the phone and I remember saying, "Nooooooo he's dying" and while saying it I saw the light in his eyes leaving. At that moment all I wanted to do was lay beside him and die too. Now my daddy was gone, and once again I was devastated. My father had been a Chef in the Navy and we gave him a proper military funeral; flag, salutes, and all.

After my father passed, Miracle was born. It was then that DYFS officially came into my life. I thought that things couldn't get any worse, well they did. Not only couldn't I take Miracle home from the hospital when she was born, DYFS came into my home and removed my son, my nieces and my

nephews, who I had full custody of after my mother passed away. I had a total of six children in the house. Now this is when I believed everything was falling apart in my life. Crazy right? I'm that addict that would think THIS is chaotic instead of realizing how horribly I was living my life before all this happened. Of all the children, I had only birthed one, my son, and I was pregnant with my daughter who I was slowly killing along with myself.

I was so out of control that all I wanted to do was get high all day and night. I didn't even want to buy food. My niece once told me that I said to her, "I'm so tired of buying food." Wow! Now who says that to a child? A child that I was supposed to care for and feed. God knows that I am so sorry for ever letting those words come out of my mouth.

With my parents gone, and I was losing custody of those I loved the most. I began to spiral out of control more than I could have imagined. I began to use even more, and I started feeling overwhelmed with everything. I lost my parent's home that they worked so hard for and maintained for twenty years. Again, God had other plans, although at the time I wasn't aware of it. I went through feelings of helplessness, and hopelessness. I wouldn't reach out to my siblings for help because I knew that they would call me out on my mess, and I didn't want that. I was a no doubt a hot mess.

I was so messed up that I didn't pay rent and I wasn't paying my utility bill. I got us evicted twice, and public service was always coming out and shutting off the lights. Again, I was out of control and they didn't deserve that. I didn't deserve them. They deserved so much better than me back then.

Once they were all removed from my care, it took me two years to regain custody of my children because I wasn't ready to stop using drugs. I continued to get high for a year after they were taken from me. I then made a decision that I wanted my children back, so I started complying with DYFS. I stopped getting high and passing my random drug screenings. I went before the same judge each time I went for my hearings, and thankfully Judge Craig Harris saw my process and my progress. He is the one that told DYFS that my children were to be given back to me.

The last time I used drugs was on Sunday, April 16, 2017. It was Easter Sunday. When all my drugs were gone, and I had what I called the "coke blues" I got down on my knees and prayed. I asked God to forgive me and help me because I didn't want to continue living like I was. For the record, my drugs of choice were crack and marijuana. When I awoke the next day, it was the beginning of a long journey to no longer using, and I have been drug free since that day. Change comes from within. When you know and want better you do better, and today I am so much better. If I can change anyone can change.

I love all my family so much and I am grateful and thankful that we are all in a much better place today with each other, and I know that they have forgiven me. I will never have enough words to say how sorry I am. To this day I apologize from the bottom of my heart for my actions back then and I hope they can forgive me because that was the addict Trena/mother/aunt. I also want to apologize to my siblings as well for my actions back then. Just as I know that my parents have forgiven me, and for that I thank them all from the bottom of my heart.

Today I am a responsible person, I pay rent, I pay PSEG, and I always buy food (as I should) with no complaints. I am going to school and working hard to earn my high school diploma. It has been a long journey, but by God's grace, mercy, and love I am coming up on five years drug free on April 17, 2022. I am now the best Trena that I can be and I love myself, my life, and I will continue to love myself by not using drugs ever again. No matter what obstacles life throws my way, I will stay true to myself and always remember all that I went through in my active addiction, and how I am never going back to being that person.

My name is Trena, and I am a recovering addict. This is my story, and my truth.

United States Has a New Look!

Glorys Bueno

One of the things that surprised me most when I first came to New Jersey was the diversity of backgrounds. Everywhere you go, you find people from different countries and nationalities asking for and providing services. That was new and unexpected for me. Wrongly, I'd thought diversity was restricted to big American cities like New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Miami. I had also not taken into account that New Jersey and New York share spaces that make up the metropolitan New York City area, so there are people flowing every day on both sides.

New Jersey's diversity has helped me feel welcomed in many ways. My initial feelings of loneliness and isolation got better once I began to realize that many before me have adjusted, been welcomed and adapted to living here. In my new group of friends, when I excused myself about my lack of fluency in English, they replied, in a polite and friendly tone, "Don't worry about that. All of us either descend from immigrants or are immigrants ourselves"!

Speaking a little bit about my experiences on a day-to-day basis in the US, I had to learn how to pick between the excess of products found in drugstores or grocery stores. I remember spending too much time reading the labels; nobody in my family wanted to go shopping with me because I always

lost time doing this. Nowadays, my eyes have gotten used to seeing a bunch of brands, prices and sizes. I pick things out faster every day but I continue working hard to stay away from the temptation of processed food.

Another aspect of culture shock that struck me was seeing ads for medications meant for serious illnesses on TV. In my culture, not even considering the fact that openly discussing mental health is taboo, you don't really see prescription medication being advertised and sold to you on TV. I remember thinking, is it normal for people here to ask their doctor to prescribe them medication they discovered while watching TV?

From the outside, I've always seen the US as the land of opportunities, nevertheless, I've learned that Americans work very hard to make sure this is true. They know they can't stop working on making things change for the better. The idea of the promise of America has resonated with me living here. However, as a newcomer, it's been hard to keep up with the rhythm of events. When I compare with my own culture or other countries where I have lived, I find this dynamism really fascinating.

I'm Venezuelan. I've been living in New Jersey since Sep.2018.

A Look Back - and Ahead

Myriam Cruz

My name is Myriam Cruz. I was born in Puerto Rico. I have lived in the United States for four years. Every day, I struggle to understand, speak and learn more English. Little-by-little, I'm getting there. With two pre-adolescent children, day by day, I strive to give them the best of me along with my values as a mother.

I like spending time with both-my son and my daughter. They make me happy. On a typical day, I might cook rice with "pigeon peas" and veal, pork, or lamb chops. Watching my children enjoy my meals brings me so much pleasure.

As a family, we often go to the park to have a picnic, or a barbecue, listen to music, play soccer, or just walk around. We have celebrated many summer holidays in one of our many beautiful, local parks. Even when the weather is a lot cooler, we go there to have fun, and to enjoy each other's company.

Being with my children truly is one of my greatest passions. I think it is necessary to lead by example. Because I like to cook and help others, in the end I believe it is more of a pleasure rather than a chore.

I also think that maybe, one day, I'll serve as the inspiration for my children, as well to someone else, *to try*, no matter how difficult life may seem at the time, and to *believe*, with all your heart, that your dreams can, one day, be achieved.

My Story

Li Dezheng

I came from Shanghai in China. My name is Dezheng Li. People call me Li. I have been in the United States for more than two years. Now I live in New Jersey. When I just arrived here, I was worried how to greet some Americans in English. I know if I don't say any words when we meet on the way, it is not polite but I don't know what I should say properly.

When I knew there was an English conversation class in libraries, I joined the class. You know, I have no opportunities to speak English because I spend time only with my relatives. Since I joined the English conversation class, surprisingly I have got many, many beneficial results. All of my classmates who came from different countries in the world are very kind and hardworking. We practice and make progress continuously. Our teacher Kathy is a very compassionate, responsible and ethical lady. She asks us everyone to talk about what we did in a week and she then corrects our mistakes both in pronunciation and grammar. She teaches us American culture and customs. Our English level has improved in her class. We all love this class. It is an effective and vibrant class.

I never knew my mother. She died giving birth to me. More unfortunate is the fact that not one picture of hers ever found by me.

I only knew that my father was the closest dear person. My aunt, my father's sister, was another adult I knew from my childhood. She was never married. I was told that she left for London when she was only 17 years old. She first worked there as a nanny for a big farm owner. When the farm owner died, his children took possession of the farm and my aunt became the housekeeper. She had been in London for 40 years when she gave up her comfortable life there and came back to Shanghai to help my father take care of me.

At the time China was being invaded by Japanese. People were having a hard time and my aunt died from overwork when I was only 8. It was too big a challenge for an old woman to raise a baby girl.

As much as I could appreciate it, my aunt was my mother. I love her so much. She was as dear to me as my father. My only regret is that I had no chance to express my gratitude and pay her back. For the rest of my life, I will say to her I am sorry.

As I said, I grew up without a mother. My aunt, who was like my mother, didn't live long either and she left me a dog and a cat to accompany me playing and sleeping. My dog was named John and my cat was named Pacy. Their names were given by my aunt. They were my dear friends. Every night Pacy was lying on my right side and John on my left side. At my age now in the 80s, lots of memories have faded away. But the memories of my dog and cat in my childhood are still so vivid. In my mind they were like my best buddies and I could share my happiness and sadness with them. We developed a strong bond. They accompanied me until they passed. The year John died was when I was about to enter junior high school and Pacy died three years later. My childhood experience with them made me a lifelong pet lover. I have had dogs or cats for most of my life.

This Thanksgiving is my first Thanksgiving after I moved to United States to be close to my daughter. In ESL class I learned the traditions how Americans celebrate the holiday. We have a small family here so we chose to roast a chicken instead of a turkey. To go with the roasted chicken, we made a shrimp and tofu soup dish which is my favorite Chinese dish.

The recipe is really simple. The main ingredients are 2 tomatoes chopped, a quarter pound of shrimp chopped very fine and 1 container of tofu and some chicken stock. Heat a pot with a 1 tablespoon of oil, add some chopped garlic and stir. Once the garlic aroma rises, add the tomatoes to stir together for a minute and then pour in the chicken stock mixed with water. Cut tofu in small cubes and add to the soup base. Wait till the soup boiled, season the soup with salt and let it simmer for a few minutes. Season the chopped shrimp with salt and pepper and mixed in an egg white and stir thoroughly. The final step is to use a spoon to scoop the shrimp into balls adding to the boiling soup. Continue to let the soup to boil for two more minutes with the lid on and that will be it. This delicious shrimp and tofu soup is done. This hot dish is complementary to roasted chicken and it completed our thanksgiving dinner.

Wisdom From an Eagle

Aliou Diallo

After I waited one year and four months to be approved by US immigration, I realized I had finally reached the end of the tunnel. My visa was issued. Soon, I will be on my way to meet my

spouse in the US. Less than one week before I took my flight, I met with my father, who had taken a huge moment to give me tremendous advice on life and success.

The timing was worrying me as well. There was no time to waste anymore. All my stuff was ready and I did my last hang out with friends. The last person I met was my father. He turned around and faced me with a calm voice. He said, “I would like to share with you some rules of life that come from an eagle.”

This is what he said to me: “First of all, eagles fly only in pairs, at a high level. They don't fly with crows or other birds. That means, whoever wants to become a leader doesn't associate with folks of poor mindset. Furthermore, he won't hang out with people who don't have a goal. An old saying states, ‘Tell me who you hang out with, I will tell you who you are.’”

In addition, my father told me, “I urge you to have a purpose, an objective, a goal in your life. Eagles have an objective. For example eagles when they need to catch their prey, at that moment they stay focused on that prey. Nothing can distract them, not even the weather conditions. In other words, human beings are supposed to have a goal. The path of life is strewn with obstacles and challenges, but let no condition of environment divert your objective.”

“Life doesn't promise us gifts, but it does promise us challenges. My father continued, those difficulties make you strong and rise up. For instance, eagles aren't afraid of facing danger. They never back up when they are facing danger; in fact, when eagles attack a furious prey, however big it is, eagles can challenge it. Moreover, get out of your comfort area, go and meet your challenge. Be aware. What doesn't kill you, will make you stronger.”

Finally my father told me: “If you want to be a leader, never relive your past. Instead, try to fix your future. For that reason, eagles don't feed themselves on dead meat, but rather they eat fresh meat. Just move on, and do a new conquest. Banish mediocrity in your life, coach excellence.” I thanked my father for his wisdom and gave him a goodbye hug.

After all these lessons, I suddenly understood why the US uses the eagle image as a coat of arms. The Great Seal is the proof of this reality. Since that advice from my father, I realized that to live in the US I need to have a huge dream. With this in mind, I remember Ronald Reagan, the 40th President of the United States who said, “America is too big to have a small dream”. From this quote I can say that “Never give up” will be my motto as I begin my new life in the United States.

The Most Important Decision in My Life

Cleber de Oliveira dos Santos

I was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since I was a toddler, I was into soccer. Early, I had a dream to become a soccer player and always imagined myself as a pop star like Ronaldo or Messi. On the other hand, pursuing this dream was not easy, because many barriers can arise in life. I wanted to become a soccer player, but at one point of my life, I had to decide if I should attend school or chase my dream. It was not easy to decide, but nowadays, I can really understand how this decision was very important in my life. How different would my life be today if I decided differently?

My first gift was a soccer ball. My uncle Carlos gave me a soccer ball when I was one year old. I remember playing with my soccer ball in my yard and imagining myself scoring goals in a crowded stadium. When I was eight years old, Carlos took me to the Maracanã Stadium, the most famous stadium in Brazil, to watch a Flamengo game. Flamengo is my favorite soccer team in Brazil. After that day, I was confident I would be a famous soccer player when I became an adult.

However, my parents always encouraged me to study. They used to say this is the best way to get success in life. I started school when I was six years old. I learned to write and read fast. As a result, I jumped from 5th grade to 7th grade. My parents felt so proud because of that. Even getting high scores in my education, I held on with my dream to become a soccer player.

When I turned 13 years old, my mother enrolled me in a soccer school called America Football Club. She did it because she knew it was important to chase my dream. Besides, I had always excelled in playing soccer. Today, I remember when I played for the first time: my parents were there, and they could see I scored the only goal of the game. My team won and my parents were very happy. My coach said I would have a successful future. I got very excited about that.

At America Football Club, I used to train four hours per day and five days per week in. However, because of my good performance, my coach urged me to train eight hours per day. He required me because I needed to be physically stronger. He said if I did not train full-time daily, I would not have success as a soccer player. I remember as if was today when he said: "Either you train full-time, or you can't go ahead along with us." This phrase will be with me forever.

In my school, I was studying in 8th grade. All schools in my city used to work in the morning or in the afternoon. There was no possibility to study at night. I was in one of the most important decisions in my life: If I wanted to pursue my dream, I had to give up studying, because I would have to train full-time daily. I cried when I told my parents. My parents stared into my face and said: "It is your decision. We are with you regardless of what you'll decide". I was only 13 years old. Becoming a soccer player

was my most desire. On the other hand, I did not forget what my parents used to say: “Education is the only way.” What should I have done?

It was July 10th, just two days before my birthday. I have preferred to hear my brain, not my heart. If my parents said education was the only way, I had to follow this advice, and I had. I called my coach and told him I would go ahead with my education. He tried to convince me I would continue to study in the future, but I did not want to wait for that. My parents got very proud of me. Definitely, July 10th take part in my life forever.

My life moved forward. I graduated in Business Administration and became a Brazilian Navy Officer. I’ve been working as military for almost 22 years, and I am so satisfied with my career. Studying to enter the Brazilian Navy I met my wife Cristiane. We have a pretty daughter called Sophia. She is 12 years. She is the best treasure that life could give us.

I am not sure if I would have become a famous player soccer. But I am sure that I made the best decision. Education provided me a lot of opportunities, such as contributing as an example for other young people, serving my country as military, and living in the United States for two years. Because of my decision, I could meet my wife and constitute my lovely family. Important to say that, in the Brazilian Navy, people know Commander Cleber Santos not only as a professional military but also as a great soccer player!

Untitled

Pat Dunston

Hi Everybody:

I just wanted to share with you my 5 days with two amazing people!!! Yes they are truly amazing!!!

I always saw Daddy’s career as beginning at Alcan, only to learn that he was a gardener for a family, he was a clerk in a hardware store, and he was a bookkeeper all before Alcan. I also learned that while working in a full time job, he went to night school then walked home or when possible hopped on the back of a truck going to cross road.

I didn’t know Mama worked in a lawyer’s office doing clerical work. I didn’t know she started Ms. Edith infant school before it became known as Miss Edith School. I didn’t know that she wrote letters for friends who wanted to correspond with friends and family but did not want to sit down and put pen to paper.

I didn’t know Daddy first noticed Mama when he saw her in Mandeville with as he described with a glow in his eyes and a softness in his voice as he remembers yester year, “ I saw her walking

with that 27 waist, 36 breast and 40 waist..ummmm.” She met him through a mutual friend and she loved that he was intelligent and loved to read. “I could see he was intelligent”. The rest is history.

Over the 5 days I saw so much love and caring that only a lifetime can bring...going through the rough and being committed to coming out on the other side stronger than ever. To hear them laughing through the walls as Mama says, “Carman mi treat you good, noh true”. To hear Daddy laughing as he says, “If yu se a true, a true Miss Ivy” or to hear Daddy say, “Come noh Miss Ivy, come sit next to mi”. For them to have an extra-large king size bed at the hotel and me walking in to see them hugging so closely as they slept that the bed could definitely fit the 7 of us and our spouses without a problem,..but then again that is how I have always remembered them sleeping.

I hear over a hundred times as they told me and other people we met how lucky they are to have ME...just kidding...they relayed with pride and joy to anyone who would listen how lucky they are to have all of us and how each of us are so good to them. And then I heard the story of how within the last several months...something happened that has never happened to Daddy before... they were stuck on the road because they ran out of gas...how a stranger took Mama back home and how Daddy bought a gas tank and went to the gas station to get some gas...they laughed as they told me not everybody is not bad. Then I heard the stories of Daddy’s childhood over and over and over again with no recollection that he had just told the story 5 minutes before. I was asked the same questions over and over and over again...for example “did you call to cancel the paper.” I saw the hesitancy of not knowing where he is going, and getting lost in a medium size dining room. To hear him say, “I have to get my license from the man...me asking him to explain only to learn he gave his license as ID to get a towel for the beach and he did not get it back. The man said he did not leave his license...so when he goes home, he has to get a new license from MVD.

Mama’s memory is not so bad but she is having difficulty hearing. To tell Mama, “lets go back to the room” and her response is, “it’s not the black spoon.” And there is Daddy translating, “she said lets go back to the room.” The public address system belts out several names to come to the front desk and Mama says, “the woman says, our plane is here” and there is Daddy, “she said those people should come to the front desk.”

I know for now they have each other but in this season of their lives they require that we step up and assist them where we can. It may be as simple as a phone call to ask if everything is ok, it may be to drive with Daddy to the gas station to make sure he has a tank of gas each week and change the oil. It may be to check they turned off the stove or took the lint out of the dryer. It may be to make sure the doors are locked and the pipes are turned off. It may be to make sure Daddy keeps a ledger of the

bills being paid. It may require that each of us take turns and spend a weekend with them if necessary. If anyone has other suggestions, please share.

Daddy just entered a 3 year study with Johns Hopkins due to his memory loss. The study is design to help keep people in their home if possible. They are able to make recommendations and possible guide us with equipment and supplies. Mama and Daddy say they are so lucky to have us but I think we are the lucky ones. They had such great vision for us and were and are committed to us. I think it is our turn to have a great vision for them and be actively committed to them. Every little bit helps.

Just wanted to let you know my observations and thoughts

Warmest regards,

Pat

One Day

Bruna Gomes

One morning I woke up wondering, “What can I do to try to have a better life-with more financial security for my children and for their mother?”

To this point, life in my native country was not easy. Good jobs were extremely hard to find, and I had a family I had to help support. We all needed better opportunities for a successful future.

I made the decision that I would come to the United States, and almost immediately, I began to make this dream come true. I arranged everything to get my Visa in order. After three failed attempts at making it happen, my dream and I were certainly becoming frustrated, but I didn't give up, and neither did my dream. With the grace of God, by my fourth attempt, I managed to complete the process.

Eventually, I made it here to the United States, and I started studying English. Five months later, I had to return to Brazil because I didn't want to lose my Visa. Six months after going “home” to Brazil, I came back to this country-once again. I couldn't study here anymore, though, because I had to work, but- thank God- I had the happiness of building my family in this country that I had begun to love. Today, I have a wonderful husband, and three beautiful daughters. I am taking the opportunity to study English through JVS, where I participate in remote ESL classes three times a week.

I feel very happy in my current situation. In America, my family and I are not just surviving, we're thriving. Naturally, I miss my family members, who remain in my native country- a lot. Not a day goes by, when I don't think about them, but I know that with God's grace, I will see them all again, one day.

I just have to thank God for giving me the presence of mind to think about the possibilities, the opportunity to find a way here, and the patience to make it to this wonderful country- *one day*.

Be Dare to Live in New Country

Nadezda Ivanov

Hello!

My name is Nadezda. My family and I moved to the USA from Russia when I was almost 40 years old.

I've never thought about immigration before. I was never ready to live in another country. I didn't have much information about the USA. What do we usually know about another country just by listening to the news and watching travel or history channels? We don't know anything about everyday life. But when you live in a new country, everyday life is most important to you. Greetings, leaving, polite behavior, parenting, holidays, education, shopping, etc. are all different from your home country.

The first time I was surprised when I was walking in the neighborhood, and an unknown person asked me: how are you? I have never met this person, I had no idea why he asked me, I asked myself, what should I do in this situation? My second question: why is he smiling? In Russia, people don't smile at a stranger. Now I think it's great that people smile. And I smile at a stranger when I come to Russia.

Another thing that surprised me was the relationship with children. Americans praise their children. In Russia, we push our children and say they can do better. This may sometimes devalue their efforts and achievements. I'm still not sure that parents should compliment their kids like Americans, but I stopped criticizing my son too much. I'm trying to find a good balance between praising and pushing. In Russia, older people or strangers may talk to children to discipline them or judge them. I'm really glad I don't see it here in the US.

One more thing that scared me was small talk. Anyone can ask or say something to you. In a store, in a park, a person you don't know may say to you, "It's a beautiful day, isn't it?" Or the cashier may tell you, "I like your necklace/ring/bracelet/dress/shoes etc." This situation is not common in my

home country. And I felt uncomfortable, especially because of my bad English. I was not sure if I clearly understood what I was hearing. I really didn't know what to say back. I was embarrassed by my pronunciation and vocabulary. Smiling and saying "thank you" helped me look polite and friendly.

And the American cuisine made a huge impression. When I first came to the restaurant, I ordered an appetizer and main course, as I did in Russia before. But when I saw the first dish, I realized that I could not eat anything else. The serving size is gigantic! The good news was that I can take the leftovers home.

The last thing I would like to share is the amount of sugar in food. It always seemed to me that Russians have a sweet tooth. To be honest I really like sweets. But when I tried American yogurts, cookies, cakes, ice-cream I understood how I was wrong! In the US I have to spend a lot of time finding my "guilty pleasure", which contains not too much sugar for me.

After all, I want to say to newcomers: don't be shy, don't be scared. You will always find people who will help you in any situation. The USA is a country of immigrants. All Americans have overcome the difficulties of new life. And you will pass too!

The Potato Train

Roberta W. Jackson

I remember my father told us that in times near World War 1 before 1920 maybe once a week in the morning before school he would meet up with some white boys. They would get together to wait for the 5 am train at a certain place to meet the early train that carried food through to Newport News, Virginia. They called it the *potato train*.

They had to stay real, real close to the railroad RR tracks. The train man would pull open the door and hold a big bag of potatoes as the train was coming close. The trainman would cut a big old hole in the big bags and push and push the huge bags so potatoes would fall out and sometimes he would shove whole bags so the boys could get the potatoes for their families. They would get as many potatoes as they could carry and run them home before school.

They had big families. His mother was 1 of 14, and his father was one of 6. My mother was 15th of 18. They all worked hard for their families. As they grew up my father and his brothers worked at the shipyard and my grandmother cooked and cooked at the shipyard too.

My Hair Salon

Zeno Kaewjai

I always wanted to be a hairstylist. When I was a boy, I would watch my sister cut my mother's hair and thought I would like to do that someday. "You can do this too, Zeno," my sister would say. Her words encouraged me, and in 2013, I opened a hair salon in Bangkok, Thailand. It was a dream come true. I worked for many years at a collections company to save money for hairstyling school. I also needed money for equipment and for renting a chair. As part of my training, I worked on customers' hair at the school. I also learned hair coloring and how to apply extensions. It took a lot of practice on friends and family to develop my skill.

For the first year of my business, I did not have many customers, but after that many customers returned and brought new customers. I enjoy cutting hair and also coloring hair and applying extensions. My favorite part of being a hairstylist is coloring hair. Many of my customers wanted blonde hair or light yellow. Customers are very happy when their hair is a new color.

Even though I had customers, the Thai economy was not good and my shop didn't make much money. In 2016 I met my future husband, Danny. He is from America. We decided that maybe there would be more opportunities for me in America. In 2019, I moved to America and married Danny. It was difficult to leave Thailand and something I liked doing, but I loved Danny and wanted to share my life with him.

Unfortunately, I can't cut hair in America because my license is from Thailand. The hair and methods for styling are different in America. I would have to go back to school to learn these methods and get a new license. Hopefully, the economy in Thailand will improve. When Danny retires, I would like to move back to Thailand and open another shop.

One of the Greatest Opportunities of My Life

Mustafa Said Kagan

I was born on April 8, 1991 in Turkey. I remained in Erzincan from primary school to high school. Then I went to Ankara for a year. When I returned to my home-town then I went to the local university.

Five years later, I started to work. When my Green Card was issued, I arrived here in the USA. I began remote ESL class at an adult school one month ago, and I had the good fortune of meeting many interesting, helpful people like my instructor, the director of the education

department at JVS and my classmates.

My Spirit Speaks to Me

Margaret Minatee

I always wanted to write down my thoughts and feelings about the world around me. I can remember when I was a child and things happened in our community, I wouldn't tell anyone about it, I would contemplate the happenings in my mind and write in journals off and on.

This lead me to getting involved in community and/or city events because God gave me a caring heart.

Now it is 2022 and the last few years have been more than any of us could imagine. COVID 19, Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements, weather conditions such as: hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and fires just to name a few - Yes, we have a lot that we have to consider and still go on with our everyday lives. And I can't leave out space exploration where private people are sending ships up.

There is also the terrible war on Ukraine by Russia. It breaks your heart to see the pictures and hear the destruction of life and property.

On the lighter note, I am glad to see Black entrepreneurs in Business and Entertainment getting more recognition. I have been going to graduations for years and know that they are graduating but they would only get publicity if it is thought that they might have done something bad.

COVID 19 brought a lot of pass injustices to light: from Burning Black Wall Street, to land being stolen, to the police killing of Black men and women just to name a few.

Then there's the scandal of Will Smith standing up for his wife on the 94th Academy Awards broadcast clapping Chris Rock; what does that have to do with anything, it doesn't but America is deeply entrenched in the theater.

Back to reality, there is so much that I am not saying because this is a short paper. I am happy to be able to be a part of expressing my feelings and concerns. My connection with the Plainfield Memoirs is very important to me; we have printed a book and shared stories for many years. It is so good to hear stories of places I have never been because I was not born yet or I lived in another country or another part of the country. Jessica and I have associated in the community through the Plainfield Library for many years, I appreciate her and all the memoirs members. The library has always been one of my favorite places, you can travel, research your family, and more.

Thank you for giving me your time.

Vietnam and America: My Two Countries

Ha T. Khanh Nguyen

I grew up in a traditional communist family in Vietnam, a communist country. I grew up with my Granny singing songs about killing Americans who came to our country and caused a war. The war caused separation and pain to each family. Personally, my grandfather as well as my uncle, died in the Resistance War against America in 1954.

In my childhood memories, the anti-American spirit could be seen everywhere - on every outdoor big banner for yearly celebrations, in school history subjects and in historical museums. The loss, in reality, has stayed with each family. It seems like such a normal thing; each family had at least one or most of their family members die because of the American or French War.

For a long time, our country didn't have a relationship with America but thank God, we didn't keep the pain open for too long. After 1995, a new relationship between America & Vietnam brought a new path to the youth's realization as well as the country's communication business. Local wealthy people started to use merchandise from America. In addition, many Americans came back to find their loved ones who had been disconnected due to the War. They also discovered a very special food culture. Another chapter was beginning even if the remaining parts of our country still kept the pain and bad memories about war and strange, unwanted foreigners.

As for me, after high school, I went to university in Saigon. Saigon was known as the Former Pearl of the Orient, the most populous city of Vietnam (before or after the war). After 1975, Saigon came to be known as Ho Chi Minh City, named after our very first leader. That city welcomes all people, especially the youth, with their enthusiasm. It was the most dynamic city at that moment in history and continues to be, even now.

From industry to agriculture, the fast growing economy of the city kept locals and foreigners, especially Americans, in business together. At that time, communication still didn't develop too much. It was easier to keep something secret or hidden. There was no Facebook, Twitter, livestream or Tik Tok, etc.

But living in Saigon was also the best experience for me to get a deeper overview about current social living. I had the time and the chance to read some banned books. Due to the political opinions,

which were different than the current leader's spirit, I was able to reach an even higher understanding of my country. The books told another side of the war, not only the victory.

Saigon is still full of hidden gems that reveal the truth, even if it's painful to discover. If it's memories of a war, or new stories the younger generation hears, it is still painful, for the winner or loser, the poor or wealthy, for whichever countries fought in the war. My eyes changed from that day. But this was my student life. After that, like many others, I faced life's normal problems: paying utility bills, working, boss & staff relationships. I didn't have time to think or read anymore about historical stories. Another chapter was closed.

Then, I got married. Thanks to my husband's family who found their own special view about society, including America. They gave me a deeper look about the old wars. Actually I think everyone is still the political victim.

After having my first-born, my mother-in-law started to worry about our child's future. We all want to have a better opportunity for our children's education. We need a better chance for them. Our geographic allocation was also scary because it was too close to a big, combative country. Considering all these things, we decided to sell our house and find a chance to have a better education for our children, a safer house for their future and to be in a stronger position. By luck, or as my mother would say, due to our ancestral grandparents' blessing, we came to America after waiting 5 years.

Since I had never gone abroad for more than one month, and was also used to my own native city and country, it's really been a challenge for me in America. The first 1-2 months were busy with paperwork and school registration for my children. With all these new troubles, such as slow processing of SSN issuing, a language barrier and my daily routine changing, sometimes I got mad. But thank God, after registering my children in public school, I once again gained the belief in my decision. My children are becoming more and more confident, even if they must learn a new language. Here, my children have more freedom to think their own way. They feel comfortable and they tell me that they are happy to go to an American school each day.

America is covering my little family day by day. When I meet a good person, or someone walks by me and says, "Good morning" I am thankful. Once a stranger saw that I was confused at a street corner. She took her glasses out of her pocket, read the instructions on my paper and made sure it was clear to me. I definitely don't mean that every person I meet is kind or good but I am thankful for my present life. My faith is not Buddhism but I still try to be a better person by being faithful and peaceful.

I say thanks to America, everyone, thanks for every moment of every day for being kind to me and my family. It's a real gift to start a new life here. Sometimes I feel like a child opening a present. The present is a beautiful future in America for me and my family.

My Life – At the Other End...Of a Revolver

Claudy Petion

It is with a kind of fear that I begin to write about the story of my life. The task of writing an autobiography is a difficult one. When I try to classify my earliest impressions, I find that fact and fancy look alike across the years that link the past with the present.

I was born on November 28, 1997, in Saint Marc, a little town in Haiti. I grew up in an Evangelical family of five children where I'm the third. My parents worked very hard to give us a good education, so this is why they sent us to one of the best schools in the city. I respect them so much, so I did everything they wanted me to do until I finished high school.

After completing my secondary education, my friends and I, made the decision to leave our country and go to Argentina to study, to seek adventures and have more freedom because during my life, as a younger person, I was only able to go to school and church, so I didn't have much liberty to enjoy being the person I wanted to be.

Seven years ago when I'd just arrived in Argentina it was very difficult, at first and I had a hard time over there. I felt it might have been a bad decision to have left my family while I was still a very young man, so I started studying the Spanish language and making friends. I went to the nightclubs with my buddies to enjoy a night of dancing. I used to go for walks in the most beautiful areas of Buenos Aires. I was able to get to know many people, so-with time- I enjoyed my life there-very much.

Months after I'd begun studying the language, I enrolled in a local university to pursue Economic Science, but later decided I didn't like that career. Soon after, I re-enrolled for a degree in Industrial Engineering, I really loved this career choice. I remained enrolled, and I studied hard for two years. Then, in March 2019, I came here-to the United States, for a two-week vacation.

When I returned to Argentina, however, it was already too late to continue with the semester. I had to suspend my studies, believing I could just continue in the following weeks. Unfortunately I never re-registered.

In June, 2020, in the midst of the Coronavirus Pandemic, everything was very difficult. There was a lot of insecurity because many people had lost their jobs. I- too- felt lost and out of control.

One day, as I was aimlessly walking around, two people got out of a car. One of them pointed a gun at me and took everything I had on me, including my coat. The other looked around to make sure nobody saw the robbery. It was one of the worst moments I'd ever experienced in my life. This is why, in May 2021, I made the decision to leave Argentina and move to the United States-to be closer to some of my family, living here.

Until now, it's been very difficult to accept that I no longer live in Argentina. I fell in love with that country- more every day. I really miss it. I feel that it became my second home, and one day-I know- I'll be back. For the moment, however, I just want to be with my parents again.

Maybe it's because I left my native country to live elsewhere at such a young age; maybe it's because time is slipping away-more and more rapidly, and I really miss my mom and dad. After so many years without seeing them, I still need them, I think, maybe, we need each other.

I really hope that in the near future, I will be able to be with my parents, so we can enjoy life together. We have a lot of time that was lost.

After all these years, my head knows- for sure, and my heart feels just as certain, that I have been absent, and too far away from my mother and father for way too long. Despite my many experiences, and all the things that I have seen, I realize, there is no love like that between a child and his family. I will cherish mine-forever.

The Traditional "Soup Joumou" in Haiti

Jessie Jean Baptiste E. St Vil

Behind every tradition there is a story. Today, I'm happy to talk about "Soup Joumou" as a tradition in Haiti.

First of all, how to definite the word tradition?

According to Oxford Languages, the word tradition can define by: "The transmission of Customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way." Soup Joumou or Squash Soup, is a delicious typical food in the Haitian food, with a good flavor. The base of this preparation is the Squash or pumpkin.

Other ingredients are meat, Haitian seasoning, yam, potato, carrot, macaroni, radish, turnip, garbage, celery, spinach (optional), sorrel, vermicelli, oil, tomato.

Haiti was colonized by France. During the colonization, the Slaves used to cook Soup Joumou for their Masters, but they could not enjoy this delicious food like the Settlers. They took the leftovers of their master's and ate it.

After several Slaves uprising, against the French colonial, January 1st, 1804, was the last battle that leads to independence of Haiti. To celebrate their victory, all Slaves were eating "Soup Joumou". That's why every January 1st, almost all Haitians, wherever they are enjoy their Soup Joumou. That reminds them of the liberation they have archived.

For Haiti, People eat Soup Joumou on January 1st which have a story behind it, the freedom of the Slaves. In America they celebrate Thanksgiving by eating Turkey. What is the story behind it?

A Mother's Plea

Shanea Stradford

I had my first born child at 24 years old. I was scared because I did not know a lot about having a baby. I had family and friends that told me stories, and I took heed to the lessons they learned and battles they'd all gone through.

I had my own battle now. It was my turn to tell my birthing story. I'll never forget how it happened. I was at my regular eight-month check-up, and my doctor came in and told me my pressure was too high and they could not send me home. He added that they'd have to induce my labor.

I was rushed to the E.R. Once I got there and they induced me, and then it became a waiting game. I had no idea of the struggle that would come.

The second night in the hospital is when I really felt the cramps from my labor! Of all the talks with family and friends, no one had truly gone into depth of what those cramps would feel like. I guess-in the end- everyone gets a different feeling.

My third night at the hospital, I had to sign the papers. The doctors warned me that both my baby and I were more at risk with every minute that passed as I waited to deliver. I allowed the release for the hospital to provide a C-Section. Little did I know, when I'd signed that form, that I would be signing for the rest of my children in the years to come.

They say after you have one or two, you will always have to have a C-Section for your future babies.

I was so depressed because I was not allowed the right, as a mother, to have a natural birth. I longed for one with each pregnancy thereafter, but every time I had a child, I was cut open and the baby was yanked out of me.

The pain of not being able to walk or hold my children immediately after having a child, was so unbearable. Thank the Most High God, I made it.

My plea is that every mother to be is allowed the right to choose their own way of giving birth. No one should be forced to be cut open. Many -a- woman have successfully had VBA4C (Vaginal Birth After 4 C-Sections). I've joined groups and spoken to women just like me, who are struggling with depression since they were required to have multiple C-Sections. They, too, weren't given the opportunity TO CHOOSE the feeling of a natural birth.

I honestly feel for those mothers, and I want to bring awareness to everyone including those making these crucial decisions on medical boards across the country, about (VBAC) and natural birth.

Today, I stand in solidarity with all of my sisters. We need to continue raising awareness of the vast consequences of “Mandated C-Sections”, as we remind those who run the system that a woman’s right to trust her own body is paramount, and we are made for better than this.

The Golden Ticket

Wisley Telemaque

I am Wisley Telemaque. Thirty-five years ago, I was born in Haiti. My parents had six children, of which I am the second and one of their two sons.

As a young adult, I worked for many years as a dental assistant. Then, on April 7, 2016, I immigrated to this country. From the first time I landed on this soil, I found America to be a beautiful combination of people and places, with bountiful opportunities for all “walks” of life- enough to follow every pursuit and every dream. In this last aspect, it's definitely very different from my country .

When I first arrived in America, it was truly very difficult for me for many reasons. Primarily, at that time, I was the only one of my family who was here, in the United States. Secondly, I had no knowledge of the language. Thirdly, I had no idea about the legal or public (transportation) systems, and lastly, I didn’t have any social or business connections, nor was I quite sure how to begin to find employment.

When I did finally find a job, it was hard for me to get there because I knew nothing about “Carpooling”; there was no one available to drive me, and naturally, I didn’t have a driver’s license

yet, (let alone a car), so I couldn't even get myself to work. Finally, I decided I had no choice. I had to take the bus, and, sure enough, I got lost.

I was forced to give up many jobs due to a lack of transportation. Currently, simply because I have a license and my own vehicle, life has already improved so much!

At this time, I actually have two jobs. I am still looking for a position with better benefits and long-term opportunities to grow and advance within one company.

A married man, I share two beautiful children with my wife. We have a son, Nathan Wisley-who's a handsome two year-old, and a sweet little daughter named Lia Guerda. At four months, Lia is already "daddy's little girl".

I am enrolled at JVS where I'm studying ESL in remote classes, three times every week. Before long, my English will improve. I am told my language skills have actually gotten better already. Little by little, with regular attendance, supportive instructors and classmates, and a lot of hard work, I will feel equally as comfortable with this language, as I do with my own.

Additionally, I will take advantage of each career opportunity that comes my way. At least here, in America, I have many choices. I can follow an academic path or a road to professional employment. Maybe I will do both! All I know with certainty, is this: Whatever I put my mind to, I will achieve.

Reflections

Carlos Torres

The Initiation

Before I begin, I must say that it is not easy to recount most of my personal memories. I do so, because it helps me to become aware of the presence of my loved ones- as it is demonstrated in different ways-though always consistent, the strong connection we share.

The beginning of each of the different stages of my life has been blurred, much like the line that has separated me from my family over the years.

By the time I reached young adulthood, I'd hardly realized that I was no longer a teenager as my tastes and interests had changed and then, suddenly, almost by surprise I became a young man, in charge of myself.

From here I'd always imagined that the next these stages would progress naturally, as my formative years had, moving from school to academia and then on to a higher level of education at the university; however, this was not the case. My life changed abruptly with a series of family events.

My siblings had begun to emigrate to other countries. Then my parents were taken away, and from then on, I had no one to whom I had to be accountable, or from whom I had to ask permission-for anything. I was forced to be an adult, responsible for the care of my nieces and nephews as well as the charge of the family business.

Each of these beginnings were untimely, unannounced, surprises, for which I was unprepared. As events, they just happened and I had to adapt. I think it worked out well After all I am still here.

Early Adulthood

When I graduated as a teacher I thought "Yes! Now I can change the world!" I wanted to travel around the country and teach the children and reach all the young people within my grasp.

My first years were adventurous and enjoyable, I learned a lot about my new career. Then, as time went by I returned home and started a new project training young teachers in my own training center.

This new stage was very valuable for me as I poured my limited experience in the classroom while learning from my older colleagues who had been my classroom teachers some years before. In a way, they still were. In some significant measure, they probably always would be that instructional voice of reason in my head. After a few years I widened my professional circle. I started working as an

education official in the Ministry of Education of my country. I said to myself, "you have a great responsibility now, as a technician, and every grain of your contribution will be multiplied by hundreds, or even thousands at the national level..." Life was great again. I was going through stages of learning with new colleagues of different ages from varying parts of the country, and I never stopped learning- even as an administrative educator about the processes involved in effective instruction.

Every beginning was an amazing challenge filled with doubts and nervous energy, but I always approached each experience with the firm conviction that my purpose was to help other educators- both the novice and the seasoned, as much as I could. I consistently carried in my heart, the motto of my vocation, "Duty before all, Duty always, Duty for love" - always with the very enthusiasm and inquisitiveness which characterizes me- ever open to new ideas and ways of strengthening my skills.

Reality Sets in: Adulthood

Once my career was in order, developments moving forward evolved way more intensely.

Totally in love, at the age of 33, I proposed to my beautiful girlfriend, who soon became my beautiful wife. With this, my sense of belonging changed. I no longer felt that I was an individual. My thought process, (along with my pronoun selection) went from "I" to "We".

From then on, even my definition of myself changed. This period of time was definitely a rebirth- a new beginning for me, as a man. My wife and I would go on to have three beautiful children. The instant I held my daughter in my arms, I became a father. A mixture of emotions- never before experienced at such an amazing level of intensity overcame me. My worldview as well as my perceptions of life-in general changed. I realized that I could no longer see the world through my own eyes, but rather, through the feelings of my wife and daughter. From that moment, my sense of belonging changed, once more. Though this transformation was beautiful, after a while, I found myself creating more distance between myself and my family, in an attempt to dedicate myself to "work hard- no longer for the pleasure of doing it or learning, but for the enormous responsibility that being the head of a family implies. Upon reflection, I now realize that I had gone from being excited and curious, to being worried and apprehensive of learning something new, to the dreaded fear of making mistakes.

This is when I was introduced to, and I got to know real stress. Before, then, fatigue was a sign of having accomplished work: the close to a satisfying day. Now fatigue, fear and anxiety about leaving something unfinished refused to allow me to rest- night after dreadful night.

Such a state of existence is, mildly stated- not good. At least, once I returned home, I got to see my children's "shining", smiling faces, and our many dinner conversations filled my soul with a temporary sense of peace and contentment. I took what I could get.

Today, I find myself with all of my children in *this* country, embarking on a new adventure together, still as a family, but- again with the fear of going the wrong way.

At least, now I have the experience and awareness of the years that have passed. This is precisely why-upon asking myself, "What should I call this stage of my life?" My response brings with it the realization that this is not a do-over, nor is it really a new beginning nor is it a "clean slate", it's a constant, ever changing evolution.

Just like this amazing planet upon which we live: with each new day, we too, have the chance to rise-and just as the sun, we can go "down" ; we are constantly in a state of flux. One moment we're up; the next, we're down. Slowly, we transform into our own *renaissance*. Though reborn-we are not "newer" or "purer" versions of ourselves, just *other* versions, and every day we encounter new challenges, with many different choices, and equally as many consequences.

Surrounded by my wife and children and even more these days by my siblings, I feel so much gratitude. I am protected. I am- beyond all else, blessed, and so, I can-but conclude, in the scheme of my life, this fourth stage must be referred to as: *The Gift: My blessings from God*.

Other Submissions

Poetry

Snowflakes Fly In The Air

Ruihong Cheng

Snowflakes fly in the air,
Speed up the steps of winter.
Although the cold is not over here yet,
Spring is not far either.

Snowflakes fly in the air,
Roofs are covered with snow.
The wind ruffles your hair,
But your face is aglow.

Snowflakes fly in the air,
We walk down the snowy road.
I call you teddy bear,
You say I am like a red rose.

New Beginnings

Carlos Delgado

Second chances can happen when you least expect them,
giving you the opportunity of a new beginning.

Perhaps at this point in your life

you are not where you thought you'd be,
nor are you where others expected you to be,

It may be because of bad decisions or mistakes you'd once made,
or simply due to circumstances beyond your control.

Nevertheless, it's up to you to make a decision to change.

It's been said before, and it's so very true,

“For every door that closes,
another one opens.”

Thus giving you the chance to turn the knob and walk up a new path.

The key is

to make the most of those opportunities before they pass you by,
because there's no guarantee that they will present themselves again.

Whether it's a new job,

or going back to school,
being healed of an illness,
or reconciliation with family members or friends (just to name a few),

Embrace your opportunity with gratitude.

Although new beginnings can be challenging and scary,

don't let fear or negative comments stop you
from moving forward
in the blessing
of your new beginning.

Will I Ever Feel Normal Again?

Shyanne Hamb

She is here, her presence is at hand but this is not her.

She is weak, crippled; hopeless. Her mind is cruel, her body starved.

Why is her hope slipping? Will she ever feel normal again?

Her heart is going to burst, her body is tingling. When the sun is

hiding, she feels lonesome. Burning her throat, stomach bile shoves and

Hurls its way out, making her worries swell. Her face is hollow, and worn.

She feels somber, dim. The world in her head is starting to deteriorate.

A piece of their puzzle is gone. Now she's wounding others, her people.

They walk the halls low-spirited. She must get better, she's stuck in a

Whirlpool and doesn't know if she's strong enough to pull herself out.

Will they ever feel normal again?

The icy vinyl floor, the beeping of the monitors. The Iv line. They make

her feel secure. The glum hospital room soothes her, The smutty hospital

Food warms her. She's starting to feel content. The sun is locked away but

She is at ease. Her mind has relieved her. She's gripping onto hope once

Again. She will feel normal again....she was me.

Getting Back to Normal

Roberta Jackson

August 2021

The newspaper said "it's getting back to normal"

Wait a minute!

What is normal?

After you have lost someone you love,

Nothing is or stays the same

It's like the song says

We are not normal anymore

You go to the store

And you have to show an ID

Children have to wear a mask

We aren't what we used to be

Things ain't what they used to be.

Amazing Grace

Megan Kazier

Budweiser bottles broke my Saturday nights

Shards of amber glass reflect in the moonlight

If Sunday morning comes, I'll sing amazing grace

Just need to cover up the bruises on my face

Marlboro reds burned into my freckled flesh

The next day you're sorry, but there's no progress

I'm a deer in the headlights about to get hit

Over fear I hear, "you're just a piece of shit"

I wonder if you love me, while you lay down your hand

Do you even love yourself; please help me understand

I'll pray to go to heaven tonight, just in case

And if Sunday morning comes, I'll sing amazing grace

Foreverland
Megan Kazier

Peter Pan, it's me dear Darling.
You painted this city vintage gold.
The Upper West side is left
showered in your magical dust.
"Just believe, Wendy" you say,
and trust- I must. I try to remember,
floating on restful white clouds.
Free to fly away from it all,
or free to finally just fall-
"Faith, trust, and pixie dust"
does that stuff still work on adults,
or is my magic too rusted for you, Mr. Pan?
Cause sometimes I swear I still see you
dancing along the starry Big Apple sky.
I've grown old and lost Tink's sparkle,
No longer running barefoot in a blue dress.
I know of Neverland, but tell me Peter,
could you sprinkle me a Foreverland too?

Skip-Skipping

Megan Kazier

The needle skips the disc again.
Scratchy sounds echo over a-
song, I used to know back when.
Do you remember the melody or-
the lyrics we used to sing a little off key?
Broken record hums over static,
the snag stuck on repeat and
unable to skip to go forward.
Round and round the track we go-
The needle skips the disc again.

Salt, Shot, Lime

Megan Kazier

Silver Patron chilled on the rocks
reminds me of the taste of you.
Salt, shot, lime - turn back the clock,
Maybe a double will make it true.
Silver Patron chilled on ice,
losing you in a liquor paradise.
A sour toast to starting over now.
Salt, shot, lime – you and tequila burn.
While me and Jose, never seem to learn.

Thank You
Megan Kazier

A rope and a tire, hanging from a tall oak tree
A push from you and a smile from me
The higher, the faster, the fun
Memories being made under the sun
Thank you for loving me.

Trips to the fair, and piggy back rides so I could see
Invincible was I, when it was, we
Scraped knees and nightmares,
Lions and tigers and bears
Thank you for loving me.
A promise of a treehouse that was never meant to be
Days of yesterday laid to rest for better days to see
A kiss, a cry, and "I'm sorry" too
Maybe the future won't have to be so blue
Thank you for never giving up on me.

On 5th Avenue
Barbara Landrevie

Alone in the middle of the crowd
Motionless standing
Eyes closed

Place de la Concorde
The wind in my hair
The Seine flows nearby
Above the Grand Palace
The winter sun appears
And disappears
Like the sun my memory is slowly disappearing
If there is still time
I will only keep
I will always keep Paris
In my two cupped hands
Until the end of days
In the square on a bench
There would be my son calling me
Smiling on the bench
Children are playing near us
Calmly
Birds are flying leaving a tree
For another
And we stay there
On the bench

The small second of eternity
On 5th Avenue

What If?
Abbigail Moses

What if I could fly?

I would soar high-like a bird in the sky
Leaving all of my troubles behind
Feeling free- of life here below,
The noise, the nonsense, the pestilence and
The creatures that crawl day and night.

What if I could sing?

I would sing with a voice of an angel
The most beautiful song you've heard
Lifting my voice to the Most High,
Giving Him the glory, the honor and praise that are
Due unto his matchless name.

What if I could dance?

I would dance like King David
With boldness and confidence,
Not ashamed of the negative vibes,
But giving thanks to the King of Kings,
The Creator of the Universe,
My savior and my friend
In time with the rhythm, .
I'd dance 'til the end!

One Day of the Sunflower

Minji Park

I'm a yellow flower with seeds
Everyone always says I'm pretty

On a foggy day,
The sky was torn apart, and my body was split in half

Yellow water should seep through my body,
But purple water seeps through my split half from somewhere

Everyone is trying to protect the yellow appearance of me that was intact.
Can my torn body become one stem again?

Maybe I'll have to live with only half yellow
It's okay though
'Cause I have the sun

Raise my head
If there's a place I'm looking at,
The sun is right there

It doesn't matter if it's yellow or purple.
I will leave the seeds there

Right there looking at the sun

Dear Friend
Georgina Ramirez

Dear Friend
How complicated is our situation
Our parents are sick
They are suffering
As we are

Time is the most precious thing
That we like to have with them
But is sad to see them
In this terrible situation
Where we cannot help them
As much as we wish

In our our minds
We never think
Being on this situation
We hope they can
fight against cancer
Where we are waiting
for a miracle
Where we hope
Having more time with them

I hug you from the distance
Praying and hoping the best
for your father
more than ever
You know how much

I love you...my tears come

Our parents will live

in our hearts

In our memories

But our soul never will be the same

We're lucky

To have them

as our parents

We must accept that

Death is part of life

And let them go

Hoping they'll be in a better place

Where they will rest

Where they will have peace

Grateful

Georgina Ramirez

Now, more than ever

I'm grateful to see you again

Giving you kisses and hugs

Makes me feel happy

And peaceful.

I know and hope

This situation will be better

Just, I never thought

About your disease.

You're brave

You've superated
Adversities and also
Unimaginable situations
as double role in this life
you've been fighting alone
as a mother and as a father

Be proud of your three little girls
I'm proud to be your little one
More than ever I'm grateful
For your love and legacy

Thank you, Mother, for showing me
The correct way
To be a better human being
Showing me many lessons
Life lessons
I never will forget them

As you always say: enjoy life as much as you can
Be happy
Even though adversities
Even though environment
Don't worry at all
God's times are perfect

So sad to explain
This mixture of feelings
But more than ever
I'm grateful for having you in my life.

All my love to you MOM.

Your Smile
Georgina Ramirez

Smiling with you
Gives me peace
Hope, happiness
And for a little while
I forget my chaos

Hugging and kissing you
like when you were a baby
Reminds me of precious times
When we were close
And shared our deepest feelings

How important
You are in my life
How important is laughing together
Remembering funny stories
That we enjoyed together

At the end of the day
When it is time to rest and relax
I'm happy
seeing your face and smile
I'm happy
being here for you
I'm happy
giving you hugs
That comfort me

Now you are sleeping like an angel

How grateful I am
Because you are healthy, strong, and smart
Because I'm here
at your side
And you will always be
my little one

Ode to Nature

Elaine Reid

The sky is blue, as a sapphire.
The grass is green, as an emerald
The sun shines down on my skin,
I listen to the birds
As they sing their songs.

The scent of the earth after rain falls....
 The scent of the dirt makes me feel calm.
The brightness of the sun, so high in the sky.
 So many hues revolve
 when it's time to say, "Goodbye".

The wind blows softly,
 fragrant with the scent of sweet roses
Bees buzzing like busybodies,
 land delicately on flowers,
Butterflies flutter by,
 their colors- so sweet
to our naked eyes.

Nature's a big hug, so soothing, when you're sad,
 or a counselor when you are stifled, trite or mad.
With open arms she'll embrace you,
 and make you glad you were born.

Nature is such a beautiful sight to behold
Nature's very beauty fills up my soul
My heart with calmness,
My insight, now enlightened, everything's possible through her eyes

Mother Nature's loving warmth cannot be denied.

Daffodils

Janet Ren

Daffodils, there are you
Among the bushes
Beneath the trees
Your fresh, rich green sprouts
Your bold, lifted shoots
Peeping out from the soil
Curiously looking around

Daffodils, I watch you
when the warm sun is
Touching and hugging you
When the spring's gentle breeze is
Waking and kissing you
Your face turning to the sun as you
Dance happily cheek to cheek

I Want a Home

Janet Ren

From East to West
From North to South
I travel tirelessly
Seeking for a home

I experienced many things
During my journey
I saw different birds
Singing, chirping everywhere
Hovering freely in the air
I saw different mountains
Reaching to the sky, peak by peak
Standing calmly in the clouds
I saw different trees
Waving fervently in the wind
Greeting me with open arms

I met countless people
During my journey
Men and women, elderly and young
White and black, brown and yellow
No matter what skin color they have
No problem where they come from
Their smiles warm my lonely heart
Making me more confident and braver
They taught me many lessons
Freedom, Equality and Justice
The most basic principles of life
what it's to be a good human being

I found a home
It belongs to me and you
A home that is warm and cozy
A home that is filled with joy and love

Welcome to America
Wilto St. Vil

Where there's only two options: success and failure.
Which way will we go to find our treasure?
Be ready-always-to work harder.
I tell you : winter, summer I am a fighter.
No distractions, no pressure, I am smarter.

America makes you responsible and ambitious.
You'll be a winner.
It depends on your choices.

You're welcome to America, Dreamers.
The outcome can be sweet, or it may be sour.
A prickly cactus or beautiful flower.
Don't be weak,
Use your power.
The choices you make
Can take

You down
Or bring you farther.

America makes you responsible and most ambitious.
You'll be a winner.
It depends on your choices.

There're so many opportunities
And things you can accomplish.
Don't be foolish, jealous or selfish.
Do-just-as you wish.
Be optimistic and pursue your own dream.

Never look back.
Remember this-always-
America makes you responsible and ambitious.
Avoid what "*they*" say- whatever *they* think".
Find your own voice,
At the end of the day,
You must make your own choice.

Welcome to America, all you Dreamers-
Lady Liberty's just one state away.
She'll be there to greet you
With her words, engraved,
She'll ever be
Willing to accept "The Tired, the hungry, the poor
All the huddled masses, yearning to breathe free"
Seize the moment-every chance you get
Make something of yourself
The best is yet...
To come.
Welcome to America, all you Dreamers!

Dear Mama
Andrea Serrano

I can smell your essence in that food we prepared together.
Everybody around you grabbing your skirt, your soft hands cleaning our dirty faces.

My dear mama, running after us and the special race we had.
“Let’s go, my kiddos, it’s time for a bath.”

You took me by your hand and taught me letters, when you could barely read. I
understand now why you scolded us because you only wanted the best for us.

The way you walked, the way you smiled when you danced is tied into my heart,
because you are perfection, my dear Mama.

I understand why went to heaven because God needed more angels, but that day
was so gray because here, mom, we miss you every day.

I couldn’t say goodbye because life did not give us time, but if I look at the sky, there
you are, my lovely mom.

The Dream
Devonte Young

They say “After joy, comes sweet sorrow.”

Dull days and bright nights leave you feel’n quite hollow.

Seeing the work and feeling the drive,

Possessions you dream of, may come to life.

Stargazing- amazing,

But tensions are rising.

You decide-

“Risk it all” -just to reach the horizon.

Speaking your motive and being devoted,

That’s the code to success...

Escalate!

“Shoot for the stars...Sky's the limit,” we’re told,

The message we were left with, had yet to unfold.

As I grew older and my eyes opened wide,

It dawned upon me.

I came to realize,

Putting your “best foot forward”

Is your main front line.

Fighting the battles- a grasp at victory,

Feels like you’re leaving

All of that poverty,

And becoming quite wealthy- Indeed!

The rich, and the poor all have their set goals.

It’s the time taken, to reach them,

That leaves its mark,

In this world.

Closing your eyes and shutting them tight,

The kiss on your head brightens the night.

As you doze far away, into deep sleep,

Your visions become crystalized.

Slowly, they creep...

Then they quicken their pace.

They draw-almost too near.

You can feel as they pass,

Like the wind through your ears.

As you twist and turn eager to touch

Your future

Awaits...

With a flicker of luck!

My Love
Devonte Young

Oh, my love- oh,
 Where have you been?
I'm patiently waiting
 To see you again,
Closing my eyes and feeling your vibe,
Wish you were here...
 Drops a tear to my eye.
I feel numb
'Cause a piece of me-
 Seems to be gone.
Searching for you, to bring us
 Back - to just one.

Oh, my love, oh-
 Where have you been?
Your bright, green eyes spark
 This flame, from within.

How I do think of -
 The time we first met.
The mix of emotions-
 So scared me to death.

The first time, ever- I saw your sweet face,
My jaw seemed to drop,
 And I was led-far astray.
Your smile belied your beauty...
 Like lace.
The precocious lips of my love,

I couldn't resist.
It feels as though our love was born
In our first kiss.
And holding you closer, I needed to share.
I whispered, "I love you,"
With no time to spare.

Oh, my love, oh-
Where have you been?
I'm risking it all-
Just to kiss you, again.

Oh, my love,
This passion drives me insane.
Holding your hand
Takes away all my pain.

A kiss on the cheek can release butterflies.
Your sweet scent of coconut keeps me alive.

You've got me in wonderland.
Never, will I leave.
Your love clarifies questions...
No disparities.

Oh, my love, oh-
It's time to say, "Bye."
The sun slips down,
As the moon starts to rise.

Pulling you closer for one last kiss,
Grasping each moment we've both made of this,

Oh my love, oh-

Where have you been?

This much I vow:

All my heart, I do give.

Other Submissions

Fiction

The Wolf and the Three Little Pigs after Covid-19

Haeckel Hohlenwerger

The Wolf was walking hungry in the jungle, when he saw three little pigs. He then thought, “It is my food”. He began to follow the pigs. The first little pig went into the little stone home. John was the first little pig. He lives near stone material, and he used that material to build his home. He built his house by himself with his brother Peter on their free days. They missed several Columbus Days, and Thanksgiving Days in New York to build his house for him and his future family.

The wolf tried hard to get into the house, but he failed several times, then he gives up and tried to go after the second little pig. Peter, the second little pig, built his house with oak by himself with John. They lost many holidays and parties to build his house. He was thinking about his future. The Wolf tried to destroy the house, but he wasn’t successful.

Then he went after the last little pig. The third little pig went into his home built of wood pieces. About Joe, the last little pig, he only cares about Columbus Day Parades, Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parades, and NYC Pride Parades. When his brothers, John and Peter asked him to help them to build their house, he laughed and said, “I don’t need that, I don’t want to waste my time, I must enjoy my life”. He never cares about anybody, only himself.

The wolf could destroy Joe’s house and finally he could get food. He could bring food to his family and survive the long winter.

A New House
Priyanka Jain

Linda moved to New York State with her husband William from Texas. Linda always wished to have a big house with a beautiful backyard. Her passion to buy a dream house became true as she convinced her husband. Finally she moved into her dream house with great enthusiasm. The excitement to decorate her new house made her energetic. Some lively paintings, beautiful vases, antique corners and brightly colored walls gave her feelings like ‘my dreams have come true’.

During spring time she started planting and watered the soil for green grass. Everything was perfectly done as she wanted.

Then one Friday evening when she was watching a movie with William, her husband got a sudden call from his parents. William’s mother told him that your father isn’t well and he is willing to meet you.

William’s parents lived in London so he had to go to another country. When William left, Linda was alone at home. Because Linda grew up in Texas she did not have family and friends in New York. Being moved to a new state, she didn’t have a job here. Gradually, she felt depressed sitting alone on the couch and watching movies.

As the days passed suddenly the doorbell rang, Linda wasn't expecting someone to her house this morning. When she opened the door she received beautiful flowers and a greeting card with a welcoming note which mentioned her name on it. This warm note filled her heart with joy but she kept wondering who this stranger was? She read below the name Robin with a house number. Linda guessed this lady might be her neighbor.

Linda was surprised how she knew my name? Suddenly the phone rang, Hello there I am Robin your neighbor and got your number from William. He told me that he is away for a few months and asked me to keep you company. Would you like to join me for dinner?

Cookie and Her Adventures

Andrea Serrano

Once upon a time there was a chihuahua name Cookie. Her mom named her Cookie because she was very small. Cookie lived with her family in a small house.

Cookie had a special characteristic that caught the attention of many. Cookie did not have a tail. Her family loved Cookie so much, they did not pay attention to that.

Cookie had a superpower that nobody knew about, not even her mom. Cookie could jump as high as a flea, as high as a cricket, as high as a frog, as high as a rabbit, as high as a kangaroo.

Cookie always listened to her mom. She always ate all her food, drank all her water, brushed her teeth every morning, took her vitamins every morning. Cookie enjoyed going to the park and running on the grass and observing everything around her, but this time it was very different. Cookie heard this little bird that spoke loudly to her, saying “Hello shrimp without a tail.” Cookie felt so sad and began to cry, but at that moment something happened. The little bird leaned so far from its nest that it fell heavily on the pavement.

Cookie approached the little bird, immediately hugged it and jumped so high that it almost reached the tall tree and put it back in its nest. The little bird was very grateful and said, “Thank you very much for helping me. If it had not been for you, I probably wouldn’t have gone home, because I don’t know how to fly!” From that day they became very good friends.

Now the little bird knew about Cookie’s superpower. She could jump as high as a flea, as high as a cricket, as high as a frog, as high as a rabbit.

Other Submissions

Non-Fiction

America

Jamiat Awote

I like a lot of things in America. America is one of the richest countries in the world and the most powerful in the world. They try their best to make people live in the country comfortable. The children go to school free from age three years old to 18 years old but university is too expensive. It's very hard for many parents to afford the university fees. College tuition and medical care are the most important things the government needs to fix because not everybody can afford them. In many cases, they may have several medical issues that they need to see a doctor for but they don't have insurance. It makes it so difficult for them. Many people need to see a specialist but they can't afford it. The cost of university and medical care are the things that need to be fixed most. I think the government should make it easier for everybody.

Analysis of a Poem: The Spanish Needle by Claude McKay

Yvette Chambers

Spanish Needle

Claude McKay

Lovely dainty Spanish Needle
With your yellow flowers and white
Dew, bedecked and softly sleeping,
Do you think of me tonight ?

Shadowed by the spreading Mango,
Nodding o'er the rippling stream,
Tell me, dear plant, of my childhood,
Do you, of the exile, dream?

Do you see me by the Brooke's side
Catching crayfish neath the stone,
As you did the day you whispered.
Leave the harmless dears alone?

Do you see me in the meadow
Coming from the woodland spring
With a bamboo on my shoulder and
a pail slung from a string
waiting for my elf - eyed love?

Lovely dainty Spanish Needle,
source to me of sweet delight,
In your far-off sunny southland
Do you dream of me tonight?

I chose to analyze this poem, because, as far back, as I can remember, my classmates and I, back in Sunny Jamaica, were taught it. Though I don't quite recall its meaning- being explained in detail, I do remember feeling so enamored by the lovely language of this piece, that after all these years, it remains with me, still, in my very soul.

Personally, upon examination of the first verse, McKay employs a most vivid display, as he speaks directly to the Spanish Needles (the yellow and white flowers) which are bedecked in "jewels" of dew. Through *Direct Address* and *Personification*, the poet demonstrates amazing imagery.

Woven into this piece, we see other such literary devices, which combined, help to provide beautiful pictures created by the author's choice of words. In this case, the most seemingly-simple language becomes profound.

Ultimately, through the author's ability to transpose his thoughts, he has created images which for me, have lasted a lifetime.

Papillon - Revisited

Sursattie S. Cyril

In 1973, actors Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman were in the Big-Screen version of a film based on a hell-hole of an institution, Devil's Island Prison. The movie was entitled, "Papillon," which translated from French means: "Butterfly."

To elaborate, Devil's Island was once a French penal colony that had operated for more than one hundred years. Over time, the need to curb the criminal element led to the construction of the Prison itself. Due to the inherently dangerous nature of its surroundings, the facility had a reputation for being "inescapable." Treacherous rocks and strong cross-currents around the island's base, safe access was only possible via cable car which crossed the 60-foot-wide channel between Isle du Diable and the main island, Isle Royale.

The latter is where the general prison population was housed and allowed to roam with relative freedom. Punishment at Devil's Island Prison, however, was rumored to be savage; violation of the rules typically took the form of a severe whipping, beating, or a hanging. For the most heinous perpetrators, was- certainly-the most brutal punishment.

As my husband and I set out, some years ago for a trip to French Guyana, the sun shone brightly and warmly on our already sun-tanned skin. Our cruise ship stopped at a major dock in the town. Initially, I thought this would be a boring aspect of our venture, but it proved to be very interesting as we stared, in awe, at the infamous prison whose echoes of agony are said to be heard amid the thrashing and the pounding of the ocean's waves against the enormous cliffs.

Although escape was always on the mind of the prisoners, making a safe get-away from this gruesome facility was impossible because of the sharks that circled the island waiting greedily for the bodies of those prisoners who'd died while in captivity and were eventually thrown into the sea. Some convicts were put into deep, 12- by-12 foot holes with bars on the top, subjecting them to all types of weather.

In time, a prisoner known as "Papillon" actually made his escape. Even though a fall from the cliffs would mean certain death, Papillon laboriously connected coconuts together using heavy rope tied with "sailors' knots", and because even solid coconuts are lighter than water, he was able to create a make-shift raft. During a swell of waves, he jumped from the cliff's edge and survived the fall. "The Butterfly's" escape was a success.

Papillon lived on, from there, as a free man.

In 1953, Devil's Island Prison no longer housed criminals. The facility was shut down, and the group of Islands has since become a major tourist attraction.

Thoughts Out Loud

Massiel DeLos-Santos

What's going on with our future generation? that things like rules of urbanity we see very little in the current young people. Simple words such as please, thank you, excuse me, good morning, good afternoon, etc., our parents taught us manners and respect for others, what is correct and what is not, even how to use common sense and guess what nowadays it is scarce. Could be, cause from where I come from, those things were very important, or I'm raised by old fashioned way ... maybe, but the reality is it's so worrying how our children are rising and apparently, we do not care that much. We are facing a generation dependent on "social media", where information and misinformation prevail. It is our plenty responsibility guide them through a better way, it is my opinion that could be a good practice, as society promote kindness, humanity, respect, charity, and all good things that help us be better as a person. Are you concern about it? Or we just don't care? Answer yourself.

My Favorite American Holiday

Elena Godovikova

Every year, Americans celebrate Thanksgiving Day at the end of November. It is a special day and a federal holiday, so schools, banks, and government offices are closed.

Thanksgiving was the first holiday celebrated in America. It was celebrated in the autumn of 1621, when the Indians and the pilgrims got together for a three-day feast, it was called, "The Harvest Festival of Fun".

Today, families celebrate Thanksgiving by eating turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, and gravy, yams, corn, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. It's a popular meal on the holiday table. The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and an NFL football game are special Thanksgiving Day events.

This year my family and friends celebrated Thanksgiving at a beautiful table with a traditional meal. Everyone thanked God for love, peace, hope, health, and a good year's harvest, while holding

hands. We were happy- eating delicious food, drinking wine and cocktails , and talking about the news.

I fell in love with this beautiful holiday.

Thanksgiving is a time to be thankful for all of the blessings from the past year, and for these and so much more, I am truly grateful.

My First Love **Vijitha Jeyarajan**

My Motherland is Sri Lanka. It is one of the most popular Asian countries. It is surrounded by the Indian ocean, so over the years, people have referred to this place as, “The Pearl of the Indian Ocean”.

Thambapanni, Ceylon and Lankadeepa are among the many names used by our ancestors and sometimes still what people use today to identify those in specific regions.

Sri Jayawardenpura is the capital of Sri Lanka. Some time ago, the country’s “Administrators” decided that Sinhala would be the language used by everyone, and it’s remained this way ever since.

There is a long and proud history in Sri Lanka. Before 1948, it was considered a British colony, but our heroes had the strength and the courage to save what had always been ours. That day, on February 4, 1948 we gained our freedom, and this date has since become known as Sri Lanka’s Independence Day.

My motherland is a Buddhist country. Among the most practiced religions are Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Politically, Sri Lanka is a democratic country.

It is rich in many natural resources, as well. Even though it is a small island, it has recently developed the reputation of being quite miraculous - simply because of its beauty.

There truly are a lot of marvelous places to see-among them are:

The amazingly colorful gardens

The attractively calming waterfalls

The beautifully-clear rivers

The forests and the various plants in them

Flowers -everywhere- only serve to increase the awesomeness all around.

Environmental beauty is the main reason for the increase in tourism

Now the Sigiriya which was once used as a rock shelter, is included as a word in our heritage representative of strength and beauty. The educational structure is rather similar to the British one, while politically-speaking, Sri Lanka has a two party system. It consists of The United National Party and The Sri Lankan Freedom Party.

Lastly, my native country, Sri Lanka, has many cultural events such as The Sinhala and Tamil, a celebration of the new year. We also celebrate Ramadan, Thai Pongal and Christmas. These occasions provide many reasons for our friends to join in celebration of *who* we are as a people, and *how* we are connected-culturally, and as a nation.

There is never any doubt in my mind, nor-ever any hesitation in my heart - without question, I love the United States of America, but I'll *always* love my First Country, the country of my birth, Sri Lanka, too.

Thank You.

Other Submissions

Photography



Intimacy

Priyanka Jain



Yellowstone

Megan Kazier



Sunset in Punta Ricia Beach

Estfany Medible