

JOURNEYS

An Anthology of Adult Student Writing

2017

Mission

The mission of the Minnesota Literacy Council is to share the power of learning through education, community building, and advocacy. Through this mission, the literacy council:

- Helps adults become self-sufficient citizens through improved literacy.
- Helps at-risk children and families gain literacy skills to increase school success.
- Strengthens communities by raising literacy levels and encouraging volunteerism.
- Raises awareness of literacy needs and services throughout the state.

Vision

We envision literate communities in which all residents have full access to quality learning and service opportunities that will enable them to contribute and reach their potential.

Acknowledgements

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Finally, we are deeply grateful for our generous donors, Mimi and Todd Burke, through the Burke Family Fund in memory of Todd's late mother, that have helped make Journeys possible this year.

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From the Director

Dear Reader,

I am thrilled to present the 28th annual edition of *Journeys: An Anthology of Adult Student Writing*. Like every previous edition, from cover to cover you will find stories that move, engage, worry, inspire and make you laugh.

As we await its publication each spring I am reminded of the many ways that *Journeys* has intersected with the essential work we do at the Minnesota Literacy Council. This wonderful compilation has had a few names, starting with *Thoughts* in 1990. The very first edition was actually the inspiration of a literacy council AmeriCorps VISTA member (Winona, MN), a national service program we still run today. We then transitioned the publication into *To Open Your Mind* for many years. The current name, *Journeys*, has been serving us well since 2007.

Fast forward to this year, 2017 welcoming over 700 *Journeys* submissions from learners in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs from every corner of Minnesota. For over four decades it has been our privilege to serve several thousand ABE students annually in Minneapolis and St. Paul. In addition, we support the nearly 350 ABE programs across Minnesota through volunteer recruitment, training and placement, professional development and support for volunteer literacy coordinators and managing the statewide Adult Literacy Hotline. *Journeys* welcomes entries from any Minnesota ABE program.

These many students, including the authors portrayed on the front cover, have traveled far to land in this edition. Some come from countries thousands of miles away while some have grown up here in the Twin Cities. Some study English, others are preparing for the GED, many study computer literacy or specific career tracks and yet others study to become citizens. Regardless of geography or course of study, every learner has pursued a path of personal growth in education leading them to this book and the accomplishment of being a published author or artist.

An Eight Lesson Curriculum. Allow me to also mention a new feature of *Journeys* this year; we've included a special curriculum unit specifically designed for advanced ESL learners. Teachers of these students will find ready-made lessons and supporting materials with themes ranging from storytelling to considering literary genres. The eight lessons culminate in producing a final draft of a piece like those in *Journeys*. It is our hope that this curriculum inspires teachers and students near and far.

Publishing *Journeys* is a time-intensive project that is only possible thanks to the expertise and hard work of many staff and interns. Please see the acknowledgements section for a full listing of everyone who worked on this edition. In assembling the anthology know that only minimal editing is done to ensure the tone and voice of our authors remain intact.

May the bright, hopeful faces of the learners on the cover stay with you as you journey throughout the rest of this year. I know they will be a constant reminder to me of the brief, bright moments we cross paths with these exceptional authors and artists.

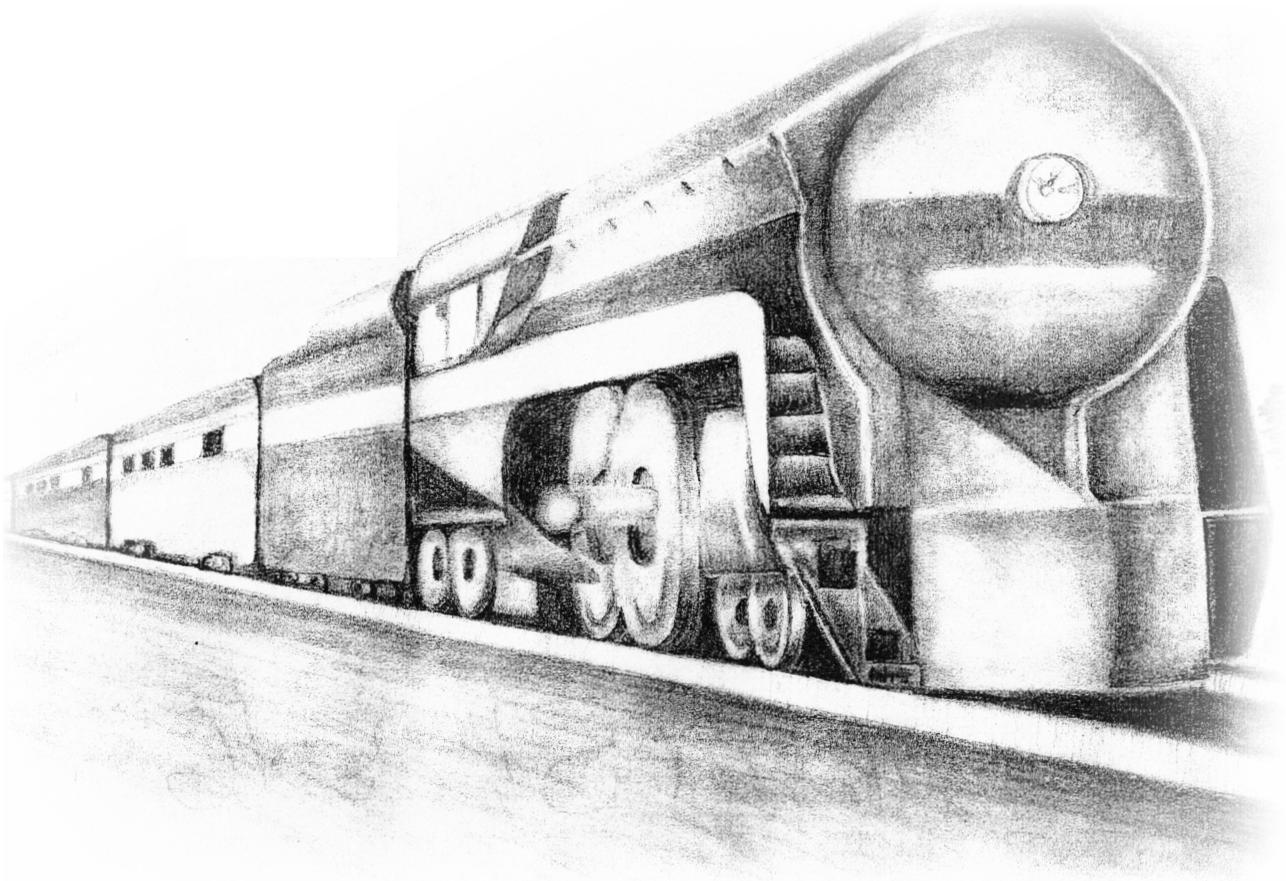
Eric Nesheim
Executive Director



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COMING TO AMERICA





Ler Lah Say was born in Karen State in Burma, but he grew up in a refugee camp in Thailand. In 2008 he came to Minnesota. He got a job at the Roseville Super Target, and he has worked there for there for seven years. He is presently a student at the Roseville Adult Learning Center in the diploma program.

After he gets his high school diploma, his dream is to become a builder and home designer.

Assimilation

Ler Lah Say, St. Paul

When I was in a refugee camp, I never thought that I would have an opportunity to come to the U.S. In 2005, there was a good chance for refugees to resettle in Norway and Sweden, but I was not interested at all. One of my cousins asked, “Why don’t you apply for these countries? They are good opportunities for you.”

I replied, “You are right, but these are not the countries I want. I want to go to the countries that speak English.” I told him that if I went to the countries that did not use English, I would have to learn another language, and I would get old. It was too late for me to start learning another language again. My decision was only to go to a country which spoke English because the only international language we learned in school was English. So I thought I made a good choice. My cousin who asked me those questions now lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his family and has a good life there.

In May 2008, I came to the U.S. and started my new life. When I first got here in St. Paul, I felt nervous because the city was amazing and filled with huge, tall, clean buildings. The busy roads were filled with the cars, and the bridges were crossing on top of each other layer by layer. Personally I didn’t feel confident to go out alone. Whenever I went for any appointments or shopping, I was afraid to walk alone by myself in open space. Moreover, I did not have enough self-confidence to talk to other people in English because my English was not good. If they talked to me too fast, I worried that I could not catch what they said.

After three months of living at St. Paul though, I got a job at Roseville Super Target. I still lacked confidence and avoided people for conversations. I had to adapt to get rid of this feeling. It took me almost a year. Later on as the time passed by, I gained more confidence whenever I faced obstacles.

Therefore, I think some people who grew up in poor countries and then resettled in a developed country such as the U.S would feel the same as me. Right now my English is not yet perfect, but I am full of self-confidence.

Ler Lah Say is 34 and originally from Burma.

Difficulties in America

MAY HTOO, WORTHINGTON

Everything changed for me when I came to America. I didn't know how to speak English and I didn't understand English at all. It was difficult to go shopping because I didn't know how to drive. I didn't know how to do laundry or how to make an appointment at the clinic. So many difficulties for me. Now after eight years it's better for me because I know how to drive. I can go everywhere. I speak English a little bit. I know how to make an appointment. It's easy for me. I can go by myself to the clinic.

May Htoo is 31 and originally from Myanmar.

About Me and My Family

KLUE WAH, WORTHINGTON

My name is Klue Wah. I was born in Burma. I am from a Thailand Refugee Camp. I came to America with my family. I had two children, one boy and one girl. I lived in St. Paul for five years. I moved to Worthington almost five years ago. When I lived in St. Paul I went to Early Childhood Education with my little girl. When my older child went to school I had to go to Arlington Hills School with my younger child. A few months later I got pregnant. My children went to school, I studied U.S. Citizenship for eight months, and became a citizen. I also went to ABE class. I have started to write in a journal. I was excited to learn many things from school. Right now I have three children. I'm still learning English.

Klue Wah is 30 and originally from Myanmar (Burma).

My First Step in Minnesota

ELIZABETH HTOO, WORTHINGTON

I was born in Burma in a small village. When I was 10 years old I moved to a Thailand refugee camp with my parents. I went to school in the refugee camp for a few years and then I got married early when I was in middle school. In 2010 my family had the opportunity to move to the United States. My

husband and I decided to move to St. Paul, Minnesota. Everything was new for my family, and it was difficult to do anything. I was very upset and wanted to move back to Thailand. One month later, I started going to school four hours a day, five days a week. Childcare took care of my kids every day when I was in school. At that time I studied hard and went to school everyday to improve my English, how to speak, read, write, and listen. I had a problem memorizing the English I was learning during class. I want to speak English fluently and help my family and my neighbors by translating English to the Karen language. Now I've moved to southern Minnesota and I continue to study English.

Elizabeth Htoo is 31 and originally from Myanmar (Burma).

My Name is Maritza

MARITZA ARAUZ, WORTHINGTON

My name is Maritza Socorro Arauz. I'm from Esteli, Nicaragua in Central America. My mother lives in Nicaragua. My father died in my country. I have four brothers and three sisters. One sister lives in Miami, Florida. I live here in Worthington, Minnesota with my husband and my daughters. My husband's country. Everybody has better opportunities for education and jobs. I like the USA very much, but I don't like the cold weather in winter too much. My husband likes the snow.

Maritza Arauz is 52 and originally from Nicaragua

The Journey of My Life

ALEXANDRA VALDEZ, ANOKA

My mom always says "Humans are animals of habit." Since my dad was a military officer in Peru, we had to travel a lot. I always complained because I didn't like to move. However, in 2003, my family decided to come to the U.S. with lots of dreams. For me, moving to this country was very difficult, starting at a new school, making new friends, and not speaking the language was the scariest feeling. I complained a

lot! I had a hard time with other people at school, but I tried my best to make it better. After a few years, I finally learned the language. I started to like living here, I made friends, we bought a nice house and we started a new life. After I graduated high school, I started working hard for a couple years to live better and to accomplish myself. Today my life is completely different. I have wonderful people by my side, and an amazing man in my life who supports me. I will start college soon, and I will be able to follow my dreams and find success in this country that opened the doors for me to make my dreams come true. Finally, I don't have to complain anymore.

Alexandra Valdez is 28 and originally from Peru.

My Story

MARTIN ALEXANDER VILLALOBOS RIVERA, ST. PAUL

My name is Martin, and I was born in September, 1998. I was born in Honduras. I finished college in Honduras. I'm in electricity.

My school in Honduras is called Institute Modelo. I came to the USA six months ago. I lived in Houston, Texas for one month.

Now I live in St. Paul, Minnesota. Now I live with my father, his wife, and my two brothers. My youngest brother is one year old and my two other brothers are 16 years old.

Martin Alexander Villalobos Rivera is 19 and originally from Puerto Cortes, Honduras.

My Life

CLARA VARON, ST. PAUL

In December of 2011, I arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota. My trip was very long. I left at 7:00 a.m. and arrived here at 10:00 p.m. It was my first time seeing my grandchildren and my daughter-in-law in person. I had talked with them over the internet on Skype, when my son helped me. I was afraid because I thought my English was not good enough. During this stage I knew a lot of people and they helped me talk and they invited me to different places. I liked

watching the snow falling, for me it was wonderful.

I lived with my son and his family for three years and shared many happy moments with them. Then, I began to study English in Clues for one year. When I talked about my profession in my home country, they gave me the opportunity to be a volunteer in Clues's childcare. It was wonderful.

I spoke with my teacher and said, "in my country I was a kindergarten teacher for 20 years." In May of 2012 I worked for a few days, then in October I began to work in childcare, until recently. I learned about the Hubbs Center from my colleague and I began to study English again.

My family has been supportive. At this moment, I live alone and work, but my son and family want me to live with them.

I am thankful for all the opportunities in this country and the help that my family gets.

Clara Varon is 60 and originally from St. Paul, Minnesota.

Citizens' Rights

HENRY LOPEZ, FRIDLEY

What responsibilities do citizens have? The responsibilities are that they must know their personal rights, political rights, and economic rights in addition to knowing their personal responsibilities and civic responsibilities.

What are the most important ones, and why? Some of the most important personal rights of a citizen are: the freedom of conscience and religion, the freedom of expression and creativity, and the freedom of privacy.

Some of the most important political rights are: due process of law, fair procedures, equal protection under the law, and freedom to vote in free, fair, and regular elections. Some of the most important economic rights are: freedom to acquire, use, and sell or give away property, freedom to establish and operate a business, and freedom to join professional associations and labor unions.

With the rights of citizens of the United States

come certain personal and civic responsibilities.

Personal responsibilities are obligations that each person assumes individually. Some of the most important personal responsibilities are: considering the rights and interests of others, accepting the consequences of one's actions, and behaving in a civil manner.

Civic responsibilities are obligations that each person has to society. The most important civil responsibilities are: being informed about public issues, voting and deciding how to vote, obeying the law, and paying taxes.

How would you explain community responsibilities to someone who is new to a community? I always explain to someone who doesn't know much about this country that we have the right to vote, equal protection under the law, and the right to choose one's work. I also explain that we have freedom to seek and hold public office. In addition, I like to tell some people that we have the responsibilities to make sure that all our rights are being respected as citizens or permanent residents.

Henry Lopez is 27 and originally from Santa Ana, El Salvador.

Holidays in United States of America

DEBORAH ELFORD, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Deborah Elford. I am a student at Adult Basic Education school in St. Paul, Minnesota. I have learned about festivals, cultures, and history in the United States of America. There are many holidays, but I have chosen four important ones: Easter, Independence Day, Halloween, and Christmas.

Easter is a festival and holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Easter is traditionally on the first Sunday of April. People celebrate by going to church services, gathering for family meals, decorating Easter eggs, and giving gifts. Easter eggs are also called Pascha eggs and are often given to celebrate Easter or Springtime. This information has been found on Wikipedia.

Independence Day, which is an important federal holiday in United States of America, is celebrated on the 4th of July. The history tells that on the 4th of July in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress. We celebrate with fireworks, parades, barbecues, carnivals, fairs, picnics, concerts, baseball games, family reunions, and political speeches, and ceremonies. Since 1776, Independence Day has been celebrated for 240 years.

Halloween is an annual festival on October 31st. It is celebrated by western Christians and many non-Christians around the world. They celebrate with trick-or-treating, costume parties, making jack-o-lanterns, lighting bonfires, divination, and visiting haunted attractions such as houses, stores and other places. Many Halloween traditions have originated from the ancient Celtic harvest festival Samhain. It has been Christianized by the early Church. Samhain and its festivals have pagan roots.

Christmas is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas is on December 25 and it is a public holiday in United States of America. Billions of people around the world also love to celebrate with beautiful Christmas trees. Popular modern customs of the holiday include giving gifts, completing an Advent wreath, Christmas music and caroling, church services, Santa Claus, reindeer and elves.

I have enjoyed learning about the four holidays, Easter, Independence Day, Halloween, and Christmas. They are very interesting because if there is no holidays in the United States of America, people will be bored. People have creative arts such as painting colors on Easter eggs and decorating beautiful things with Christmas trees in the United States of America, so they will enjoy their life with holidays. ["Easter." Wikipedia.com. 2017]

Deborah Elford is 50 and originally from Singapore.



My New Country

MOHAMED ALI, ST. PAUL

My name is Mohamed Ali. I am from Somalia. I came to the USA in August of this year. Before I came to the USA, I was afraid that it would be difficult for me, because there are so many differences between the US and Somalia. For example, the weather in Somalia is very hot and dry. In America, it is very cold. By law in Somalia, I can marry up to four wives at the same time. In America, it is illegal. In spite of all the differences, after two months in this country, I feel welcome here. I am getting used to the American culture. They like to smile and help. They encourage me to study and work. These two things are the best things for me to do for my family, to improve our lives and contribute to our new country.

Mohamed Ali is 39 and originally from Somalia.

Thankful to Be in America

Abdirizak Jama, St. Paul

After 25 years of struggling to survive, I came to the USA to start a new life. On Thanksgiving, my family and I gave thanks for our life in America. Thanksgiving is one of the biggest holidays in the USA, and this year was really the best ever for my family, because of the good weather. We enjoyed visiting our relatives, shopping, and fun activities for our six children. We started our celebration by going to a restaurant in Columbia Heights, Filfila, which means ginger restaurant. After eating as much as we could, we went shopping at the Mall of America. After shopping we went to a movie. We had planned to go bowling the next day, but it was closed, so we visited more relatives.

I am thankful for the Hubbs Center, all my teachers, and the American people. Thanksgiving 2016 was the best!

Abdirizak Jama is 47 and originally from Somalia.

Getting to My Dream Country

AHMED MOHAMED, ST. PAUL

I am Ahmed from Somalia, East Africa. My country has been in a civil war since 1991. People are dying and groups who are killing people are also stealing their things. My family and I walked for two months through the countryside. After two months, we got to Kenya, which is our neighbor. We lived at the Coastal Refugee Camp in Kenya from 1997 until we moved to another camp near the South Suderis border, which was Kakyma Refugee Camp. I lived there from 2014 to now. I am living in St. Paul, Minnesota. My dream has come true.

Ahmed Mohamed is 64 and originally from Somalia.

The Gift from Heaven: Snow

TSO CHI CHEN, ST. PAUL

I came from Taiwan where it is hot and wet in the summer. It is a tropical island in Asia. In the winter, it will sometimes snow only in the high mountains, over 3,000 meters. So, when I saw snow in Minnesota for the first time, it was so exciting and it made me so happy. I went outside and made a small snowman and took a picture and sent it to all my friends in Taiwan. Then, I measured the temperature, wow, 0 degrees Celsius and about 30 degrees Fahrenheit.

I was a teacher in Taiwan. I taught junior high students that water will become ice when the temperature is below 0 degrees, but I had no chance to prove it. Today, I put a glass of water outside the window in hopes it would become ice by the next day. Then I told my daughter, who has been in Minnesota for three years and works at 3M. She said, "Oh no, it is starting to snow. I don't like it, I have to work!" I hope my feelings for snow will not change forever!

Tso Chi Chen is 62 and originally from Taiwan.

I Want to Become a Citizen Story

NAWYEE PAW NOENO, WORTHINGTON

Hi everyone.

My name is Nawayee Paw Noeno. I was born in April, 1991 in a Thailand refugee camp. I lived in a Thailand refugee camp for 17 years and I came to the United States on September 28, 2009. I lived here for five years and became a citizen. I had to learn English first and go to citizenship class.

I learned English for almost five years and citizenship for almost eight months, then I filled out the application with my lawyer. First, I went to get my fingerprints. I had to wait almost one month and then I went back again for the test for citizenship. They asked a lot of questions. Finally, they told me "You passed." Oh, I'm so happy now that I'm a citizen!

I came here because this country is free, for everyone. Thanks.

Nawayee Paw Noeno is 25 and originally from Thailand.

Coming to a New Country

NGUYEN NGOC TRAN, ST. PAUL

It was ten months from December 4 that I first came to the U.S. to join with my husband. This was not easy for me, because I am 34 years old. I was born and grew up in Vietnam. I have had to deal with many new things here: the weather, the language, and the culture. I knew this before I came here, so I was very worried. But when I got here, I fell in love with the nature. Even the winter has its own beauty. I also received help from many Minnesota people. I hope I can give back someday.

I started learning English at a wonderful adult school, the Hubbs Center. I had never imagined this before. I know this is a very first step of my new place, but I will try my best. Maybe some day, I will feel this place is my second homeland.

Nguyen Ngoc Tran is 34 and originally from Viet Nam.

How People Treat Animals in America and in Togo

RICHARD AYEWONOU, COON RAPIDS

In this country everyone is doing his or her part to protect animals or pets. But in my native country, Togo, this is not the case. In my country, people kill animals however they want. Because there is not any law that protects animals. People even kill their own pets, cook them and eat them. I hope animals in my country will have a law that will protect them one day.

Richard Ayewonou is 25 and originally from Togo.

Just Thoughts

NATALIA LITVINOVICH, ROSEMOUNT

People who come to the United States must be ready to change their minds. A lot of things change around them. They are language, food, stores, sometimes jobs and transportation. Even though there are a lot of changes, of course people will have a lot of smiles and will be polite in different situations. Relationships between neighbors are more warm and informal than in my country of Belarus. People here express more emotions and are always ready to help. I especially like school buses. In Belarus children come to a school by one and sometimes they miss lessons. When I see them everywhere, I understand that society is taking care of the new generation.

Natalia Litvinovich is 57 and originally from Ukraine.

Our English Language Class

OLENA LIESINA, APPLE VALLEY

We are about 26 students. We came to the USA from four continents: Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. We represent 11 countries: Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Mexico, Russia, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine, and Vietnam. We are so different but we are the same. We are the small drops of our motherlands' cultures and traditions in the mankind ocean.

My name is Olena and I am from Ukraine. Ukraine is a large country in Eastern Europe, it has an area of 233,000 square miles. It's like Texas. Our population is about 45 million. The territory of modern Ukraine has been inhabited since 32000 BC. In the Middle Ages, the area was a key center of Slavic culture with a powerful State of Kievan Rus forming the basics of Ukrainian identity. Ukraine is known for its Black Sea coastline and forested mountains, historical places, and churches. It has the gold-domed St. Sophia's cathedral with 11th century mosaics and frescoes, and kind, peaceful people.

We are about 26 students. We came to Cedar Valley Learning Center to learn the English language, to find new friends and to feel its magic family atmosphere.

We are about 26 and we are the team now.

Olena Liesina is 58 and originally from Ukraine.

What I Do to Prepare for Winter

HAO TA, BROOKLYN PARK

Winter is coming. I saw a lot of jackets and sweaters in the mall. I saw a lot of people who didn't wear short pants when they walked out of their houses. The winters in California and Texas are warm like summer, but the winter in Minnesota is very cold. Minnesota will have snow in January.

The winter has Christmas Day and New Year's Day. I really like New Year's Day because my mother will give me some money; this means that she is giving me luck for the first day of the new year and every day in the year. I always get lucky, too. I will buy some red shirts and red sweaters to wear on the first day of the new year. I will buy red shoes if I see them in the mall, but I don't think I have to wear all red that day. I believe if you wear any red clothes on New Year's Day, you will be lucky for the whole year.

On Black Friday, my mother and I will go to the mall and buy some hats, jackets, sweaters, pants, boots and gloves to be ready for this winter. My

mother told me, "The winter in Minnesota is very cold, if you don't wear enough clothes to protect your body, you will get sick." I don't want to get sick, that's why I will spend a lot of money on my winter clothes. I don't want to buy new ones every winter but this is the second time ever that I've prepared for winter here.

When I felt cold after I got up and see a lot of trees have no more leaves, I know the Fall is almost over. The only thing that makes me happy in the winter is that I don't have to cut the grass every weekend so I will have time to learn more English at home.

I love snow because I hadn't seen it for 21 years when I lived in my country. Now I really like to make a snowman every winter in Minnesota.

Hao Ta is 20 and originally from Vietnam.

Critical Phase Of Life

TRANG TRAN, FARMINGTON

On May 17th, 2017 I started a critical phase of my life. That is a day I said goodbye to my grandparents, relatives and my friends from Vietnam to come to America. It was a long journey on the airplane with the excitement and a lot of thinking about life in America like the people, culture, and atmosphere. At that time, I knew that I'd be in a critical phase of my life and my culture. When I checked out from the airport, my head said only one word, "Wow!" That was the first time I came to America, I used English to speak with everyone. The most special time was after 12 years when I met my grandmother and relatives. I had a lot of feelings to express at that time. But I think I'm so lucky because I can come to America to live, to study and to make a new life and future. But especially, I can meet my grandmother again in the U.S.A. and live with her and my parents.

Trang Tran is 20 and originally from Vietnam

Breaking Preformed Ideas

WANDERLEY TOTO, BLAINE

Well, I have no idea about the behavior of American people who live in other states. But I can tell you about the people of Minnesota. Really, they are very special people. Since I arrived here in the last year, everyone that I have met has demonstrated respect and courtesy. Also, many times people have tried to be helpful to me.

But not just to me. I have seen that this is typical polite behavior of Minnesotans. I never thought I would be so welcome in America. I am living very happy here just because of that. It is very important that you don't have preconceived ideas about other people without living with them. This can block your vision of the world and about the people also.

And now I have just one thought, "God Bless Minnesota."

Wanderley Toto is originally from Brazil.

Coming to Minnesota

KPAW SAY, ST. PAUL

I came to Minnesota in 2010. I remember the first week my friend bought a pot for me, but I couldn't cook. I stopped eating rice for two days because I didn't know how to cook. I ate the Styrofoam from the pot because I thought it was bread. But it was not bread, and I was sick for two weeks.

Later, I needed to call a phone in Thailand but I didn't have a phone to call my parents. I borrowed my friend's cordless home phone. I brought it home, but I couldn't call. And two days later I bought a cordless home phone for myself and I brought it to church, but when I called my friends it didn't work. I told my friends my phone didn't work and they told me you can only use a home phone at home not other places. I told them I don't know anything, and thank you for telling me because it's a new life in America and it's my first time.

Kpaw Say is originally from Burma.

My Life in America

SA EH PAW, ST. PAUL

My name is Sa Eh Paw. First I came to Colorado on August 8, 2008. There were three people in my family: me, my husband, and our daughter. I lived there for almost three years, but I never went to school. My husband worked and I just took care of my daughter. In 2010, I became pregnant with my second daughter and she was born in 2011. When she was five months old, my family moved to Guymon, Oklahoma. My husband worked at Seaboard Food and I just stayed home. I had two daughters already, but I wanted a boy. Then I became pregnant again and when she was born she was a girl again. Now I have three daughters—no boy.

I don't want any more kids—just three is enough for me. I lived there almost three years when my family moved to St. Paul, Minnesota because I have a family. And when I lived in St. Paul, I started going to school in October at VSS School. This is the first school for me. I like to go to school and I love my family.

Sa Eh Paw is originally from Burma.

What I Packed

NAW HTOO DOH, ST. PAUL

I came to Minnesota on September 18, 2016. I packed pictures because I can look at my family. I packed a cloth because my mother bought it for me. I packed a book because my friend gave it to me as a present.

Naw Htoo Doh is originally from Burma and Thailand.

Coming to America

VIVIAN WEN, APPLE VALLEY

I came to Minnesota July 15, 2008 with my husband and son. After living here for eight years, I think I had made the right decision.

First, I like the environment. There is no pollution and there are a lot of parks and 10,000 lakes. You can go anytime you needn't pay. Sometimes you can hear

some free music concerts in the park. But, in China, you need to pay for expensive tickets to get into the park and museums.

Second, house prices are cheaper and reasonable. There are a lot of different style houses that you can choose: single house, condo, townhouse, and apartment. Everyone can buy or rent the home they can afford.

Third, in America, there are a large amount of grocery stores. The food is fresh and cheap. If you don't have time to cook, you can buy the easy cook food. The price is cheaper than when you go to restaurant. You can buy a package of spinach then add some dressing to make salad.

I like the four seasons in Minnesota. In spring, there are many flowers. You can see different color tulips, roses, daisies, and the lawn's grass turns green. In the summer, people go fishing, hiking in the mountains, and riding yachts and canoes. In the fall, even though it is a short term, you can see different color leaves: red, green, brown, and orange. It is beautiful scenery. In the winter, you can see snow falling down, you will enjoy making a snowman for fun.

In addition, even though you are poor or a middle-level family, you can get a good plan of medical insurance.

For these reasons, I think I'm happy to live in Minnesota, and I know I had made the right decision.

Vivian Wen is originally from China.

In America

FATOUMA IDRIS, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Fatouma Idriss. I'm from Djibouti, a country in Africa. I have three brothers and six sisters. I have a big family. I've been in America for 14 years. I'm so glad to be in America. In America you have great education and colleges. I want my kids to go to college.

Fatouma Idriss is originally from Djibouti

My First Thanksgiving In The USA

ROMMEL ALVAREZ, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember I came to this country on November 13, 1994. My ex-wife said to me, "I need to prepare for the holiday."

I said, "What holiday?"

She said to me, "Turkey day."

I told her, "Woooo, I don't know nothing about this holiday, explain it to me."

She talked about the pilgrims came to the USA and I understand what the holiday is. And now I celebrate every day with my friend. I have my daughter here, but I don't have any family in this country. But I talk to God. Thanks for everything I have in my life.

I have a good job. I have my daughter. I have good friends.

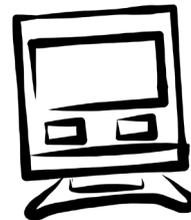
Rommel Alvarez is originally from Ecuador.

I'm Happy

LILIAN RAMIREZ, WORTHINGTON

I'm happy to be in this country of many opportunities. Happy that here I met my husband. Happy to have two beautiful daughters. Happy to have my family here. I feel blessed by God for this opportunity. I feel complete happiness.

Lilian Ramirez is originally from El Salvador.



My Life in the U.S.

MIGUEL MIRANDA, WORTHINGTON

I came to the United States in 1998. I was not too happy because I left all of my family in my country of El Salvador. But at the same time, I was very happy because the day after I came here I got a job in New York City. I lived there for four years and then I moved to Worthington, Minnesota and after one month I had a job. That made me so happy because if I have a job, I can help my family with money.

Now I am going to start learning all the one hundred civics questions because I want to be a citizen. The only thing I can say is thank you to everyone at my school for putting this program together for us.

Miguel Miranda is originally from El Salvador.

Coming to America

ANONYMOUS, APPLE VALLEY

When I came to America it was autumn, at a time when the grass was green and the trees were different colors. There were yellow, deep orange, purple, and red leaves. I was so amazed by it, and I thought I was in paradise. Even though I don't like to shovel the driveway, the beauty of the weather is awesome.

In my country there is no freedom of speech or freedom of religion.

In America I have got all the freedom that I could ever imagine. I was FREE beyond my imagination, and I was scared not to lose my purpose in this vast amount of freedom. The freedom gave me countless opportunity to be what I can be, and strive for better things in life. For example, going to school, buying a house, and starting my own home-based business.

The people are so nice and welcoming and the beauty of the diversity is so lovely.

Living in America is one of the best things that happened to me. Especially in Minnesota I enjoy the seasons changing, going kayaking on the lake, and hiking with my family in the beautiful parks. Now

that am free, I never miss my church meeting, and I have become like a family with my small Bible study group. We are from different races and backgrounds, but we love and respect each other.

Coming to America

DAGMAWIT HAILE, APPLE VALLEY

My name is Dagmawit. When I came to Minnesota three months ago the weather was good, it was summer time. The next morning my husband showed me some places and stores. He bought some clothes and shoes from the Mall of America for me and I saw the Minnesota Zoo. At the Minnesota Zoo I saw different types of animals, such as tiger, gorilla and monkey, etc. After two days I applied the social security and ID card. My husband told me something, he said, "Speaking English is very important to improve your life, so you must learn." Then we went to apply to Apple Valley Adult Education and that is why I registered. Now each day I learned language. After class I went to my home and then I studied the manual for a driving license. After three days I took the exam, but I failed. The next day I took the exam again and passed. Currently, my husband helps me to practice how to drive and park. Soon I will take my driving test that I hope to pass. I will move on to the next goal in my life.

Dagmawit Hale is originally from Ethiopia.

My Journey to America

EFTU EBRO, CRYSTAL

I have four brothers and one sister. I got married in Ethiopia and, after that, my husband went to America and started the process for me to join him. After I finished my interview, my sister died and I was so upset. My family now only had one daughter and they did not want me to leave. I did not know what to do.

After a few months, I decided to go and I told them I would come visit and I could call on Skype

or on FaceTime. I also knew that I would visit them sometime. It was going to be alright and I came to the United States in 2012.

When I came to the U.S. I was nervous without family and friends. After I started school, I felt better about learning. I met my classmates, made friends and I feel really good now. Two years later, I became pregnant and now have a son. He is one year old. We come together to school and my husband and I are so happy to have him. We are such a happy family and we love each other very much.

Eftu Ebro is originally from Ethiopia.

My Story

EKRAM ABRAHIM, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Ethiopia in the East Harar Kombolcha region in 1994. My mother is Kimya Mahamed and my father is Abdella Mumad. I finished high school and graduated in 2010 with a Human Resource management diploma. After graduating school, I got married in 2010. I have one child. My child is a boy, now he is five years old.

In 2014, I went to Ambo to compete as an athlete representing the East region after I passed my athlete exam. I got a second place medal in the competition. The top athletes got to compete in America.

When I left Ethiopia, May 2016, not a long time ago, I went first to D.C. and waited seven hours there. I had no money or dollars and I was very hungry. I said to one person if she would please help me because I had no money and no information. She said okay and gave me something to eat.

Ekrum Abraham is originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

MESERET ABEBOW, ST. PAUL

I came from Ethiopia. I graduated and received a diploma in my country. Then I worked for six years as a secretary. On June 5, 2014 I came to America. I started English classes at the Hubbs Center. In

2016, I got a housekeeping and hospitality certificate from the Como International Institute. Now I am attending a Family Literacy Class and looking for a job.

Meseret Abebow is originally from Ethiopia.

My Journey

MUHYADIN AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

This is my history. My name is Muhyadin Ahmed. I come from Ethiopia. I was born January, 1987. I have lived in Minneapolis two years. I have five children. My children are all girls. I have twins. I am working for a big company, General Mills. I study English. My school's name is Open Door.

Muhyadin Ahmed is originally from Ethiopia.

Coming to America

MUNIBA IBRAHIM, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Muniba and I am from Ethiopia. I was born in 1992 in the city of Awaday. My parents have eight children. They have six girls, two boys, and I am the sixth. I started school when I was six years old and my favorite subject was English. I loved to read all of the time.

After many years, I got married and my husband left Ethiopia and began the process to bring me to the United States. One day he called me and said that I had an interview. He told me to prepare everything and that I would be in the U.S. in two months or less. I was so excited to finally see my love as I missed him a lot.

I started to think about how much I was going to miss my family, especially my youngest brother. We did everything together. Since I loved him so much, I decided that I was not going to go to America. I talked to my husband and he told me not to worry and that he promised that I could visit Ethiopia at any time. After I heard that, I was so excited and started to prepare for my move.

I arrived in 2012 in the winter time. My husband and his family came together and were waiting for me. I didn't know them but I knew that they were

family just like my own family in my country. I started to live my new life in the United States but talked with my parents everyday. After 15 months, my husband surprised me with a ticket to visit my family. He kept his promise that I could visit them at any time.

Now, I have three children. I have beautiful twin girls and one handsome boy. We live together as a happy family and I am so proud to have them in my life. I love them to death!

Muniba Ibrahim is originally from Ethiopia.

My Story

RIYAD HUSEN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Riyad Kedir Husen. I was born in Ethiopia. I have two brothers and a sister. They were both born in Ethiopia too. I attended high school in Ethiopia until ninth grade. When I came to the U.S. The weather was good, but now it is too cold. In my country I lived with my brothers, but now I live with my mother. I love my family and I help them.

Riyad Husen is originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

ELENI AMAN, ST. PAUL

My name is Eleni Aman Hussen. I was born In Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. When I was in Ethiopia, my big dream was to live in America. I went to Virginia first, for about two years. I was bored and confused there. Then, I moved to Minnesota. Now I am comfortable. I am married and have three children. One five-year-old boy, one three-year-old, and one two-year-old daughter. Sometimes I visit my big family in Toronto, Canada. They live with my mother. My father passed away in Toronto in 2015. I love my family.

Eleni Aman is originally from Ethiopia Harar.

My Story

ABDIAS CHAVEZ, WORTHINGTON

I'm from Guatemala. I came to the United States in the year 2004 to work to get my family along and give the best education to my children. I love my children. I always thank God for being allowed to be in this country and for giving me a beautiful family. I like this country more when it's summer because I like to go for walks with my family. I like the snow a little, but my kids like it a lot.

Abdias Chavez is originally from Guatemala.

My Life in the United States

OLIVIA ESTHER MONTERROSO, WORTHINGTON

When I came to the U.S. it was to Los Angeles, California. My first job was in office cleanup. I did that for one year. And then in 2008, I had the opportunity to get married. I moved to live with my husband in St. Paul, Minnesota. We lived in St. Paul for seven years. In 2015, my husband got a new job in Worthington, Minnesota. Today, we have four beautiful girls, and my priority is taking care of my family.

My plan is to study for my GED and learn more English. This is my story. Thank you for your time in reading it.

Olivia Esther Monterroso is originally from Guatemala.

Kenya and the U.S.

AFIFA MUHUMED, MINNEAPOLIS

Hi, my name is Afifa Muhumed. I was born and grew up in Kenya. I was born in 1990. Kenya is a beautiful place. It has many trees, animals, and mountains. Kenya is even more beautiful when it is the rainy season because when it is the rainy season the trees are green, the grass is green, and the sky is blue when the rain is gone. I learned the Quran in Kenya. Kenya is hot always. I lived there with my family from 1990 until 2007.

In 2007, I came to the U.S. as a refugee. When you are in another country and you hear about America, you think everything is easy... money on the ground, you just lay down and the food is coming to you as you are in your bed, and you can get money without work. That's what we think but when I came here I asked my uncle is this America or the forest of America? My uncle told me welcome to America, this is America. Then I learned that what we thought was not true, if you want money you have to work.

The U.S. is beautiful when it is summertime. The U.S. has many people, more than Kenya. One different thing between Kenya and the U.S. is in Kenya there is no snow at all, always it is summertime, but the U.S. has four seasons like summer and winter. Another different thing between Kenya and the U.S. is I never went to school in Kenya, but I went to school in the U.S. because the school in Kenya is far away from my home and I didn't have an electric wheelchair.

One day I will go back to my home country to see my family. I want to say thank you to the U.S. because it helped me go to school.

Afifa Muhumed is originally from Kenya.

The Shocking USA

FATUMO NOOR, ST. PAUL

My name is Fatimo Noor. I was born in Kenya, on the east side of Africa. I was in the twelfth grade in Kenya, before making my way to the United States of America. I flew from Nairobi to London, to New York, to Colorado. I was with five people in my family when I arrived in Colorado. I was thinking America was a wonderful place, until my first night in Colorado. I woke up red and itchy. I went to the doctor and found out I had bedbug bites. I told him, "in my country we don't have bedbugs." He just laughed. What a shock, this wonderful country has bedbugs.

Fatumo Noor is originally from Kenya.

Homesickness

POCHOUA LEE, ST. PAUL

On September 1, 2010, it was the first day of school. I very much wanted to go to school, but I couldn't because I had to come to the United States. However, I didn't want to go to the U.S. I really wanted to continue my studies and finish. What could I do if I went to the U.S. by myself? I had never flown in an airplane or left my family. But now I had to go to a new world that I had never seen. I really didn't know how long it would be that I could come back.

The next day, I came to the United States. All of my friends and family came to send me off. I was scared and nervous of being in the airplane. I didn't know how to speak any English. I was afraid that I would get lost somewhere else and wouldn't get into the U.S. I came with other people that I didn't know. I sat by the window and looked down at my wonderful land. I saw my beautiful hometown. I felt sad to leave my family and home. I also missed my family and friends. When I was in the airplane, I didn't eat anything at all because I couldn't swallow the food or maybe it was tasteless.

Then I arrived in the U.S. on September 5, 2010. My family here really loved me, but I still felt cold. My eyes turned red, and my tears dropped from my heart. I didn't want to live here anymore. I felt like a stranger that got lost in this world. I didn't feel comfortable with the cold weather. My body hadn't adjusted to the weather, so I got the flu. One week later, I felt much better so I started to go to school. I found some friends at school. They taught me everything about the U.S. They said, "It is a beautiful place to live in. It has four seasons. Each of the four seasons has its own secret." At that time I didn't know, but I saw a colorful leaf. I really loved it.

Finally, I fell in love with this country. My family loved and supported me. My friends and teachers were very nice to me. However, I'm really happy that this year I will visit my hometown and family in Laos!

Pochoua Lee is originally from Laos.

My Life Before and After the USA

ANITA LICONA,APPLEVALLEY

My name is Anita L. G. and I am from Puebla, Mexico. When I was a girl, I lived in my country. It was hard for me because I grew up with my grandma and I needed to work by myself. I studied elementary school there in the afternoon and I worked in the morning. It was like this until high school.

When I was 18 years old, I came to Phoenix, Arizona in the USA with my best friend. One year later, I met a great man, my husband. We got married, had a son and when our son was six months old we moved to Minnesota, because in Arizona we did not have family. One year later we had a baby girl, my life is really changed now. I'm very happy with my own family. I like living in Minnesota. This is a beautiful place to live although it is really cold in the winter. But my kids love to play in the snow and in the summer they love to go to swimming. Now I feel happy and I have the opportunity to learn English because it's necessary in this country.

I love and miss my country, but I want my kids to have better opportunities than I did.

Anita Licona is originally from Mexico.

Cristian's Story

CRISTIAN GARIJO LOPEZ, ST. PAUL

I was born in Colombia in 1991. I am adopted. My new parents came for me in 1993. They are Spanish from Spain. I went with them to Spain when I was two years old. I lived in Spain for eight years. After that I went to live in Mexico. I lived in Mexico for 15 years.

I came to Minneapolis on October 15, 2016. I want to learn English. Why? Because I need to learn so I can finish my studies.

My first time here I had a bad cold and I missed the beach of sun of Mexico. But Minnesota, you are beautiful. In St. Paul, I did not know anyone and I

was alone. But I met a girl who was very funny and spoke Spanish. She is from St. Paul, and she helped me. Minnesota is very beautiful with trees, lakes, and the Mississippi River. Sometimes I think it is a pretty place to live.

Cristian Garijo Lopez is originally from Mexico.

This is My Story About Coming to America

IVAN RODRIGUEZ, ROBBINSDALE

Hi, my name is Ivan Rodriguez and I was born in Colima, Mexico. I came to the USA when I was 14 years old. My life wasn't easy in Mexico so I decided that it was time to come to America and look for new job opportunities. I have been in the U.S. since 2000. I started working as a roofer with my brothers. I roofed until 2006 and then met a wonderful woman. She is now my wife, and we have been married for nine years. Right now we don't have any kids, but we will be parents next year. Thank you everyone, family and friends. God Bless you and God Bless America.

Ivan Rodriguez is originally from Mexico.

Leaving Mexico

LUIS C., ST. PAUL

Leaving our own country to come to the U.S. could be a hard decision to make for almost any person. For some people, it is the only way to have a good life and give their family a good quality of life.

In January of 2016, I wrote a story about my first day working in a hospital in Mexico and it was published in the Journeys book 2016. I was so excited about it, and I received a copy of the book because of my story. I could say that book is one of the greatest thing that I have. When I started to read it, every story taught me something.

In my own case, it was so hard to leave my country to come to the U.S. I came because my sister asked

me for help. She was having some emotional issues and she needed my support, so I decided to come.

Although I had my sister and some family in Minnesota, the fact of being so far from my parents was a big concern to me. Also leaving behind my friends and lovely cats.

Luis C. is originally from Mexico.

I Arrived in America

MARIA OLASCUAGA, COON RAPIDS

When I arrived in America, it was very cold and snowy outside. I've lived in Minnesota for about eight years. The one thing that hasn't changed is that I still hate snow because the snow and the ice are slippery, and I fall down when I go out, or slide on the road when I'm driving. I'm from Mexico. I miss my family in Mexico. It isn't too hard to learn another language and I do the best I can every day. I have three kids and sometimes we talk about our culture in Mexico. It is nice to remember our life in our country. I tell my kids stories about my childhood in Mexico. For me it's very hard to be far away from my family and friends in Mexico. But I came here to get a good job and a good education for my kids. Now I have a lot of friends at my job. They are good people and very friendly.

Maria Olascuaga is originally from Mexico.

Coming to Minnesota

SOLEDAD FLORES DE SANTANA, ST. PAUL

I came in July 2006

I came from Mexico to Minnesota

I came with many passports

I came with my keys

I came with my letters

My books from my parents

I left behind my house and my brothers and uncles

I miss my good friends

Soledad Flores de Santana is originally from Mexico.

When I Came to the United States

A. R., ST. PAUL

I came to the United States in May, 1988. At first all was difficult because I did not know anything about this country. After a few weeks, I got a work permit and all was easier. I started work and I could earn some money. I started picking tomatoes, lemons and squash. It was not hard for me to get to work because they take you to the workplace and back home. When I moved to Minnesota, it was harder. I did not understand English and I had to buy a car if I wanted to work.

Now all is different. I took English classes and now I can speak and understand some English. Now I have the chance to study for the citizenship test. I bought a small house in West St. Paul and later I brought my family. Now all has changed again. My kids started to learn English. It was hard for them. Now they are graduated from high school. They took another challenge and they started college. I hope they choose the right way.

A. R. is originally from Mexico.

My Life Story

MUNIRA GOBENA, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Munira. I came from Ethiopia. I came to the United States of America in November, 2016. When I came here I felt two things. I was happy to see my husband because he had been in the U.S. already for a long time. I was also sad because I knew I wouldn't see my family, my mother and my father, again for awhile.

Munira Gobena is originally from Minnesota.

The Difference Between the U.S. and Africa

YONIS AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My favorite place in Minnesota is the park. You see people having fun and animals. I can do many things like working, running and having fun with friends we see. In our hometown we don't get those kind

of chances, for example work, and the roads are different from here. When I first came to the U.S. I saw a lot of things I didn't have in my hometown. In the U.S. I like it when it's Summer and Fall months. You go to the park and you see different kinds of people everywhere you go, and the weather is different from my hometown.

Yonis Ahmed is originally from Nairobi, Kenya.

My History

FATE TUKE, ST. PAUL

I am from Oromia. When I first arrived in the U.S. I could not speak English at all. I didn't understand because American people speak very fast. Now I understand a little. I am studying English at the Hubbs Center adult school. I hope to improve my communication with people.

Fate Tuke is originally from Oromia.

Hard Work

NAWAF AL-DEBANI, MINNEAPOLIS

There are many things to be achieved by working and planning. Many people have a wish. Some of those wishes can come true without any action plan at all. This is what happened to me and I am still surprised.

I wished I could travel to America for tourism, but I did not have the money and I thought it would be impossible. I decided to marry two weeks before I got my bachelor's degree in engineering. Around the same time, I received news from the Ministry of Education that my wife would receive a scholarship to America. And, I got a scholarship along with my wife.

So, now we are in the United States to study, and I can see the country just as I had wished.

Nawaf Al-Debani is originally from Saudi Arabia.

My Story

ABDI ODUWA, MINNEAPOLIS

I came from Somalia and I live in the USA. When the civil war happened we fled from Mogadishu to a refugee camp in Kenya. I lived in the refugee camp

for 20 years, then I came to the United States in 2014. When I came here I felt happy because I felt my family and I were safe.

Abdi Oduwa is originally from Somalia.

Untitled

AMINA HUSSEN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Amina Hussen and I am from Ethiopia. I was born in Somalia and grew up there and I moved to Ethiopia where I got married and got seven children. I got my first child in 1993 and she has a son now. When I had seven children I moved to the USA to Texas in 2011. We were there about six months, then I came to Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2012 on February 16. I got a lot of experiences that I didn't know before. This country has helped me a lot and I am really glad to be here.

Amina Hussen is originally from Somalia.

Winter Story for Me and My Son

FADUMA FARAH, MINNEAPOLIS

Last year when we came to the USA in Minneapolis, it was difficult for us, because it was the first time we touched snow. But this year it will not be difficult, because my son likes snow and making snowmen. It is dangerous to drive in winter, but I don't have a car.

When I was at work my friend broke her leg on slippery snow. That was sad for me. This year I will be careful when I walk, because I am afraid to fall down. Me and my son like the sound when we walk on snow.

Faduma Farah is originally from Somalia.

America

FADUMO MATAN, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to America, I came to Minnesota. It was so hard. Everything was so different. After awhile, I liked it so much. At first I did not know the language. I did not have a car. The weather was cool and I did not have a job. I came with my family but

they needed help, but I couldn't help them because I was in need like them. Now I love this country because it has more benefits and I know I can do more with my life. I want to be someone one day. I want to be a teacher.

Fadumo Matan is originally from Somalia.

My First Job in America

FARTUN OSMAN, MINNEAPOLIS

I would like to tell about my first job in America. I had been in the United States for six months when I got it. It was in the airport. I was a cashier. I really liked everything about that job except the manager. She did not like my hijab. She told me to take it off and come to the job without it. I could not accept that because I had been wearing the hijab when I was hired.

After one year I applied for another job with the same company, but in a different store at the airport. When my former manager heard about my new job, she was super mad, but she could not do anything to make me to stay in her store and do whatever she liked.

The new job was easier and paid more money than my old job. My new manager was never upset about my hijab. I worked at the new job for three years. Then I got laid off because the store closed for remodeling. That was the last job I had outside of my home because I got married and started a family.

Fartun Osman is originally from Somalia.

My Journey

HAMDI HIRSI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Hamdi. I was born in Mogadishu in 1985. Mogadishu is the capital city in Somalia. I left Mogadishu in 2000 and went to Kenya. I lived in Nairobi and Mombasa. Then, in 2005 I got married to Omar. We lived in Kenya Kakuma camp. We got resettlement from USA. We appreciate the USA

government for helping us. We came to Salt Lake City, Utah, USA in 2007. We have a great family: two sons and five daughters. Finally, I am happy to be here and to raise my kids.

Hamdi Hirsi is originally from Somalia.

My Story

KAMILA JAMA, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Kamila Jama. I was born in Somalia. I am 36 years old and I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I have 4 children: three sons and one daughter. My oldest son is ten years old, the next one is five years old, the youngest one is two years old, and my daughter is eight years old.

I work three days a week and come to school four days a week at Volunteers of America. I like writing and reading. I like my culture, my country, and this country. I am happy I came to this country, too. I like my teacher because she teaches me things that I didn't know before. She helps me a lot. Thank you teacher.

Kamila Jama is originally from Somalia.

Adapting to a New Country

MARYAMA MOHAMUD, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Entering the USA wasn't easy for me but it was my family's choice and I couldn't deny it. The first time I came here, I was astonished by all of the snow and all of the cold weather. I asked myself, "Where are we now? Is this the end of the world or what?" I couldn't believe the weather in America, but now I know it's much different from my country, Somalia.

The first three months in the U.S. I didn't go to school because I was under the weather. After a little while, I started a school, made new friends, a new life, and learned a new language.

You may know how hard it can be to adapt to a new environment and what that can be like. Back home in Somalia, I finished sixth grade. When I came

to the U.S. on November 26, 2013, I started eighth grade in Rochester, New York, at Thomas Jefferson High School. I remember on the first day, my dad brought me to school and the principal brought me to my first class. It was scary because not many people spoke my language, and I didn't know English, so I couldn't communicate with people. Eventually, my English improved and I made a lot of new friends.

I lived in New York for two years, and then I moved here, to Minneapolis, Minnesota. I currently live in Columbia Heights, and I attend the Adult Education Center. My goal is to pass the GED and go to college.

Maryama Mohamud is originally from Somalia.

Coming To America

MOHAMED WARSAME, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Mohamed Warsame. I'm from Somalia. I came to the United States in October 2006. The first state I came to was North Carolina. I have enjoyed the USA since I came because the people I have seen are very polite and kind and they helped me with everything I need. This USA and the people that live here are very good. They have good character. My idea is most people are honest, but maybe some people they are not kind and honest. The conclusion: The United States is a good place for a better life. But something is wrong: it's very cold in the winter.

Mohamed Warsame is originally from Somalia.

A New Place

NASRI ABDI, MINNEAPOLIS

When I first came to United States, I met many difficult things for me. First, I was confused about a new culture, such as language. Second, I didn't know how to drive. Third, I didn't know how to look for a job. And also when I started a new school, I took a wrong bus for my home. Then I lost my way. I couldn't speak to the bus driver. After that, I was tired. Finally I got home.

Nasri Abdi is originally from Somalia.

Now I'm American

NIMO YUSUF, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Nimo Yusuf. I am from Somalia. I came to the United States in 2000. When I arrived the surprising thing I saw was the snow around the airport and I couldn't see the ground. I asked my sister why the airport looked muddy and rough. "Is this how America looks like?" me and my sister asked each other. Then we took a bus to go to the hotel and they provided us dinner. The dinner was chicken and rice which I didn't like the taste of because it was the first day I tasted American food. Now I like American food. Now I'm American and I like to eat American food.

Nimo Yusuf is originally from Somalia.

My Life in America

SHUKRI ALI, ST. PAUL

My name is Shukri. I am from Somalia. I have two sisters and two brothers. My mom stays home and my dad works.

Education is very important to me. When I was in Somalia I went to school. Most subjects were taught in Arabic. When I came to the USA, I began school in the ninth grade. I graduated in 2009. I started school at the Hubbs Center in October to improve my English for college.

I work with kids. I love working with them. When I am at work, I am always happy. I am also happy to have all of my family here and healthy. Additionally, I am happy to be getting a free education in the U.S. Moving to the U.S. was a right move for me.

Shukri Ali is originally from Somalia.

My Journey

SHUKRI YUSUF, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Shukri. I was born in Somalia. I grew up in Somalia. I have five sisters and brothers.

When I was a child, my mother took care of me. She always gave me good advice. She always said to me, "Don't be angry, because if you are an angry person,

the people will not like you.” My mother told me, “Be a nice person and help the people who are weak and can’t do their job—like the elderly people and the ones who don’t have kids.” My mother’s legacy was learning, because no knowledge is darkness.

I finished high school in 1991. Civil war started and government stepped down. I evacuated to the country. In 1993 we arrived in Kenya. I liked Kenya because I came to a new country, and I learned a lot of things I didn’t know before. I never forgot how they would come for us and treated us, but Kenyan Police aren’t good at all. When they caught me and asked for my legal papers, I said “I don’t have any legal immigration papers.” The policemen said, “You have to pay money. Otherwise I am going to send you to jail.”

After five years my husband sent me a visa to enter the U.S. I came in May of 1998. I came to the U.S. when it was summertime. The trees were beautiful. The ground is grassy and green, and the weather was very nice.

I am grateful for my life in America. On a typical day, I wake up early. I brush my teeth. I like to take a shower. After that I make coffee. I drink a cup of coffee then the coffee wakes me up and I feel active. I start my daily routine. I prepare my children to go to school. When they leave, I get ready to go to my work.

I am a quiet person in morning, and I am angry when someone is talking too much. I am active and strong. I do all my work in daytime. I like to help older people or children if they need help. I am kind. If I see something in the street, I like to pick it up.

I don’t like ungrateful persons. I am grateful. If I’m not a grateful person God would not like me.

Shukri Yusuf is originally from Somalia.

Coming to America was My Childhood Dream

SAULE KHAN, APPLE VALLEY

My name is Saule Khan. I’m from Almaty, Kazakhstan. When I was 10 years old an American girl lived with my family as an exchange student. She was from

Minnesota. She told me a lot of interesting things about America, the people and the culture. After she told me about America I started to dream about moving to the U.S. Then I grew up, finished school and university in my country. I got married to a great man, whose childhood dream was moving to America too! We took part in green card lottery and won. It was a miracle! We couldn’t believe on it, because it is very hard to win – the chance of winning is 1.5%. So we are lucky guys!

When all of the case documents were ready I arrived to America with my husband and daughter. My American sister from Minnesota warmly welcomed us, helped us start in everything. Now my husband has found a good job, my daughter has started studying in elementary school, and I’m learning English. Everything is like my childhood dream come true. But there is only one very sad thing – my relatives are so far away. I hope in the future they will be able to come to us, and then I will be absolutely happy.

Saule Khan is 34 and originally from Almaty, Kazakhstan.

My Life in Thailand

NAY MOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Nay Moo. My date of birth is July 1, 1995. I was born in Mae Jae Village. The Village is nearby the Salween River. I lived in that place about two years. Then I moved to another place, because of the Burmese army, they came to our Village and burned our houses. During that time me and my family all moved to another place called Salah. It is the first place I moved to. We lived there about six years. At that time I was like 12 years old. I was a student and I was about 2nd grade. I studied at Salah Number 2 High School. I studied there for four or five years and then I moved to another place called Mae la Oon, because of the flood that’s why we had to walk away from them. I stayed there about four years until like 4th grade.

In 2012 I came to the U.S. I lived in Minnesota about four almost five years now. The first year

when I came here to the US I was like 16 years old. When I came here I went to LEAP High School. I studied at LEAP about four years, then I came to GAP School, because I am over 20 years old. That's why I can't stay at that high school any more. Now I turned 21 years old. I study in GAP School. I like to prove myself to be a good student and work hard for the future. Because the country has much higher education than in other countries, I have to work hard and follow the rules. This country has a lot of rules that we have to follow. If we do not follow their rules we will get trouble for real. So everybody has to be cool with each other and understand each other when we live in Country. I hope everybody has to try to get a better life for the future one day.

Nay Moo is 21 and originally from Burma.

My Story

DAH LER, ST. PAUL

My name is Dah Ler. I came from the NuPoe Refugee Camp in Thailand. I am 24 years old. I have three sisters and two brothers. I am the youngest.

In 2011 I moved to the USA with my parents. We came here because we wanted to have enough food, a job, and some money. In 2012 and 2013 I went to high school for two and one half years, but I did not graduate, because I had trouble with English.

In 2014 I got a job. I worked for one month and then I had to quit because I had no one to help me get to work. Then I stayed home all day and night and was bored because I had nothing to do, so I called my boyfriend. He lives in Colorado and I live in Minnesota. Someday he will come to pick me up and I will go with him to Colorado and we will get married. Now we have one child, 15 months old. He loves his dad more than me. Anyway, I love him with all my heart.

Dah Ler is 24 and originally from Burma.

A Better Life

KMYEE SHEE, ST. PAUL

My name is Kmyee Shee. When I first came to the United States I was 19 years old and pregnant with my son. I arrived in Minnesota on July 23 and my son was born on August 19. I came to the U.S. without my husband. I had many problems, because I couldn't speak English very well and I missed my husband so much. I didn't want to go to school, because I didn't want my son to get cold. I needed to carry my son's car seat with me whenever we went to the clinic. It was hard for me because the car seat was heavy for me. After one year my husband arrived in the U.S. and I was so happy to see him. Now I have two kids, one boy and one girl. I thank God so much for watching over our family. Now, our life is getting better and I am happy to live in Minnesota, but I don't like the snow that much. Thanks for reading my story.

Kmyee Shee is 24 and originally from Burma.

Life in a Refugee Camp

PAW DELZIA DELZIA, ST. PAUL

I am from the Karen state in Burma. For over 10 years my family had to stay in a refugee camp in Thailand. While living in the refugee camp I couldn't go out anywhere because I was not a Thai citizen. I didn't have enough money to buy food and clothes. I didn't have a car so I had to walk one hour to school. There are three high schools in Mae Ra Moe Camp.

A few years ago, my family got the chance to come and live in the U.S. Since coming to the USA, I have been eating meat everyday, every morning and every evening. In the camp we were given rations of poor quality of rice, yellow beans, and fish paste. We could afford to buy only a few vegetables. Some people had a small garden. Meat was very expensive in Thailand, so we ate it only once a month. Juice was also expensive, so we drank water. I am happy to be in America, where I can eat what I want, whenever I want it.

Paw Delzia Delzia is 26 and originally from Burma.

From Burma to Minnesota Via a Refugee Camp and Texas

EH BLU HTOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Eh Blu Htoo. I was born in a Karen village in Burma. I have three sisters and one brother. My mom and dad were farmers in our Karen village. We had cows, buffalo, cats, and dogs. Because the Burmese soldiers were killing Karen people, we moved to a refugee camp in Thailand. I came to the U.S. in 2009. I lived in Texas first. I got married and pregnant in Texas. I also had a job in Texas. The agencies were not good in Texas, so we came to Minnesota. I have four children: two boys and two girls. We are a big happy family. God Bless you all. Thank you.

Eh Blu Htoo is 28 and originally from Burma.

Coming to America

MA HLA WIN, ST. PAUL

I came to America on March 25, 2008. When I first got here, I was so sad. I didn't know about the weather until I got here. I was so cold. I didn't know how to go shopping, go to the clinic, and I didn't know how to speak English. I didn't understand people talking to me and I didn't know how to respond to them. I had to go to school and make an appointment to see a doctor. I had to call someone to help me with everything. I had to apply for food stamps and health care. It is hard to look for a job here, if people don't speak English. I thought to myself, I live here and life is very hard. So I cried. I wanted to talk to my mother, but I didn't have a phone, so I borrowed my neighbor's phone. I talked to my husband and said, "We have to get a better life and know how to speak, read, and write English to help ourselves." Right now I feel better because I know a little English. My life is better and I feel happy with myself.

Ma Hla Win is 28 and originally from Burma.

My Life in America

KEE PAW, ST. PAUL

When I came to the United States, I thought life was very difficult. On the first day, I was really hungry. I wanted to eat food from my country, but I didn't see any. My case worker brought me pizza, hamburgers, and juice, but I didn't want to eat these things. I had never, in my life, seen them before.

I also had trouble about transportation. Every month my son had an appointment for WIC. WIC doesn't have transportation. It took me two hours to get to WIC. When my son, who was 11 months old, had an appointment, I put him in a stroller and we walked to WIC. We did that for almost one year.

Then, I had a problem at work. My case worker found a job for my husband. He didn't have a car and he couldn't speak English. He rode his bicycle to work. He worked for eight months and then he bought a car. His friend sold him one for a thousand dollars and then work became better for him. Our life is becoming easier in the United States.

Kee Paw is 33 and originally from Burma.

My Story

O. MERRY MERRY, ST. PAUL

I was born in Myanmar. I have two brothers and four sisters. I am the youngest. I lived in Myanmar until I was 21. Then I moved to Thailand. Next, I lived in Malaysia for two years. Then I registered for a refugee to the United Nations. I came to the United States five years ago. First, I lived in Austin, Texas for six months. Then, I moved to Minnesota and worked for two years. I got married and had a baby, so I stopped working. My child is so cute to me.

My mom and sisters are still in Myanmar. I miss them so much. My dad passed away when I was two. My mom and sisters took care of me. I will never forget their kindness.

Now I attend a Family Literacy Program three days a week. God bless everyone who reads my story. Thank you.

O. Merry Merry is 36 and originally from Burma.

This is My Story

AMY CHO, WORTHINGTON

My name is Amy Cho. I'm from Burma. I came to America on March 25, 2008. I arrived in Missouri at midnight. In the morning I saw a lot of trees. "Oh my God," I thought, "American trees have all died!" When I left my country the trees were green. I didn't know it would be different here.

Three months later I went to work at a restaurant. I had a friend help me. She spoke Thai. When I went to work my boss taught me English and explained the words to me. During the daytime, I went to school. I lived in Missouri for eight months then moved to Minnesota.

I take care of my kids and go to school. School is fun now. I understand more English now. Also, all of my teachers are very good. They taught me to understand English.

Amy Cho is 42 and originally from Burma.

Helping with Travel to the USA

MAMYATINAYE PEH LEH, ST. PAUL

I'm from Refugee Camp in Thailand, but I was born in Burma. My mom, my grandfather, and my uncle made a big difference in my life. They told me, "Right now the U.S. is inviting refugees to come to the U.S. We hope you go with your family. Mostly, we hope your children graduate, and go to college, and get a better job that they like."

Then I discussed with my family and decided to go to the U.S. Step one: I met with an I.O.M. officer to apply to the U.S. They copied my family's ID and Household Registration Document and sent them to U.S. They said, "You may wait for one year for the U.S. to send back information for your interview."

In 2010, I got an interview for the whole family at the O.P.E. Office. They asked us about the problem when we lived in Burma. I told them about when Burmese soldiers came to our village, and we

moved into the forest and there our family didn't have enough food to eat. When the soldiers needed a porter, they would catch people to carry their food and bullets, and other things. After we had the interview, they said they would send it to the U.S. again. This time, we waited for approval of our interview.

On August 9, 2010, I got a letter Notice of Eligibility for Resettlement. They said your application for refugee status in the United States has been approved. In the letter, there was the D.H.S. Travel and Interview Date. We went to O.P.E. Office to find out the state where we would go. And they took photograph of my family to show how many people would travel to U.S.

On August 27, 2010, the transportation picked up my family to go to Mae Sot, at the Pawa Hospital. The nurse checked our family's chest X-Ray, and TB physical examination. Then in January, we completed two days of intensive cultural orientation. An I.O.M. officer showed us movies about how people travel on airplanes, and what to say in English when someone gave something to us. And then they gave us the brochure, "Asking for assistance."

On January 27th, our family left the Refugee Camp. We departed from Thailand, and flew to Swaziland, then New York, and then Minnesota. I came with my family, including my husband and two children. When I was on the flight I told them I felt nausea through all three flight to Minnesota. I had never traveled on an airplane, I just saw them in the movies, I want to say thank you to everyone for help.

Mamyatinaye Peh Leh is 43 and originally from Burma.

Coming to America

LIHUI ZHANG, CHAMPLIN

Why I came to America? I have a few reason why I came. I met my husband, we weren't married. We had our first kid 11 months later. My husband moved to the United States. After three months my husband went to China, married me, and I applied to come to the United States. The second year we got our second son. I waited almost five years, my old son

was almost five years older. I wanted to register first grade for him, but the school needed me to provide my second child's unprocessed certificate. I didn't have my second child's unprocessed certificate. The school didn't give my older child registration to first grade. Later I got a letter from U.S. Consulate. Then I got a U.S. Visa. This is first reason.

Second reason: I lived in Shenzhen by Hong Kong. My sister-in-law lived in Hong Kong. I went to the police office. I want a certificate to visit my sister-in-law. They wouldn't give it to me. I was very mad.

I love the USA I love freedom. I like the U.S. policies.

Lihui Zhang is 42 and originally from China.

Crossing Borders

JOSE RAFAEL RAMOS, ST. PAUL

When I came to the United States for the first time, I was 13 years old. I thought everything was different than my home country, Mexico. The people, language, food, and even the schools were different. At first I wanted to go back to my country, because I missed my friends so much, but I didn't have a choice. I had to obey my parents and go to school. After a couple of months I made friends and even had my first girlfriend in my new school. I went to school for three years, but didn't graduate because I went back to Mexico. After 15 years, here I am again, and I am trying to get my GED. I'm going to school to accomplish my goals. It is never too late.

Jose Rafael Ramos is 34 and originally from Durango, Mexico.

Big Changes

SILVIA SARASTI, ST. PAUL

Many people in my country are dying to come to the United States. It is a dream to get to this country of opportunities, but not me. So why am I here now? I had never thought of living in the United States; however, my circumstances changed and I had to accept them. I was an ESL teacher in Ecuador. The big changes in my life began when I got a scholarship to study ESL in Kentucky. I was very happy to get it, but

I did not know what would happen. The scholarship was for a seven month course at the University of Kentucky. I had planned to go back to my country to teach ESL again, but a special person came into my life. We dated and got married two and a half years later. I had to move to Minnesota. I am happy now because I am living with my dear husband, but I am missing my family in Ecuador.

Silvia Sarasti is 40 and originally from Ecuador.

With God's Help I Will Be a Part of This Great Country

LUIS VASQUEZ VASQUEZ, ST. PAUL

My immigration experience started on September 9, when I crossed the border from El Salvador and Guatemala on the way to the EEUU. When I stepped on Mexican soil I faced many dangers: hunger, thirst, violence, and nature. On the border of Mexico and the United States, I slept on the shore of the Bravo River. I did not eat and I drank water from the river. When I got on American soil, I was arrested by immigration agents and transported to a detention center where I spent four months. I was released after paying \$5,000. Today I am free, but an immigration judge will decide my legal status or deport me. I believe God will help me be a part of this great nation, the land of opportunities.

Luis Vasquez Vasquez is 22 and originally from El Salvador.



Thank You America

MARIA ALVAREZ, ST. PAUL

Hello. My name is Maria Alvarez. I am from El Salvador. I have been here since I was 15 years old. I am now 31. I am writing to say thank you to all the people of Minnesota for making me feel welcome and safe. I

remember when I came here, I got lost in downtown. It was very cold, because it was February. Some people asked me if they could help me, but I didn't understand them. Finally, a man asked me if he could give me a ride. I was scared, but I said yes, because I did not know my way home. I was very cold. He took off his coat and put it on me. I couldn't speak English, so I just gave him a paper with my address on it. The whole way home I was praying, because I was afraid this man could hurt me or take me to the wrong place. I have found so many wonderful people who have helped me. I feel so blessed for being in such a wonderful country. I also want to thank my teacher Marilyn, for all of her support. Thank you for being so sweet and wonderful.

Maria Alvarez is 31 and originally from El Salvador.

Never Too Late

RENE HERRERA, ST. PAUL

My name is Rene. I am from Santa Ana, El Salvador. When I came to America, my first dream was to learn English, for I spoke only Spanish. I also dreamed of graduating from high school in the U.S. My father was unable to help me with my dream, for he had to pay a person to bring me to the United States, because he said it is very dangerous for me to leave El Salvador. However, in November 2005, he was able to help me come to the United States. I was 22 years old then and I could not study in a high school. I am happy to say, it is never too late in this country. I am studying English in an ELL seven class, and the next step is studying for the GED.

Rene Herrera is 33 and originally from El Salvador.

Coming to America

KALKIDAN HAILE, MINNEAPOLIS

The first time I came to America I was so excited and happy. I came to America alone. After a few days I felt lonely. I missed my family. I stayed with my cousins. I especially I missed my mom. When I was in Ethiopian she helped me with everything.

In America there are many challenging things such as the weather. It is so cold and it is difficult to adapt also to find a job was hard. No one was helping

me with this stuff. The good thing was I faced the challenges myself. I found a job. I tried to adapted to weather. I wore thick clothes. I studied English. Thing became better than before.

Kalkidan Haile is 23 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I am from Ethiopia. I came to the United States 11 years ago. I am single and I have 5 brothers and 2 sisters. We are all living in the United States. We are beautiful. I want the best for them. I am happy because I am attending school, and it makes me feel happy and proud. I work hard and help my family and support them. We bought the American dream house. It has six bedrooms, a four stall garage, a small back yard and we have kind neighbours. My life wants to move forward.

From Ethiopia to the U.S.

HABEN BAHTA, ST. PAUL

I am from Ethiopia. I came to the U.S. to have a better life, in December 2014. I have one son. We live in St. Paul. We have been here for two years. When I came out of the airport it was very cold. I saw snow for the first time. I was surprised. Everything is new here. My life is amazing.

Haben Bahta is 27 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Story

LAMROT MAMMO, ST. PAUL

On February 19, 2015 I arrived in Texas from Ethiopia. I was eight months pregnant with my second baby. She was born on March 28. After seven months I moved to Minnesota. I am happy to be in Minnesota because my children have insurance. In Texas we lived with my husband's cousin. Now we have our own home. I am very happy my children and I have

a good school here. The children have good teachers and so do I. Minnesota has been very helpful to my family.

Lamrot Mammo is 32 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

YIFTUSIRA BEYENE, ST. PAUL

I came to the United States from Ethiopia on June 10, 2014. I have one son and one daughter. When I got here, I saw snow for the first time. Everything here is new for me. I was bored. Now I am not so bored, because I am going to school. I am happy.

Yiftusira Beyene is 33 and originally from Ethiopia.

Coming to America

GENET TEGEGN, ST. PAUL

My name is Genet. I am from Ethiopia. I am married and have one daughter and one son. When I came to America in November 2014, my life was completely changed. The USA is so different than Ethiopia. The first year was very difficult. I had to adapt to a whole new system and the weather. Everything in the U.S. is technology. For example, I had to learn to shop online. Transportation in the U.S. is better than my country, but it was not simple to learn everything. Over time I learned the system by communicating with other people. There is so much to learn about life in America.

Genet Tegegn is 35 and originally from Ethiopia.

Coming to America

YODIT GEBREWOLD, ST. PAUL

I was born in Addis Abbaba, Ethiopia. I came to the United States of America on June 16, 2009. I remember a lot of snow, which I had never seen before. At first, life in America was very difficult for me and my two children, one boy and one girl. I was not able to speak English, so communicating, shopping, and taking public transportation was very difficult. I remember my brother supporting me by

trying to build my self-confidence. After four months I started working. Everything changed for the better. I began to understand the American system, and it became easier to solve problems. Now life is good. I am happy, thank God. God bless you!

Yodit Gebrewold is 44 and originally from Ethiopia.

I'm From Guatemala

SUCELY GERONIMO LOPEZ, WORTHINGTON

I came to the USA in October, 2008. It was a total change in my life. I was happy because my mom was here, but at the same time very sad because my brothers stayed in my country. And I got more sad because my mom's boyfriend was a drunk and beat her. I wanted to study but could not and had to work. When I started working I was living alone. I was very sad here because of the changes. But my boyfriend makes me happy, and I am happier because I have two great reasons to live. That is because of my daughters.

Sucely Geronimo Lopez is 27 and originally from Guatemala.

My Life

JOSE HERNANDEZ, WORTHINGTON

I'm from Guatemala. I came here 30 years ago. When I crossed the border I had to walk three miles. I had to hide in the bushes because immigration was looking for illegal people. Before I came here I thought that the United States was a beautiful country but it is very hard to live here. I miss my family, my friends, and everything. I didn't understand English when I came here. I just only said, "okay," "oh right," and "no problem." I was working on a farm in California and this is how I got my paperwork. The reason that I came to the United States is for a better life. I didn't study enough in my country and I came to school to learn English and I have more opportunities here in the United States.

Jose Hernandez is 51 and originally from Guatemala.

About Me

RUBIA VARGAS, ST. PAUL

My name is Rubia Vargas. I am from Honduras. I am 31 years old. I am married and have four children. I came to the U.S. in 2003. When I got here everything was different. I started working to help my family. It was very hard for me, because I did not understand anything. When I spoke to my supervisor, thank God, I succeeded. Now I live happily with my husband and my children. I love this country. It has given me so many good things.

Rubia Vargas is 31 and originally from Honduras.

About My Life

HAKPHANG THAO, ST. PAUL

My name is Hakphang Thao. I was born in Vientiane Laos. My date of birth is 11/03/1997.

I lived in Laos for 18 years. When I lived in Vientiane every day I went to school. My school's name is Nousawa high school. My school is near the river. Every day I went to school by bicycle.

In 2015 I moved to another place. I moved to the USA. When I came to the USA on 05/13/2015 I was so happy because I wanted to see my mom, my dad and my younger sisters. They moved to the U.S. in 2009.

After I moved here, one day my family went to the park. I saw many birds and many squirrels playing and singing I was so happy when I saw many animals in the park because I felt like when I lived in Laos.

The first time I went to school here I didn't know how to speak English and I couldn't find my class. Everything was very new for me.

On 11/29/2015 I went to the Hmong New Year in California. I saw my wife over there and I married her over there too. She's very beautiful and very important in my life. So right now I live with my mom, my dad, my sisters, and my wife. We live in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Every day my mom and my dad go to work and

my wife goes to St. Paul College, but I go to school. I don't have a job. I want to go to work too but my mom, my dad, and my wife say to me that I need go to school and finish school first, and I shouldn't worry about money. I am so lucky.

Every night I think about my future and what I need to do because right now I don't know how to do anything for my future. But I will learn more English and learn more at school so my family will have a better future.

Hakphang Thao is 19 and originally from Laos.

What Surprised Me When I Came To the U.S.

CHUEVANG, BROOKLYN PARK

I came to the United States on June 25, 2010. The houses surprised me because when I was in Laos, I saw a lot of American Movies. I just saw the high and big buildings, so I always thought the U.S. was the prettiest in the world. However, when I saw it in real life, "sight" it was not that pretty and all the houses in the United States have a basement so that surprised me too.

Money surprised me too because when I was in Laos, I always thought that all people who lived in the United States were rich because when people from the United States came to visit us, they spent a lot of money and they wore very clean and new clothes and shoes. But when I came here and saw the real situation "oh boy" I realized that there were also homeless people like anywhere.

The nature surprised me too because I always thought in my mind that the United States would have a lot of flowers and had green jungles and I thought we would live near the ocean but since I have been here, I have never gone to see the ocean.

Clothes surprised me because when I came to the United States and my sisters-in-law took me with them to shop at Express, New York Company and Banana Republic, "oh my god" all the clothes were so expensive. I bought one skirt at Banana Republic; it cost \$99.99. I spent \$500.00 and I just got six or

seven pieces of clothes because I had never seen that before. But now I'm used to buying these expensive clothes so they do not seem that expensive anymore if I really like the dresses or clothes.

Chue Vang is 25 and originally from Laos.

My First Days Here

THIA LEE, ST. PAUL

I came to the United States on December 7, 2008. My husband told me to dress for winter because it was cold in December, but I didn't know how cold it was. When I got out in the airplane, I felt the wind blowing so cold. I had never felt cold like this before. When my father-in-law drove us home, I looked out the window and saw the trees white with snow. People lived with winter for a long time, so I could, too.

At first, I heard conversations in English. When people talked to each other, they just talked in English, which I didn't know or couldn't talk back to them. I felt like I knew nothing. I was lonely. During the third day of my first week of school, my husband forgot to take me home. When I finished class, I didn't see him. I went to the front desk and made two phone calls, but I just heard a woman's voice and I didn't know what she was saying. I didn't know how to ask the woman who was sitting there and I didn't know that telephones had area codes. So, I just sat there and waited and waited for my husband come. That made me understand that English was important, and I would have to learn.

In the U.S. you must know how to drive because you cannot wait for someone to take care of you all the time. You had to help yourself, too. It was difficult for me when I wanted to go to the store, because I didn't know how to drive a car. If no one had time to take me to school, then I couldn't go to school. After that, I told myself, I should practice driving a car. Finally, I learned.

Finally, learning about snow, English and driving are not easy, but all these helped me improve my life.

Thia Lee is 28 and originally from Laos.

Getting Over Homesickness

XONG LOR, BROOKLYN CENTER

I arrived in America on December 16, 2006, with my husband. I was excited to see my new home and the new country, but I was also upset that my family couldn't come with me.

We arrived at the Minnesota airport at midnight. There was light everywhere over the Twin Cities. It looked totally different from my home country, but it was very beautiful. When we got off the the airplane, my husband's family welcomed me with lots of flowers. I was happy and also nervous, because I'd never met my husband's family before. I was excited to come here, but then I saw a lot of snow when we drove home from the airport.

When I left my family at the airport of my home country I couldn't say any words to them. I was too upset that I would be separated from them. I felt like something was stuck in my throat, and I felt like my heart was going to be torn apart. Since I was born, I was never separated from my family. At that moment I wanted to change my mind, and not come to the United States with my husband. But I couldn't do that because in our culture when you get married you have to move out to live with your husband and his family.

When we were here for only two days, I had to stay home alone. My husband had to go back to work. I wanted to go out, but I couldn't drive, and I couldn't speak English. The only words I knew were "Hi" and "Thank you." I was afraid when people talked to me or knocked on the door. I was homesick. I called my mom almost every day, and I told her that I didn't want to stay here anymore. I felt alone in this world.

Finally, I got to go out. My husband registered for school at the Brooklyn Center High School Adult ESL program. He also took me to the DMV to get my driver's permit which took three tries! After a day, a week, a month, and a year passed, I had many friends! I was pregnant with my first child. Also my husband sponsored my parents to come live with us in the United States, so I wasn't homesick anymore.

Xong Lor is 29 and originally from Laos.

The U.S. and My Country

KER YANG, BROOKLYN CENTER

When I came to the U.S., I was overwhelmed. I didn't know how to start my life. I was struggling for everything because the language here is different than my language. I thought about how to go back to my country, but I couldn't do anything about it. I thought I had to endure life in the U.S.

One of the good things that have happened to me is that I got to know about Jesus. When I became a Christian my life started to calm down. My friend said, "Ker your life is successful, that is something you have and I don't have it." I said, "Well we are just about the same, no one is better than the other one, but the thing that I have and you don't is Jesus." She didn't reply after that anymore.

I like the U.S. because they have enough vaccinations for everyone who needs them. That is why people don't have a lot of sickness like in my country. In my country there aren't enough vaccinations for all people, that why we have more sickness. What I like about the U.S., better than in my country, is the education. The education is open to everyone for their lifetime and it is always available.

Ker Yang is 45 and originally from Laos.

Why the United States?

YIA THAO, ST. PAUL

My family and I came to the United States because my country was in a civil war. We lost our country, so we had no choice but to leave. Our immigration papers were accepted, so we came to the USA for a better life. They are still fighting in my country, so we are happy to be in the U.S.

Yia Thao is 46 and originally from Laos.

My Name is Thomas Khenkitisak

CHANSAMOUTH (THOMAS) KHENKITISAK,
WORTHINGTON

My name is Thomas Khenkitisak. I'm from the very nice country of Thailand. I remember that my house was not very big in my country, but 11 people lived in it. I have five brothers and four sisters. My Dad and Mom passed away in Thailand. Every time my family had a problem we helped each other. They never said you do this, or you do that. We worked together all the time. When I stayed with my family I was so happy. Now I am married, and I have three kids, one daughter and two sons. I came to the U.S. to make my life a lot better. When I lived in my country I wanted to be a lawyer, but here I have to go to school to learn to speak and write English well, and to learn to listen well to understand. One interesting thing about me is I want to help people understand the English language as an interpreter. When people from Thailand go to see the doctor, they can't speak very good English, and when the doctor tells them to take medicine, they might not understand. They need an interpreter to help them understand what the doctor tells them.

Chansamouth (Thomas) Khenkitisak is 57 and originally from Laos.

A Little History of my Life

ANONYMOUS, BROOKLYN CENTER

Hello, my name is Maria and I'm from Mexico. I lived with my grandparents for 18 years. Because my parents were too poor, they came to the U.S.

I saw my father for the first time when I was 15 years old, when he returned to Mexico. I met my mother for the first time when I was 18 years old, when I came to Minnesota.

I like Minnesota very much because in Minnesota there is a lot of respect for people, there is not much crime, and it is a beautiful state. But I miss my Grandmother, the Mexican food, my friends, and my family.

Jobs and Security

ARACELIS TELEFOR, ST. PAUL

I was born in Mexico. I came to the United States in 2009. I have two brothers and three sisters. One brother and two sisters live in Mexico with my mom. One brother lives in Georgia. One sister lives with me in Minnesota. I came to the U.S. because my country has no jobs. I need opportunity. I have been in America for seven years. I have no plans to go back to my country now. There is too much violence in Mexico. I will stay in America with my family where there is security.

Aracelis Telefor is 31 and originally from Mexico.

My Personal Migration Story

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Mexico. Mexico is a nice and beautiful place. I was studying at high school in 2005 when my dad got sick. He went to see the doctor and the doctor said "He has heart disease." It costs a lot of money. We didn't have money for the treatment. I decided to come to the United States. I crossed the desert by walking, I walked for 10 days. I arrived in Phoenix, Arizona. I stayed three days. After that I took a bus to come to Minneapolis. It took me over 28 hours to be here. One week after I stayed here, I found a job. Two weeks after I sent money to my parent. My dad started his treatment. My dad survived for over five years after he started his heart treatment.

My Personal Migration Story

EDIHT P. GONZALEZ BELLO, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Ediht, I was born in Mexico in 1980. Mexico is a very poor city to live. It is very difficult to find a job, and if you don't have a job it means you will not have money to buy food. The reason why I came to the United States was because I wanted to get a job to save money and start building my

own house and have a place to live. One reason that pushed me to come to the United States was the unemployment in my country, at the same time that is the reason that pulled me to come to the United States. One advantage to live in U.S. is the job opportunities and one of the important thing for me is I have plentiful food. The only thing I do not like about this country is the climate in winter, it is really bad.

Ediht P. Gonzalez Bello is 36 and originally from Mexico.

Minnesota Fan

EZEQUIEL GONZALEZ, ROSEVILLE

When I first came to the U.S., I experienced sadness because I left behind my friends and girlfriends and my family. But my mom was the one that I missed most of all. When I called my mom by telephone, she cried almost all the time, and I was trying not cry but it wasn't easy. I missed her cooking because Mexican food prepared here doesn't taste as good as in Mexico. The food was different for me.

I was frightened when I drove a car and saw a police officer. Why? Because I didn't have a driver's license at that time. I didn't know what I do. I was nervous and afraid. Also, I felt alone because I didn't know anyone.

But some things were good. September and October were the first months that I started living in St. Paul. It was wonderful because the weather was very good. It was not hot, not cool, but the perfect weather. Everything was green: the trees, grass, plants. Also there were lakes and rivers. People could walk and play different sports and do many more activities. It was very different from the place where I had lived for more than five years. That place I called the gray place because there weren't trees, grass, flowers, lakes, or rivers. Nothing. It was a desert. Also there was a lot of crime. Nobody walked or played outside because it was too dangerous. After those first beautiful months here came December and the snow. Everything was white. Wow! I had never seen snow. It was beautiful. It still is beautiful.

I LOVE MINNESOTA!

Ezequiel Gonzalez is 36 and originally from Mexico.

My Coming to America Story

GABRIELA RAMIREZ BARRERA, ST. PAUL

After I got married, we decided to come to work in the United States. We never imagined how difficult it would be to get here and live here. We had to walk a month in the desert and in the last week of the month we ran out of food. So we walked and walked without eating anything for one week. You hear life is easy in the U.S. but it is not. Because I have gone through all this, I now value life more. I am taking the opportunities given by this country to study English with my child in a Family Lit class.

Gabriela Ramirez Barrera is 36 and originally from Mexico.

I Love Minnesota

VERONICA VILLA-SALCEDO, ST. PAUL

My name is Veronica. I am from Mexico. I have lived in Minnesota for 10 years. I like living here. I remember when I arrived to this beautiful state. I came in winter. When I saw snow for the first time, I thought it was beautiful and fun. In my country, I had seen snow only once. Today, I like living here, because winter is my favorite season. I even like cold weather. My family also loves the snow. Each winter is an opportunity to play and have fun in the snow. I love winter.

Veronica Villa-Salcedo is 40 and originally from Mexico.

My Country and America

ESTELA GUTIERREZ, WORTHINGTON

I am from Ayotlan Jalisco, Mexico. My family is my mom and four brothers and one sister. My father died seven years ago. Two of my brothers live here in the United States, and they have their own families. My sister and two brothers live in Mexico with their families. I remember that I sometimes helped my parents work in the house or in the fields, or

sometimes played with the other children because my parents were feeding cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys. I would also help pick the vegetables that they grew like tomatoes, peppers, onions, squash, and corn. In Mexico I worked in a factory making clothes like blouses, pants, and dresses.

Here in the United States the jobs are very different from Mexico. Here my first job was working in a turkey factory. I remember I didn't know how to use the security tools for protection. I was very, very nervous. I don't remember much about my first day in America, but I saw how different it was from Mexico. The houses, streets, plants, and stores were all different. I remember when I bought my first pair of shoes in America. I didn't know what size to choose. Or when I bought my first pair of jeans I didn't know what size to buy. The first months were very hard for me, but I tried to learn more things about this country. Now I like to live in this area because I have all the stores nearby, such as the laundromat and the grocery store. My work at the Mexican restaurant is not too far away so I can walk sometimes.

Estela Gutierrez is 48 and originally from Mexico.

My Life

JUAN CARLOS LEON, WORTHINGTON

My name is Juan Carlos. I'm from Mexico. I lived in Los Angeles, California for three years. It is a very big city with many areas for fun, but the salary is very low and the rent for a house is very expensive. I moved with my family to Minnesota and the standard of living is much better. I'm really happy. I have lived here for 15 years. I only regret not having entered school during that time.

Juan Carlos Leon is 48 and originally from Mexico.

I Am Catalina

CATALINA PALMA, WORTHINGTON

I am Catalina. I'm from the country of Mexico. My family is big. I have three brothers and four sisters. I have many cousins. I have many uncles and aunts. I

am married. I have 11 grandchildren. I came to the United States because my family lived here. In my country I didn't have many opportunities. Education is most expensive. I don't like the weather in Minnesota, but I like going to school and working in childcare at the school is fun. I like the posadas in December in my country, the different traditions, the fish, the different foods, and the fruit. America is different than my country because there are different jobs and different foods. Education is free. I like America.

Catalina Palma is 68 and originally from Mexico.

Coming to the U.S.

TERESA VEGA RODRIGUEZ, WORTHINGTON

My name is Teresa Vega Rodriguez. I'm from Mexico. My family is from Michoacán, Mexico. I have three brothers and three sisters. I have my mother, two uncles, four aunts, and eight cousins. I miss my friends, my cousins, and all my family. When I came to the U.S. for the first time I came with my family and I was younger. America was so very different than my country and I felt like I didn't like the USA. But after three months it was Christmas time and I felt better, but I missed my school and my friends. When I went to the adult school I found some girlfriends and I felt better. I don't miss the food from Mexico. I love American food. The thing I like most about the U.S. is that I can work. If I have a job, then I have money for everything. I don't like the weather in Minnesota and I don't like the warm temperatures because it makes me sweat. My hopes and dreams for the future is to keep united with my family.

Teresa Vega Rodriguez is 68 and originally from Mexico

My Own Story

TEODORO CASTRO, MINNEAPOLIS

This is my own story. My name is Teodoro I am from Mexico. When I lived in my country my life was not easy for me and my family. Especially for my mother because she had to work very hard to support the family. To be honest she was the man of the house

my father was an alcoholic. Sometimes we didn't have enough food for dinner or breakfast. When I was 10 years old I started to realize the situation. I remember one day when I woke up after I got ready for school I walked to the kitchen for breakfast. I saw my mother very sad because there were not any any breakfast. I remember I said to my mother

"Mom I'm not hungry I only want coffee and a piece of bread," then I walked to school. When I was 17 I was tired of the situation, I decided to migrate to Mexico City, the capital of Mexico looking for a better life. But living in the big city was not easy. Because things are expensive and the salary was little that's the reason I decided to migrate to the United States of America so now in my story I want to thank this country, because the United States of America is a great country.

Teodoro Castro is 43 and originally from Mexico city.

My Immigration Story

HODAN OMAR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Hodan. I was born in Somalia. Our family had middle class life in our country. The factor that pushed me was civil war. First, I immigrated from Somalia to Kenya. There were problems, but the biggest problem was I didn't have Kenya visa. I live there years and years. After that my husband started the process of U.S. visa. Although I wait a long time I got it. When I was in Africa I had bad idea for U.S. community, although I asked my husband some questions about how they look at us, but he didn't understand my phobia. Then I enrolled at the South Campus school and still I am thought about how the Americans are. After few months I saw normal people, I see daily positive things. So I throw out the previous picture and I wear new glasses. This is my story of immigration from Africa to America.

Hodan Omar is 32 and originally from Mogadishu, Somalia.

Coming to America

IULIANA UNTURA, SHOREVIEW

My name's Iuliana. I was born in Moldova. I came to the U.S. on November 23rd, 2015.

We won the Green Card Lottery. I'm married and have two kids. We had a choice to go to America or Norway. But we choice America. We flew to Norway and stayed for three days. With Iceland Air we flew by Iceland-Reykjavik which is above Greenland, it was very scary.

My English was "zero," just "Hi" and "Bye," but my daughter knew how to speak 70% English, and she translated for us. After about 12 hours we arrived on the eve of Thanksgiving.

Now I study English for good communication and understanding.

I like Minnesota. It has the same seasons and climate like in my country, and a good future for my children.

Iuliana Untura is 31 and originally from Moldova.

First Week in the United States

NAW LAH, ST. PAUL

During our first week in the U.S., we couldn't sleep at night because the time zone was different from Asia, where we came from. So during the day time we slept, and at night we cooked and ate. I worried that the neighbors next to or below my apartment would complain that we were noisy at night. One night, police cars came and stopped in front of my apartment. We were cooking dinner in the kitchen. When I saw the police cars, I wondered if someone complained about us. A policeman quickly got out of his car and walked up to my apartment. He pointed a flashlight in my husband's face and asked "What is your name?" My husband quickly turned off all the apartment lights. We all ran to the bedroom and stayed quiet. My heart started to pump really loudly and I worried what I could do if the policeman

knocked on the door.

Our life experience had taught us to be afraid of police. Most young people from my country go to a different country without passports to look for a job. We were two of them, we lived in another Asia country illegally for many years and worked hard to take care of our families in our home country. We always had to run away from the police. If they met us, they asked for money and sometime even sent us to court. When some of my friend met the police, they tried to run across the road and died because they were hit by a car. Others jumped into the lake and drowned. This is why we were so afraid of the police.

We came to America without English so having a problem with a police in just the first week was so hard for us. But really, the problem was next to my apartment. The neighbors fought and about 10 minutes later we saw that the policemen had arrested a man next door. Now it's a funny story about our first week in the United States. But at that time, we were really scared.

Now, I understand that if my family or friends need help I can call the police for help. Also if police are around me, I feel that I am safe.

I'm thankful that I have a better life here in America with education and protection from the police.

Naw Lah is 36 and originally from Myanmar.

Coming To America

WA YANG, WHITE BEAR LAKE

I remember coming to America, not knowing my own age or birthday until 1993. I landed here in the United States, in Minnesota, the city of St. Paul. I feared what life would be like in a big new world full of choices, hopes, goals and dreams.

My parents didn't wait any longer and registered me in school at the age of seven, hoping that I would reach my goals and dreams one day. There may be a lot of obstacles along the way, but I hope I will learn to adapt to life and just to love it.

There's a lot of challenges and changes. I'm getting

older, not any younger. My biggest challenge in life is to succeed in school, build my own family, have a nice stable job, and be successful in every way of life.

As time passes, I have learned that life is never easy, whether I'm living in Thailand or in the United States. Life is short so I have to learn to love it and adapt to it. I hope there are good changes along the way of life.

My Experience

ABSHIR MOHAMED, SAINT CLOUD

I like Somalia because it's my country. My parents are there and my brothers and sisters and friends are there. I am from Mogadishu. I lived there for 29 years. I am from Somalia, and then I came to America. I love America. I have healthy food to eat, a hospital, a school, and a house. I have a big family, a wife, and children. If I could return to Somalia, I think I would not go, because there still is not peace.

My Story

ADHANOM AFEWERKI, ST. PAUL

First, thank you for giving me this chance. My name is Adhanom Afewerki. I was born in January, 1986 in Eritrea from my father Afewerki and my mother Xegeweyni. When I was seven years old, I started school. I finished elementary school in Weki Duba and I moved to Sudan in 2011. I then moved from Sudan to Libya, to Malta, and from Malta I came to America in March, 2016. I have work, and school. America is a nice country. I like it.

Grandmother Sent a Visa

ALI KALIFA, MINNEAPOLIS

Hi, my name is Ali Kalifa. I was born in 1991 in the country of Somalia. I traveled to Kenya to escape the civil war. My grandmother sent us a visa to come to the United States. My family and I came to Minneapolis, Minnesota in November of 2003. On that first day in Minnesota it was winter. We couldn't go outside to learn about the city. For three days we stayed indoors. Later, some of our relatives visited

us. They brought food and we traveled through Minnesota cities. We went to the Mall of America. Later, we learned more about the city.

My Story

ALI ROBLE, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Ali Roble. I am from Djibouti City, Djibouti. I have two parents, three brothers, and two sisters. My dad passed away in 2003. My mother is still alive. She lives in Ethiopia.

I was born in Djibouti, but I grew up in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. I went to school in Hargeisa, Somalia in 1999 and moved to Ethiopia in 2004. My life was good at that time because I had a home and a small grocery store. Ethiopia is a beautiful country. It doesn't have winter.

I came to the United States of America in 2010. I work for the St. Paul Public Schools. I am very happy now. I am grateful to be learning at VOA Adult High School.

Soccer in the U.S.

ARMANDO MARQUEZ, EAGAN

I was born in Mexico in 1980. When I was 17, I moved to the USA. Here, I'm a hard worker. I don't have time for school. I've lived here for 12 years. Now, every day, I go to work in the afternoon. I work every weeknight and three days of the week I go to school in the morning. I like soccer in my free time with my friends. Here in Minnesota, we only have five months of soccer weather. Minnesota United is our new pro soccer team. Soccer was played in the stadium at the University of Minnesota to a sold out crowd. Many people are happy because they got to see professional soccer for the first time. Maybe in the next years, soccer will be important in this country, too.

My Memory

ANONYMOUS, COON RAPIDS

I was born in Iraq. The date of December 28th, 2013 changed my life. I made my decision to leave Iraq and go to Jordan with my wife because life in my country

was not safe for me. After that, we went to Jordan. After 10 days, we decided to go to the (UN) refugee agency in Jordan. The place was full of people of all nationalities. We registered data for my family. Then we waited for a long period of time to be accepted. On the February 13, 2015, my twins were born. But we were not happy because they were born small. So we didn't bring them from the hospital for a month. When my children left the hospital, we were very happy. After a long period of time the International Organization for Migration called me and asked me if we wanted to travel to the United States, where my parents live. I said yes, certainly. I would love to live in America, a country of freedom, safety, and education. We were very happy to hear those words. We had not believed we would be traveling to America. Before the short period of travel, we went to the clinic for the required medical examination of every refugee. On the morning of August 28, 2016, we went to the Queen Alia International Airport to travel to Chicago International Airport. The trip was fun and wonderful and tiring for my kids at the same time because it took 14 hours non-stop. After a long trip we arrived at the Chicago Airport. We were very happy. After 4 hours, we took a plane headed to Minnesota. Two hours later, we arrived at the Minnesota Airport. My family was waiting at the airport, and after a separation of over five years. They were happy to see me. So, we celebrated on that day. My family was holding balloons and USA flags and we took some pictures and went back to my parent's house.

Untitled

AYUB SEID AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Ethiopia. I grew up with my grandparents. Ethiopia has a different calendar from the rest of the world and 80 different languages and cultures. Also, fresh food, fruit, and nice weather. Everything is nice in Ethiopia.

In 2009, I moved from Ethiopia to Qatar state in the Middle East to Doha city. I started work there; Qatar is very hot and sunny. I saw so many different

things such as when you start work or graduate in school, in some they do not pay the same amount because of a different nationality. For example, if you come from Ethiopia or Bahrain, they pay Bahrain more. They do not pay the same amount, or salary. Or, if you come from Oman or Kenya, they pay more for Omani. The net salary is different. And if you were born in Qatar, you cannot be a citizen, unless you get your parents' citizenship. If my father is Ethiopian, I will get Ethiopian citizenship from my embassy.

In 2012, I got married. I moved to America, and America is very nice. I feel like I am in my home. I see equality. Even I got my green card and my driving license within one month. It was the happiest day in my life. Snow is my first time I see in my life. Now I'm getting my GED for high school level education for free. God bless America.

When I Came to the USA

DOLLYUNIS, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to the United States it was wintertime and everywhere was white because of the snow. I was very confused because I had never seen snow like that. In my country it was always hot weather. I stayed home for a couple of days. Later I applied for a job, but I did not have a car so I had to use my feet and walk in the snow. After two months I learned how to drive in the snow.

Why I Came to America; To Solve My Problem

EJEL AILAY, APPLE VALLEY

I came to America from Eretria on Oct 1, 2014, two years ago by myself to get job. I have a wife whose named Hanna. I have five kids with my wife, and one adopted child. All of them are in my country. I came to USA legally, but the trip was very difficult for me. That is because I had a fracture on my spinal cord, and the trip took 22 hours by air. This was very terrible for my health.

My family is in my country. I have four boys and two girls, and to help my family I have to have a job to get money and to bring them to the USA.

To solve my problem, I have to have medical care. When I am cured, I will start the job that I worked before, as a nurse. Or, if I get another job, get money to bring my family to America. If my family comes here they will have their first freedom.

Coming to Indianapolis

FADUMO FARAH, SAINT CLOUD

How does a young woman who is by herself learn to live in a new world? It was very difficult to start a new life in a new country because everything was new for me: language, weather, and culture. At first I felt confused, scared, and helpless because I could not understand English or speak when I went to buy groceries. People could not understand me. In Indianapolis there are few Somalis, so we felt different from other people. But then I started school. I met different people from several African countries, Central America, and even Europe. All of us were trying to learn English. We are all human, more the same than we are different. Now I feel at home because I can speak English and people can understand me well. I have a job. Most people are friendly, so I am not scared or confused or helpless anymore.

Fadumo's Day

FADUMO GULLED, SAINT CLOUD

I live in a small apartment in St. Cloud, Minnesota. It is on the first floor in a new building. I live with my husband, and I am a student at Discovery. I am studying English. I work full time at Coleman from 3:30pm to 12:00am.

I get up early every morning. Usually, I pray, then I brush my teeth. I prepare breakfast. When I am done, I have a lot of time for my school work. I look at my homework then I leave school in my car at 10:30. After school I go home. I make lunch then we eat. Me, my aunt, and my husband eat together. After that I clean up the kitchen then leave to go to work.

That is my day.

Untitled

HIBO HOUSSEIN, MINNEAPOLIS

The first Minneapolis story is the way that I came here, on the plane. I was so scared the moment that I rode it, because it was my first time. I was wondering, how is it going to take off, and the worst thing was I had not eaten anything. I was someone who was fasting for no reason. The moment that I came in the airport, I was feeling dizzy, and I fainted. I was in a bad situation, I was hearing the noise of the people, but I couldn't reply. After 10 minutes, the caseworker came to us and called to emergency help, but my family did not agree, they said, they will take out your kidney and everything from your body. Finally, after two days, I became better than before.

Letter

HIBO HUSSEIN, SAINT CLOUD

Dear Sister,

It is early in the morning and I am sitting at home after a long day. It was not nice today, and I felt homesick. I think of you often and all of my friends in Somalia. I miss everyone. It rained today, here in Minnesota. Outside the sidewalks were crowded with people. All of them wore coats and carried umbrellas. Everyone was in a hurry to work too because we forgot our umbrellas. Buses and cars moved up and down the street. One of the cars went through a puddle of water and splashed me. I was upset about that but inside the department store, it was warm and pleasant. I felt better then. As you know, I work in the hat department. Two elderly women were there this afternoon. One of them tried on funny hats. They both laughed and talked. I like their Minnesota accents. Later I went to a small restaurant close to work. There weren't many people there. There was just one young man at a small table near the window. I ate a piece of pecan pie. It tasted delicious. You know the food in Somalia is wonderful. Now I am fine. I am learning a lot in my class. I like my teacher Joe and my classmates. I live with my husband. His name is Hasan and he is a nice man. I attend my class every morning, I work every afternoon, and I study every evening. I do not have free time, but I feel happy in here Minnesota.

Afmadow, Somalia

HINDIO MUHUMED, SAINT CLOUD

I am from Afmadow, Somalia and I lived there for 20 years until 1992. I left because of the civil war and I felt sad because in 1991 people died. I went to Ethiopia in 1991 and did not come to the U.S. until 2007. I felt good when I got to the U.S. and today I still feel good. The things I miss about my home are my house, my country, my culture, camel milk and meat, and all the cultures.

My New Life

INESSA SEMENIUK, MINNETONKA

I came to the USA from Belarus 18 months ago. I had a long trip. I went on a train from home to Warsaw, and flew 8 hours to Chicago, and then went by car for 7 hours to Minnesota. I had a fiancé visa. When I came to the United States, I got married. The first time in America, I was scared because I didn't know about life in America. I didn't understand anything. I didn't have friends. Now, I like life in America. I go to school to learn English and I have friends.

When I Moved to America

KIIN FARAH, SAINT CLOUD

What is it like to move across the world? When I came to this country I felt nervous, but I am happy now. Before, I did not know how to start a new life. Also my family was living in Africa and only I came here. I felt alone. In this country the weather is different from Africa. Africa is very hot, and here it is cold. I saw a lot snow, and I felt scared. Finally, I got a job. I changed my life and supported my family. Now I feel better. Finally, when I came to this country, I did not know how about life in this country. Now my life has changed, and I feel amazing.

My Life in America

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My arrival to America was a dream come true. It was like being in a world for giants. The great reason that I am here now is my husband. I came to United States to live with him, and this gave us the opportunity to

live in Minnesota. I like this state for many reasons.

First, the best one is school because education here is excellent. I found good teachers and volunteers who teach and help students learn and make their goals. The students also help each other in the classroom. It is wonderful! I am very satisfied going to school every day. Second, another good thing is that the people who live in Minnesota are kind, nice, gentle this make the way easy to communicate with them. Minnesota is beautiful. It has many big lakes, which allow people to fish. Something else that I enjoyed very well here is autumn because the trees change colors. Leaves go from green to pink, yellow, red, orange and the colors are amazing. Finally, I wish to continue the rest of my life with my husband and my family here, and try to work hard in my education to get a good job in the future. I wish to visit more of the states in America to discover other good places and other cultures.

Education and Come to the USA

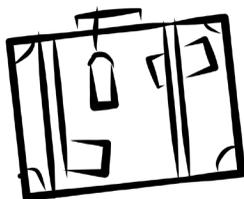
MADDIE GESESE, EAGAN

My name is Maddie. I am from Ethiopia and I love my country. In Ethiopia I was a registered nurse (RN) and worked at Ayder Referral Hospital. One day I opened my email and saw I had received a diversity visa. I was surprised because I didn't fill out the diversity visa application. I called my brother and asked him about the visa and he said, "Oh Maddie, I did it. Sorry, I forgot to tell you." I was mad because I didn't want to leave my country. My family pushed me to move to the USA. I came to America in 2015 and started to study to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA). Now I am working as a CNA, but I am not happy because I want to be a RN like I was before. I need to continue my education because I need to improve my speaking and writing skills. Now I am working on it and have started to study English at Cedar Valley Learning Center. I am trying to improve my English language, but I still miss my country.

My First Impressions of America

MANNAR MATROUD, COON RAPIDS

My name is Mannar. I am from Iraq. I came to the United States in 2014 with my son. This trip was difficult for me because it was the first time I traveled by airplane. The trip took a long time before arriving in the United States. When I arrived in Minnesota my family welcomed me at the airport. We were very happy to see each other. I noticed the roads were different and beautiful compared to my country. Also, the buildings were beautiful and were built from wood. In my country the buildings are made from bricks. Many things about the USA surprised me. There were areas of grass and many trees. After a few days, I went to a restaurant and tried different kinds of food, and I liked them. Some things that surprised me were the stores: they have discounts on special days. Another thing I like are the lakes. They are very beautiful with many kinds of birds. I think Minnesota has many natural places which make it very beautiful.



Coming to America

MARTA ALVAREZ, APPLE VALLEY

When I came to America, it was very exciting for me; all things were new. I saw a squirrel and rabbit in my garden. It was awesome. In my country, it is not common to see the animals in the town. The first thing I did was study English, because it is very important to understand and write correctly to find a job. When there was an opportunity to go on vacation, I visited Yellowstone Park because I always watched the Yogi Bear cartoon TV program. I love the mountains, lakes, and forest so much.

Immigration to the USA

NASIRA ABID, SARTELL

It was a different experience for me to move to the USA. Before getting my visa, I was so excited to see a new world. At the same time, I was also sad because I had to leave everything, like my parents, relatives, loving friends, and my job. Although I had a good life in Pakistan, I wanted my son to get a higher education. Since my brother was a doctor at the St. Cloud Hospital, he sponsored my family. That's why I choose Minnesota. Now, I like living in Minnesota because it is a peaceful place and people are nice. At the end, I would like to say it has been a good experience for me.

Coming To America

NORA LINN, APPLE VALLEY

When I came to America, for the first time I saw that everything was different.

I didn't like the food or the cold weather; these were my two biggest issues at first. Then, the language became an issue as well. I did not want to leave the house because I was afraid to get lost. I was scared that if got lost, I would not know how to get back home. I couldn't speak English, so there was no way for me to ask for the directions. One day I was by myself at home when I realized I needed to go to the store. Target was the closest store to me, so I decided to go there by myself. It took me about an hour to walk Target. I didn't know it would take me an hour to get there. When I went to Target the first time a few days earlier, I went by car with some friends.

It seemed to me that it took only a few minutes to get there. However, after that I was afraid to go anywhere by myself. That was 16 years ago, now that I am more familiar with the location and the language. I am not afraid any more. I can ask any question I need to ask in English. I have also learned how to read and use GPS well enough, to get where I want to go without getting lost.

A Foreigner in America

TESFAYE TEFERA, EAGAN

When I came to America in December 2011, everything was new for me. From the beginning the terminal at the airport was big and complicated for me as a new person. The roads in America are wider and cleaner compared to my country. In my studies, I learned that Ethiopia is a very undeveloped country. The other thing is most of the houses in America are made from wood and also have air conditioning. While in Ethiopia, houses are constructed in cement and bricks and we do not use air conditioners at all. The other thing that I like in America is that there is no power interruption at all. I never have any power loss in the last five years. In my country, there is power loss at least twice a week. In general, the United States is a well-developed country where people always wish to live.

Long Johns

TIERIA KEMP, MINNEAPOLIS

Long Johns are not fancy or cut from expensive cloth, but they are essential, especially if you dwell way up North. They wrap your body in warmness and form a barrier shield, keeping you safe from the wicked winds that blow ferociously from the unforgiving Northwoods fields.

I climb out of bed and decide which pair I will wear today. The long, cold, hard, dark winter winds will not cross me on this day! I pull my pants up over them and hide them very well. I have a little secret, only I know they are there.

Some folks laugh at long johns and make giggly jokes, but I know something they must have missed: long johns are not a hoax! They are my very best friend, November through March. I praise them each winter season and adore them with all my heart.

Coming to the U.S.

FARTUN H. MAHAMED, BURNSVILLE

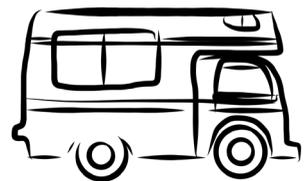
My name Fartun Hassan. I was born in Somali and I grew up in Nairobi, Kenya. I lived with my mom and siblings. In 2005, I decided to come to the United

States and came on January 17, 2007. I started to go to school after five months, and I started work. Now I have a beautiful life. My husband and I have five beautiful girls. I have a happy life.

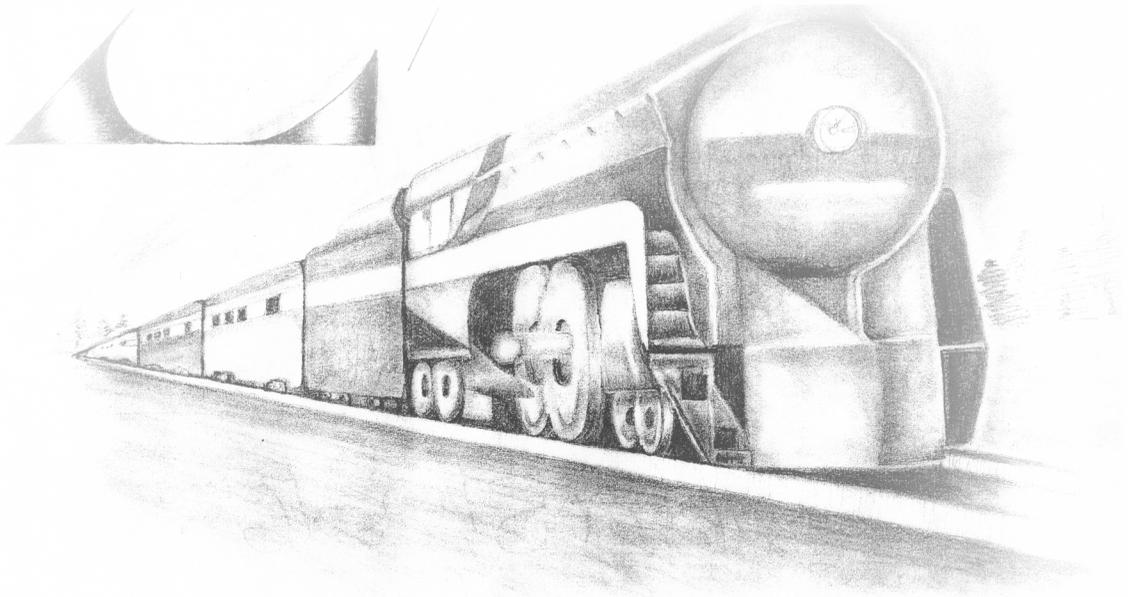
Why I Came to America.

TONG THAO, BROOKLYN CENTER

My name is Tong Thao. I am from Laos. I was born in the small town of Luang Prabang. The reason I came to the America was because I married with my wonderful husband. In December, 2006, I had the opportunity to come to the America. Now I have my own wonderful family. I have three kids, two girls and one boy. When I was in Laos I didn't know a lot about the United States. I thought it was the same as my country. When I came to the USA, it was very different than my country. When I arrived in the America, it was hard for me because I didn't know English and I didn't know how to drive. I just stayed home for one year. Than after that I came to school to learn English. Five years later I had the opportunity to became a citizen, get my driver's license and get a job. Now, I will continue to go to school to get my GED in the future. I know I still have many years to get my GED, but I will be determined to reach my goals. I love America and I'm so happy I came to the USA, because America is the best country to live in and it has a lot of opportunities for everyone



OVERCOMING CHALLENGES





Dena Stuart was born in Texas and raised on a farm. She came to Minnesota in 2014 and loves it! She thinks it is beautiful here despite the cold. Dena is a mother of 4 and a grandmother of 2. She recently earned her adult diploma through the St. Croix River Education District adult basic education program in North Branch. She works as a store manager and is preparing to go to college to study forensic science.

DENA STUART, WYOMING

I was raised in Texas. When I was 16, I hitched to Houston. I had no idea what was ahead.

One night I met an old friend. Some guys beat him really bad so I took him to the hospital. I was holding my bleeding friend when cops came and arrested me. Two days later I was charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. That wasn't true, so no charges were pressed and no one testified on me. But Houston picked up the charge. I felt so helpless. I was in jail for six months.

Probation was hard. I had a four-month old baby, no education, no job.

I started using meth. I failed my drug test and was about to be arrested for it. When the cops turned their back, I ran—all the way to North Dakota.

I met Cory. We bought a trailer and used meth together. When he started hitting me, I gave him an ultimatum. Stop the dope and I'll quit, too, or I'm out. Two weeks later he joined me in sobriety! We went to Corey's parents in Minnesota. They were skeptical but decided to give us a chance.

Later I got arrested as a Texas fugitive. I had two choices. Turn myself in, in Texas, or wait in jail for Texas to come get me. I decided it was time to get my life on track. I was tired of running. I flew to Texas and was sentenced to three years.

Prison was ugly and violent. After 15 months, a uterine tumor ruptured. I had immediate surgery. I almost died! The Governor gave me an early release.

Cory and I decided to stay in Minnesota on a new path. Sober, free, ready for a real life. We started going to church. I fell in love with this state. I found a good job and started going to school to get my Diploma.

We are now four years sober. I'm close to graduating. Life is so much better. I love how far I've come. I found God. My daughter is happy. I've been through so much. But it made me who I am today. I finally found my place in the world. Since I've done all this, my oldest son decided to go back and get his diploma!!! This is why it was all worth it. Happy Momma! God is good.

Dena Stuart is 42 and originally from Montgomery, Texas.

The Love of My Life

LUTHER SAM, SAINT CLOUD

Every time I shut my eyes, I have visions of you, visions of us being very happy. The memorable times we have had; the beautiful times as well as the painful times remain with me. When we are together, it's like nothing else matters. I let you control me, I loved it. I let you own me and that was ok because I needed you. I needed you there when I woke in the morning; I was afraid to go to bed without you. I loved you more than I loved my family, my home, my kids, and even more than I loved myself.

I loved you and now my brothers and sisters don't come around anymore. I miss them, but I have you. We sleep when and where we can no matter how uncomfortable it really is or how cold it gets. You were there when I kissed and hugged my only daughter good bye. That hurt and I cried, but I still had you and you helped me forget.

When I am with you, I am king of everything and without you I am king of nothing. Yes, you know the lengths I put myself through to be with you. I am weak without you; lost and empty. I see how happy you make others and I know I am not the only one who knows how powerful you are. It scares me to death that I could give you my last breath.

As I lay in hospitals and jail cells, I am alone and you are a mere ghost. But I continue to love you and want you; who else can say they gave it all for their best friend? Your grasp is so strong... but I am going to leave you now.

I want to live. I am telling you good-bye. I want to see my brothers and sisters and family again. I want to hold my daughter. I miss home and my warm bed. I hope to never see you again. GOOD-BYE HEROIN! PLEASE STAY AWAY. I TRULY WANT TO LIVE...

My First Time in the U.S.

JOLY DELGADO, MINNEAPOLIS

My first time in the USA was not good. The airport here is very big compared to the airport in Peru. I felt scared and I was crying. I tried to communicate but

I didn't speak English. The people didn't understand me. I tried to use a telephone but it was very different.

Joly Delgado is 37 and originally from Peru.

Love . . .

JULIE A. ANDERSON, WALKER

Can't anybody care?
Can't anybody save her?
Can't anybody love her?

She's crying inside...
For those she loves.
For they do not love her,
Like she does...

They don't want her...
Who knows why?!
Everything she knows is "Goodbye."

They all say "I love you..."
But who can say "I really do"?
Who could ever love her?
Seems like nobody can!

She lives in torment all alone...
But nobody knows.
That she is all alone.

They make her feel loved...
And then they turn her world upside down.
They pull and push and keep her down...
Where she should be.

What happen to God?
Doesn't he see?
All the pain she feels.

Can't she have one piece of love?
What has she done?
Who has she hurt?
Doesn't anybody care that she is not one?

Can't anybody hear her?
Crying all alone.
Desperate and afraid...
She sits all alone!

Where has he gone?
Why must she die?
All alone...

Why must her love die?
Wasn't it fully grown?
Didn't she do it right?

The Devil has struck again...
Blow after blow in her head.
The darkness in her heart has spread.

Please stop this poison!
End her pain...
Heal her dark heart with love,
Tonight!

She is fading fast...
Could this be happening at last?
Nobody can see her...
Nobody knows to help.

Someone save her... For this I ask.

Julie A. Anderson is 23 and originally from Pine River,
Minnesota.

My Life Before the USA

HODAN BARUD, MINNEAPOLIS

When I lived in Somalia the country had a war. Then we couldn't live in Somalia because people were being killed. Then we came to Ethiopia. Ethiopia helped my family. Then my family went to a refugee camp in Ethiopia. My mom and my father went to the U.S. government and asked if we could come to the United States. One day we got a call from the government telling us that we were a fortunate family. My mom and father were excited because there is no war in the U.S. was safer because the people are respectful. After we came to the United States my family and I got help. Now we have a better life in this country.

Hodan Barud is 22 and originally from Somalia

What I Do to Prepare for Winter

NUUR KEINAN, NEW HOPE

I want to get ready for winter because the winter weather is brutal when it is harsh. I think everybody worries about the weather. I am also worried about the weather. The important thing you have is a car. If you don't have a car, life is very tough. I think its practical to use your car every day. Other necessary things you need are good clothes. Everybody has to confront the winter. I want to prepare myself.

It's hard to cope with winter. I have a good plan because I prepare good clothing for winter. I don't like very cold weather, I like warm weather. I counsel the people who have never seen winter here: "please prepare good clothing and get ready for snow." I am reluctant to stay home all day just because it's cold.

Nuur Keinan is 23 and originally from Somalia.

My Life in Thailand

PLAH SOE, ST. PAUL

My name is Plah Soe. Everyone calls me Pat because Pat is my nickname. I'm 21 years old. I'm from Thailand. I was born in Tha Song Yang, Tak, Thailand. I have three brothers and one sister. I like studying history. I don't like mathematics, physics, English or Chinese because they are difficult for me. I'm a person who likes to read fantasy novels. I can read them all day.

I started elementary school at six years old. When I finished elementary school I was 12 years old. Then, I moved on to study in the city of Nakhonsawan. When I was 14 years old, I went to a different school: J&P Seminary Nakhonsawan. During the time I was studying there I was very happy. After I finished at J&P Seminary I studied at La Salle Chotiravi Nakhonsawan School, a large Catholic school, for four years.

I dropped out of school the summer of Grade 11. I didn't intend to leave. When I left school, suddenly my teachers and even my close friends found out that I resigned. I came to the USA in 2014. The reason why I came to the USA was because I wanted to excel in English. I set a goal that if I did not finish college in the U.S. I would not return to Thailand. When I graduate from college in the U.S. I will return to my family in Thailand.

Plah Soe is 21 and originally from Thailand.

Story About My Life

SUE KYAW WAY, ST. PAUL

My name is Sue Kyaw. I am Karen. I was born in January, 1995 in Thailand, the most beautiful place in the world. I had just three brothers and two sisters. When I was two months old my family moved to Sa Lah Refugee Camp in Thailand. When I was three years old I started going to elementary school in Sa Lah Camp.

When I was seven years old, in 2002, my father, my brothers, and my sisters passed away and they left

me with my mother alone. After then my mom and I, we got depressed about our life and we felt crazy. When my father and my siblings passed away, I hated my life and I quit school. I didn't want to talk with anybody. I wanted to die too.

In 2003, all Sa Lah refugee people moved to Mae La Oon Refugee Camp. When my mother heard about that she cried – she didn't sleep at night because she thought all of the time about how to build a new house. When we arrived in Mae La Oon some leaders helped our Karen widows. They built houses for all of our widows. My home was near the Salween River.

When I was 16 years old my mother passed away. After a few months I went to take care of my uncle's elephant in Karenni country and every day I rode the elephant and I worked with the elephant in the forest. Sometimes I went to find the elephant. I saw a lot of Myanmar soldiers face to face on the path. They talked with me, but I didn't understand and I didn't talk with them because I didn't know how to speak the Myanmar language.

When it was almost 2013 I went to Mae La Oon Refugee Camp to apply to come to the U.S. and I just waited for them to come pick me up for such a long time. In 2014, on May 7, the bus came to pick me up and I arrived in the U.S. on May 16, 2014.

After a few months I went to LEAP High School. The first time I didn't know anything. I was so sad because I didn't know how to speak the English language and I didn't understand

Finally, I want to say thanks for God picking up my life.

Sue Kyaw Way is 21 and originally from Thailand.

About My Life

ROSE MEH, ST. PAUL

My name is Rose Meh. I would like to tell you about my life. I am Karenni. It's a different culture than Karen. I was born in Burma in 1995. I lived in Burma one year.

In 1995, my family moved to Tham Hin Refugee

Camp in Thailand. My parents walked from Burma to Thailand with seven children. My mom was pregnant. My father carried rice.

I lived in Thailand 18 years. I went to school for 19 years in Thailand in the refugee camp. I went to high school but I didn't finish high school because I came to the USA.

I arrived in the USA two years ago. When I came, on the first day, I saw things differently than in my country because I spoke only my language and English was hard for me. I couldn't have communication with anybody. Now I am going to school. I am learning English. I understand and speak some English. This country is beautiful. I am so happy this country is giving me the opportunity for a lot of things.

Rose Meh is 21 and originally from Thailand.

My Story

THAW WAH, ST. PAUL

My name is Thaw Doh Wah. I am 23 years old. First, I will let you all know that my essay is all about myself. I was born in Thailand, I grew up in the village and went to school in grade one. When I was 9, Burmese soldiers and leaders came into my village and they killed some Karen people and some Karen soldiers. They burned the people's houses so I and my family and other people couldn't live in my village any more. I had to move to a camp. It was called Mae La Oon Camp and I grew up there again.

Thaw Wah is 24 and originally from Thailand.

Life When I Learn How Hard It Is

KARNJANA AMPHAIRIN, MINNEAPOLIS

When I look back at myself five years ago, I see a big difference. My life and my attitude have totally changed. Because life in the U.S. sometime can make you cry, for several reasons.

In the country I came from, my life was good. I got a bachelor degree, and I got a nice job. Everything

seemed easy for me, but I felt incomplete. I had a dream, and my dream, like for a lot of people, was to stay in the U.S., learn a different culture, and experience a successful country.

I was growing up in a country where parents support and spoil their kids. Everything I needed. I didn't have to try so hard, just ask my parents, and they never said no. My dad gave me all the money that cost me to get here with hope that his daughter would have good opportunities and success. I was so happy learning new things, making new friends, and I didn't focus on responsibility. Money did not matter, being here, because my parents still supported me. I felt complete, and I didn't care about my parents that much. Unfortunately, my dad got a heart disease a year after; he needs surgery. He needs lot money for his surgery. I was crying every night before sleep, praying to god, "What should I do?" Being here, far away from my parents, I can't do a thing. Should I just leave my entire dream and go see my dad or should I stay here and grow. I decided to stay here and begin to work hard. I did everything that I could to get money. I didn't care that I have bachelor degree and work in housekeeping. Sometimes I almost give up, being here, sending money back to my parents. Finally I knew to do something to help my dad get better. He got a good treatment. His sickness made my life change forever.

I feel stronger than ever, my attitude about life is changed. I see the world differently than I used to. I don't need to be successful to be happy, and life, it doesn't have to be happy all the time.

Karnjana Amphairin is 28 and originally from Thailand.

One of the Worst Events in My Life

MARGRET NABATANZI, MAHTOMEDI

An event changed my life in 1987 when I was still in Uganda. I lost my son of one and a half years, Solomon. He died of measles that attacked him with a fever. He started with a cough and throwing up. Then I took him to the family doctor who referred us to the main hospital where they tried the best

they could to provide a suitable treatment. But, the boy didn't survive. I was so desperate after his death. I grieved for a couple of years.

This little boy was a bit unique because he was not a crying baby like his preceding siblings. So everybody liked to hold him even though he was a little bit heavy. He had chocolate colored skin and I think if he grew up he would have been a tall guy according to his structure. Maybe now he would be a married man, with two kids. I would like him to be a teacher because he seemed to be a smart boy.

My life changed because when I think about my lost baby, even now, I compare him with other kids who are alive, that are the same age that he would be. Right now, I have two boys instead of three. Losing a child always brings the inner pain to most of the parents and also to the whole family.

Margret Nabatanzi is 64 and originally from Uganda, Africa.

Why?

MEGAN JOHNSON, BRAHAM

Why so early? Tell me that dad.

Why when I barely knew you? Why when I was only two?

Why did you have to die? Why should I cry?

Why do I lie when my friends ask "Where is your dad?" then ask "Why are you sad?"

I cant tell them I am sad because I have no dad. They would feel bad.

Well I dont mean to upset you. I just had to let out a little emotion before I break down in tears.

I have not cried soulfully in years. The only tears I have cried were fake.

I made a mistake by trying to stay cool, but I was only a fool. I should be the real me,

the me that is strong.

The one who wants to belong. The one who already dealt with the tears, the fears and the years of pain, that made me insane.

At night she thinks of her dad and every time she cries.

Always asking why, why did he have to die?

She gets so mad because her daddy left her.

Too bad he never told her, she deserves much better.

She was always ignored and pushed around.

And every time she made no sound. Maybe if she put her life to an end they might

remember her then.

She seemed to act proud, But she had no respect for herself.

Can nobody see her screaming out loud?

She's screaming for help, she's screaming for advice.

Advice about what to do with her life.

so down and low, It's only hate she can show....

Megan Johnson is 24 and originally from USA.

One of My Greatest Accomplishments

PAULINE BETLEY, CRYSTAL

The barrier that I have overcome and continue to fight against is my disability.

It all started when I was born. I have a genetic eye disease called Kearns Sayre Syndrome. It is a progressive external ophthalmoplegia, which is weakness or paralysis of the eye muscles that impairs eye movement and causes drooping eyelids. This also causes loss of vision and other abnormalities. The carriers of this disease are the males of the family. My dad, grandfather, uncles, and nephews all carry this disease, and it is passed on to the female children that are born. I was the only girl in the family who got this disease that my dad had.

How this affects me is that I have barriers that I need to overcome. The first barrier that I have from this disease is that I will never be able to drive a car, ride a regular bike, or even do what I like doing which is construction work. I had always felt that everyone was against me.

These barriers had gotten in the way of many things that I would liked to have done, so I knew that something had to be done.

I first had to go to Adjustment to Blindness Training where they taught me how to do everything like a blind person would do. First, I had to put on these sleep shades and do everything as a blind person. Second, they gave me a white cane to get around with so that I could become independent. Third, they gave me a slate and stylus so that I could learn how to do Braille. Then I was put in a shop class where I had to build things.

As I learn more about Kearns Sayre Syndrome and the barriers it presents me with, I am encouraged and able to improve my adjustment to this disability. I have made a lot of progress, and I am determined to continue to work hard to overcome this difficulty and reach my goals.

Pauline Betley is 45 and originally from USA.

The Country I Grew Up in Does Not Exist Anymore

JUAN DEL-MORAL, BLAINE

My name is Juan Pablo, I came from Venezuela five years ago. I was born in a beautiful country that had everything. I always imagined living in Venezuela, but the country I was born in and grew up in does not exist anymore for me.

In the late 90's a military man won the president's election and he promised a revolution in the country, he said he was the voice of the poor people and with him as a president, no one would be poor in Venezuela. After almost two decades of this "revolution", they destroyed my country and destroyed all the dreams I had in Venezuela.

When my daughter was born in 2010, I realized that she needed a future and Venezuela could not provide her that future. That's why my wife and I started looking for jobs overseas. We found a job in a country that my daughter will grow up to have a lot of opportunities and that country is the USA.

Juan Del-Moral is 35 and originally from Venezuela, Caracas.

How I Improve My Health

LAO LE, ST. PAUL

When I was young, I looked at someone 60 or 70 years old and still strong, and I thought in my mind, "I crave a peaceful life in one's old age."

I was born in a farming family, in a backward agricultural country that was in civil war, so peoples' lives were very poor and diseased. I grew up in an environment with no adequate food, clothing, education or morals.

I participated in the army at the age of 22. After I have trained for one year at military officer school, they sent me to an armor company. Here my I changed from low level to high. I engaged in fighting many battles. I have gotten many medals from my army and one bronze star from the U.S. Army. I have also had a life unidentified. I wasn't sure if I would still be alive tomorrow or be dead tonight. So after an operation, I drank and smoked a lot.

After the many upheavals of my life, I became determined to improve my health, to reach my goals. Those are: longevity and vigor. I have smoked for 44 years, each day seven cigarettes. In the day-time I smoked two or three, the rest I kept smoking after dinner time. When I sat in front the TV, I always had a smoke. One time my wife said "It looks like your head is a train engine". From there, I quit smoking. But that wasn't easy; my body got upset, sad, and unbalanced. Nevertheless, I tried to command myself by getting away or ignoring it to go somewhere or do something. Besides that, I stopped drinking alcohol, too. I take a walk every day and also I have to diet some kinds of foods to keep my blood sugar and my blood pressure regular.

I am thinking activity is good medicine for my health and makes my blood regularly circulate in my body. Some people asked me "Why do you need to go to English school at age 80?" It's up to you, but with me I need to be active rather than passive. I don't want my leisure time to be sedentary.

I joke with members in my family that I will be alive until 105 years old. But nobody will know what happens tomorrow.

Lao Le is 80 and originally from Vietnam

My Immigration Story

FARHIA SHARIF, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Yemen in 1992 and grew up there. I started school there until I graduated. I left Yemen in December of 2012 because I lacked a free education. I was determined to get more opportunities. I was a refugee in Yemen, and government took me to the United States. My flight was via Germany. After that, I came to Minneapolis directly.

I faced many obstacles when I came to Minneapolis. I didn't speak English. I didn't have a job. I didn't have any friends, and I hadn't known anyone here except for my two brothers. The weather was bad.

Even though I faced all of those problems, I succeeded. I enrolled in school. While I waited, I got a job. It was a part-time job. Someone told me to get a full-time job, and I went to a full-time job. After 6 months I opened a savings account, and put in every cent I got. After eight months, I bought a car. Then I started school, and I was a level one. Now, I am in level 6, and have a lot of friends. I'm also familiar with the weather.

I have two dreams: to accomplish ESL classes, and to go to college and get a degree. I hope my dreams become true. Overall, my advice to give a new immigrant is to work hard, and make their life better until they reach their goals.

Farhia Sharif is 24 and originally from Yemen.

My Journey

GLADYS GORDILLO, ROSEVILLE

I have been in the United States for more than 16 years. For me, it was a dream come true. When I was seven years old, some of my classmates at school asked me, "Where are you going when you are grown up?" I was answered that I was going to the United States, the biggest and most powerful country in the world. Everyone laughed. They thought I was crazy, but the truth was I was a poor girl from the countryside growing up on a farm.

Therefore, after many years, I was thinking what I had been doing with my life. I was also trying to help my daughter finish her career at the university in my country as that time. I did not have a good job to support her. I decided to go far away to look for better life, so I applied for a visa to the United States. That is not easy to get, so I was very surprised they gave a visa to me, and also grateful to the Lord for opening that door for me.

My first years here were not easy. Communication with other people was a big problem. I never studied English in my country. Many times I got lost on different buses. I always bought the same food because I did not know how to ask for something else.

Even though I remember the words I spoke a long time ago about coming to this country, I think how the words we say to our children can encourage and uplift their faith. Our words are very remarkable to our loved ones. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" - Proverbs 18:21

Gladys Gordillo is originally from Colombia.

Real Tough Life

CARLOS ROMERO, MINNEAPOLIS

In January of 2011, I had an accident while driving under the influence of alcohol. In that accident I lost my car, but thanks to God nothing happened to me. I knew I was lucky to not have killed myself that night. The police officers showed up and sent me to the hospital and when I got out of the hospital I went home, but I never knew I was charged with a DWI until later when I got my second DWI.

Well, my life started to change in 2013 after my second DWI. At my first appearance in court the judge charged me for the two DWIs. My ex-girlfriend helped me a lot in life, showed me how bad and hard it was at that time, but I never thought I'd have one more, because I am one of the those people who almost never makes the same mistakes again.

Well, on July 11, 2015, I got my third DWI and my life took a turn I never thought would happen. For the first time I stayed in jail for three nights and

three days and I had a lot of time to think about my life. After getting out of jail I promised myself I would never go there again. Thanks to alcohol my life was so miserable after that. I lost my job, broke up with my fiancée, and my kids moved to live in Chicago, but I was not able to leave the state because I entered treatment in an alcohol rehab program through the DWI court. At that stage in my life I saw my mother suffer and cry too much about my problems and I saw my ex-girlfriend cry and suffer, and other parts of my family too. Well, I know now the real effects the alcohol caused in me. I hope now to never go back to drinking again. I don't want to see my family suffer for my faults. Today I am working hard to try to get back to my normal life and when I have a chance to share my experiences I always try to give advice to others.

Carlos Romero is originally from Ecuador.

In Search for a Better Life

FLOR MELGAR, BIG LAKE

My name is Flor Melgar. I came to the United States with my husband in 1995 in search of a better life. As a child in El Salvador, my family struggled. I was the youngest of eight children. We lived in a very small house that had a kitchen and one room where we slept. We didn't have a bed. We had a hammock where three would sleep, and the rest would sleep on the floor. We were very blessed to have food and clothing. Though we were poor, we had each other. I went to school only until the sixth grade because my father thought I was better off working instead. Sometimes, I didn't know if I would see the sun another day. I had so much faith in God—praying that I wouldn't have to live like this my whole life.

I was 20 when I married my husband, and I wanted kids, but first we wanted a nice home—a place where they would be safe. At last the Lord heard my prayers. The opportunity for a better life opened up. We worked so hard each day for three years saving our money to begin our journey to the United States of America. We arrived in Los Angeles, California. I got my first job taking care of an elderly lady. I would

bathe her, help her get into her clothes, feed her, but most importantly, I gave her lots of love. I worked for her for two years until she passed away.

Later on, my husband and I moved to Minnesota. When we got here, I began searching for a job. I found one in manufacturing plastics. I've worked there for 16 years. Now I have four kids who I am very proud of. This year, I passed my American citizenship test, and now I am a United States citizen. I have been very blessed. I have so much faith and a love for God whom I cannot thank enough for all he has provided for me and my family. Thank you to the teachers who helped me learn more English. I have learned so much in life. Hard work does pay off. Love is very important. We were created to love and to give love. I have learned to appreciate all that you have, to give thanks, and to trust in what God has planned for you.

Flor Melgar is originally from El Salvador.

Why I Don't Miss My Home Country

XIOMARA GUTIERREZ, ST. PAUL

If I say that I miss the country where I was born, I probably would be lying. I miss my family, friends, food, and some traditions. If my family were here I would never think of going back. My home country is not an ugly place, but it is a place full of violence. My life is better in this country.

I moved to United States in 2003 because of the violence. My home country is a territory of gangsters. It makes my beautiful country an ugly and dangerous place. I lost some of my loved ones to the hands of gangsters. They kill people just because they want money, but they do not want to work for any money. It is easy for them to ask for money from the people who have family in this country or people who have a business in this country. Sometimes they kill families just because someone in the family doesn't want to join the gangs. Even people who go to visit their family are at risk of being attacked.

This is why I don't really miss my home country. I came to Minnesota 13 years ago seeking a better life. If my family were here, I would be the happiest person in this world because day after day they face the violence in "our home country."

Xiomara Gutierrez is originally from El Salvador.

Coming to America

FESSEHAYE GHEBREMDEHIN, BROOKLYN CENTER

My name is Fessehaye Ghebremedhin. I am from Eritrea. I was born in 1974 in Eritrea. In 1992 I got in an accident with a landmine. I lost my right leg above knee and my left leg was not good. When I lived in Eritrea I finished high school and I got married. I have five kids. I worked 15 years with businesses and with insurance company. When I worked at the businesses I had a lot of problems. For this reason I wanted to leave Eritrea and another reason was religious freedom not in Eritrea. This one was the most important reason. When I came to the USA to visit I didn't want to go back to Eritrea. When I came to USA I had big problems by immigration staff they arrested me for two months in jail. After two months I came to Minnesota. I lived with my uncle. I like the USA for many reasons. It has many freedoms. I have religious freedom at this time. I got everything except my immigration case. So I like the USA and I miss my family.

Fessehaye Ghebremdehin is originally from Eritrea.

Pray Hard. Work Hard. Trust God

BIRATU DINBAR, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Everybody should try to live a better life so they can face the many challenges in this world. What is a challenge? In short, challenge means a difficult thing or tasks which test someone's ability or skill; something which you weren't accustomed to before, hidden to your vision, a mission, or goal. Sometimes challenges are destructive, which is why we need to observe them carefully and fight against them courageously.

When we accept challenges as a positive aspect of life, it helps us to be more prepared for success.

Three things are needed to be successful: prayer, hard work, and trust in God. Without prayer, we can't reach our goals. I have one useful quotation that I've heard before, and it goes: "Always put the unknown future in the hands of the known God. He has the key it will take to unlock your locked doors."

We are created to work hard. I must work hard to support myself and my family. Living in Minnesota and America is an example of a challenge, and my need to work hard. If I don't work hard, there is no food on the table and no money in my pocket to support myself and my family. A quote by Lionel Messi goes: "You have to fight to reach your dream. You have to sacrifice and work hard." The bible says: "Commit thy way unto the LORD, trust in HIM, and HE shall bring it to pass."

According to the above I mentioned, all of us have many challenges. Maybe our challenges are different from each other. If we pray hard, work hard, and trust God, we will win our daily problems. I'm pleased about all things I've done in this country, such as struggling to learn the English language, improving in my conversation class, having part-time work, and having an opportunity like everyone else.

Please, pray hard for your life, work hard for your daily lives, trust God in helping you to solve your problems.

I thank my God in order to have this opportunity. I give thanks to my teachers. I give thanks to my entire family. Please pray for my country, Ethiopia, and pray for America's new president.

Biratu Dinbar is originally from Ethiopia.



Coming to America

FARHIYA ABDULLAHI, MINNEAPOLIS

In July of 2005, my family and I came to America. We were very excited because we like new adventures. We were also delighted to see my sister. We had not seen her since 1995.

We fantasized before we came to America about where to work, how to save money, and how to send it to my other sister in Ethiopia to support her and other relatives. We had never left our country before, but it was a beautiful experience and a challenge too.

We had a lot of dreams. Everyone had different dreams when coming here, but mine was to learn English quickly. When we started school we cried a lot because we did not speak English. This was the first difficulty to overcome. My brother told me it was a new struggle, so he did not like America; he wanted to go back to Ethiopia.

Our proposal was to come for only two years and then go back to Ethiopia, but now we have been here for much more than five years. Now we like Minnesota. It is a wonderful state in the USA. My brother has graduated from high school. Sometimes I ask him if he wants to go to Ethiopia, but he says, "No."

After six years, my sister from Ethiopia was able to come to America. We were very happy to see her. We had not seen her for six years.

Farhiya Abdullahi is originally from Ethiopia.

My Life Story

NADIA MUKTAR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Nadia Muktar Bakir. I am from Ethiopia. I was born in Oromia. When I was 21, I left Ethiopia because the government was not good for Oromo people. My sister lived in Egypt. I worked in an Arabic house cleaning there. Work was hard. I came to America in 2016 with my two-year-old daughter because here is better. Life in Minnesota is good. I am happy.

Nadia Muktar is originally from Ethiopia.

Who I Am

SITI SHAFIE, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Siti. I am happy in class. I am beautiful, but also smart. I am a good reader. My speaking is not good. No one understands when I try to speak English. I try many times. I am persistent.

I am a good cake baker. I go to English School. I like my work. I am moving, and my family is discussing a vacation. I am going to my sister's house. I love my sister.

I was born in Ethiopia. I have four brothers and four sisters. I have a mother. My father has died. I liked my father because my father is a good father. My father played with me. My father died when I was 10 years old.

After my father died, my family was sick. My father was good. Now, my mom had all responsibility for the children. My mother is sweet. She takes care of her brothers and sisters.

My sister came to America in 2010 with her husband. She was pregnant and my mom came to America to help my sister. My mom was in America, so my brothers and sisters took care of me in Ethiopia. It was a hard time because my mom was away from me. July 15, 2013, I came to America. I am happy because I am with my mom now for three years.

The hardest part of moving here is language because I don't speak English. The best thing about living here is my work cleaning.

I am going to school. I like going to work at two jobs. It is important, and my future is big, because I want to go to nurse school and graduate. I plan to stay in the United States, in Minnesota. After I graduate, I will be a nurse. I will help somebody. It is good to be good.

Siti Shafie is originally from Ethiopia.

Our New Life in the USA

BINA WAHBY, INVER GROVE HEIGHTS

I have been living here for one year. We arrived on

November 30, 2015. Before coming we knew that we would face lots of difficulties because we came from a country in which everything there is totally different from the USA, but we had to make this decision in order to live safely.

The first three months were very hard and passed slowly. We were so sad and lonely, we felt homesick. Also we didn't know anyone around the neighborhood and no one came to visit us and that made us feel we were like fish out of the water. There are many things that help us and make our life much easier, one of these is that our kids are getting a good opportunity to live in a better environment and that's very important for us, and the other thing is I'm taking ESL in Neighborhood House. There I met very kind and graceful people who helped and encouraged me and made me feel better and forget many things temporarily at least when I have been there. Also my daughter feels very happy and excited in child care which is available in Neighborhood House.

I'm very thankful for Neighborhood House. It's really like a big warm house for both me and my daughter.

Bina Wahby is originally from Iraq.

My Refugee Story

VONG LEE, ST. PAUL

I was born in Thailand and have lived in many refugee camps with my family, because no camp could be permanent. We had to move from one camp to another over several years. My ultimate camp was located in the middle of Thailand close to Bangkok. I grew up in this camp and had a chance to go to school, but the highest grade I could take was just grade six because I was not a Thai citizen. I went to school on weekdays and helped my parents do work at home on the weekend. I didn't see any opportunity for everyone to get a better life, but we were happy with the life we had and enjoyed it.

In 2002 the United Nations entered my camp and investigated our histories because the UN was looking for the Hmong people that had helped the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. All of us admitted that, yes, we are those people. Then the UN gave

us the opportunity to come to the U.S. My older brother's family and my family came to the U.S. in 2004, but my oldest brother and my sister and their families still waited for their documents to be completed. It was very sad to move to another country and leave everything behind. My siblings and I missed each other a lot because we used to live together. Since we came to the United States, we have lived in many different states.

I was very excited when I first came to the U.S. I thought that if I came to the U.S., I would be rich without working hard. I was totally wrong even though this country is much much better than my home country. Here everyone has to work to earn money to support their families. Now I am working, and I can get everything I want. The benefits of this country are the opportunities everyone gets, especially the children.

Being released from the camp to get freedom here was like dying and being reborn. I had a complicated life before with no hope, but I never gave up. Finally my life has changed. Although all of us live in different states, we can still visit each other.

Vong Lee is originally from Laos.

I Love Minnesota

BLANCA ELIZENDA BLANCAS GARCÍA, ST. PAUL

I am adapting to St. Paul more every day. Now I understand a little of what they speak and how they think. I like living here, I like what I do here I love Minnesota.

Blanca Elizenda Blancas García is originally from Mexico.

Challenges and Changes

ELFIE MONTERROZA MONTERROZA, MAPLEWOOD

As individuals we all have to work for our goals, which are part of life. Some dreams and goals are easy to reach. Some other are more difficult and take more time, but I believe that everything is possible. One of my main goals for this year is to obtain my GED. I was born in Mexico, but at the age of 15 I came to the United States. Spanish is my first language so learning English and studying for the

GED at the same time makes it even harder.

The first months of arriving in the U.S., I was afraid to attend school because I couldn't speak any English. But a year later, I decided to attend school. Since then I have been working hard to achieve my GED. The time has passed. Now I am a happy wife and a mother of two wonderful kids. Every morning my eight and six-year-olds are my inspiration to look forward and to always be positive.

I have a part time job. I went to college to get my certified nursing certification (CNA). Since then I have been working with elderly people, not only as a CNA, but also as a counselor. My job is also to help them with emotional and spiritual support. This is important because the place where I work is the last place that many of them live before they pass away.

I enjoy every moment of my life helping these extraordinary people. As a result of having a busy life I probably will take more time and need to work harder to complete my goals and dreams. I want to be a role model for my children and show them the importance of education.

Elfie Monterroza Monterroza is originally from Mexico.

A Successful Year

ERMILLO MARTIN URZUA, CHASKA

This year has brought many achievements to our lives, due to a lot of effort and work. First, I was promoted at my job to have a better position and salary. Second, after one year of training, we have finally obtained a license for foster care, an option that my wife and I decided on when we had problems getting pregnant. We decided to be foster parents or have the possibility of adopting a child because we think that we can give care and love to some child who needs it.

The most important thing for us has been that we completed all the paperwork and filled out the application to get legal status in this country. We just need to wait a couple of months to receive our legal resident cards. This makes us very happy, because after 16 years without seeing my mother and family, very soon we can travel to Mexico to visit them.

We always said those who persevere for their goals obtain good results. We think that we have been blessed. Step by step we are growing and progressing in this country.

Ermilo Martin Urzua is originally from Mexico.

My History

FRANCISCO MARTINEZ ALATOMA, ST. PAUL

I came to Minnesota in April 2007. It was hard to leave my family because I did not have family here, and I did not speak English.

The food is different. In Mexico it is fresher. Here the food is frozen. Just heat it in the microwave and it's ready.

In my work it has been hard since I did not speak English, but I'm better now. I need a better job because my current job is hard.

The best thing in my life in St. Paul was the birth of my children. Francisco Jr. is eight years old, and Pablo is six years old. Of course, I have a beautiful wife.

I like the weather, especially the cold.

Francisco Martinez Alatoma is originally from Mexico.

Thanks To My Friends

MARIA DEL PILAR VALLEJO, CRYSTAL

I came to the USA in 2007 and arrived in Minnesota. I came with a lot of dreams and my goal was to make money and to give a good life to my family. When I was in Minnesota for the first time, I was very surprised at the life here because everything was so comfortable. I came from a very poor family and sometimes we did not have enough money to survive. This place dazzled me and I knew that if I worked hard I would have almost everything that I wanted.

However, I felt so alone and clumsy sometimes. I did not speak English and it was so hard for me to communicate. I did not have friends here as I had in my country and I missed my family. After some time had passed, I started to come to school. This gave

me the opportunity to learn English and to meet great people.

Today, I want to say thanks for all of those people in my life, especially the teachers, volunteers, and other partners. I will always remember all of those friends who gave me the lessons that I will never forget. In this country, my mind has been opened because of so many wonderful people and I am so grateful for that.

Maria Del Pilar Vallejo is originally from Mexico.

A Moment That Changed My Life

ZAIRA CEJA, BROOKLYN CENTER

My name is Zaira and I am originally from Nayarit, Mexico. I came to the United States in 2007 and started working right away at a company named Opportunity. This is a place where disabled people work and it has two departments. One is for the disabled workers and the other is for temporary service employees.

I started working as a temp worker and I enjoyed what I did because it was easy to do. Most of the things that we did were assembly and packing. I also enjoyed the job because there were a lot of people who spoke the same language as I did (Spanish).

One day, a person from the other department asked my manager for a person to go and help the disabled workers. My manager sent me to help! While I was working in my new department, the manager asked me to “go get a tray.” I looked at her and said “yes” because I did not know any other words. I looked around the area to see what I could bring to her but there were a lot of items. I just could not figure out what a tray was. Other workers were looking at me and telling me “right there, right there.” I still did not know what to take. Finally, somebody showed me what a tray was. I felt really embarrassed, my face turned red and I thought about it all day long.

From that day forward, I knew that I really wanted to learn English. Now, I remember that day and feel

good because now I can speak English. I feel so proud of myself!

Zaira Ceja is originally from Mexico.

My Growing Years

AYAN HERSI, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Somalia. My parents sent us to school in Somalia and to a madrasa, an Islamic school. I used to get good grades in every subject and I felt strong. Since I came to the USA, I've had many embarrassing moments. Some of the most embarrassing have occurred while I was attending school in the United States. One year, at a charter school for refugees most people spoke Somali or Amharic, so it was hard to learn English. Everyone was speaking in their own language. How could I learn English?

One of these moments happened in high school during my 10th grade in the United States. I remember it well because it concerned my grade. I learned every subject in English, which was hard for me. I used to read a lot and write a lot. I passed ninth grade, but I was worried about 10th grade more because English was my second language. Also, it was my last year to stay in high school at that time. It looks like I'm doing well now.

Ayan Hersi is originally from Minneapolis.

Learning To Be Great Before The Time

MAGDALENA TALAVERA, WORTHINGTON

Hello! I'm Ms. Calderon from Nicaragua, but now I live in the United States. I never thought that my life would change so much. However, all people need to grow up and learn about surviving. The following is my history. I remember when I was just a little girl my father left our family. My mom kept the house with all the responsibilities. I have nine sisters and three brothers. I remember when I was six years old my mother told me, “You need to work where your Dad is working.”

I asked, “Why?”

She answered me, “Because you need to tell your Dad that I don’t have anything to give you and your brothers and sisters don’t have enough food, and we need to pay the light and water bills.”

So I told my mom, “Mom, I can’t go because all the time when I look for him he hides and makes me wait all day in the sun and often in the rain.” That was not the problem. The problem was not expecting much and he gave me nothing. I had to go home hungry and penniless because he did not give me money for the bus. This was frustrating for me, but I never understood because she had hope that I would help her. When he left our house he told her, “Woman, you can use the iron to prepare these shirts and pants for me.” My mom obeyed him, but she never thought that these clothes were to be used for marrying the other woman. He left and did not return.

Time passed, and my mother and my brothers learned to live without help from my father. My mom went to work outside of my country. She went to Costa Rica because she, like other people, needed work and needed more money to send to her parents. This is when my life changed dramatically because of all the changes my mom was experiencing; my brothers and I were still at home. I remember my mom telling my older sister to take care of me. She agreed but my heart tells me that she said no.

So my mom left me and my brothers with her in our house. But my brothers needed someone to make food and wash clothes as well as to clean our house. I think this was my opportunity to help my older brothers. I remember when I was in my house I woke up early because I needed to cook, clean the house, wash the clothes, and then go to school. It was not easy for me. My sister also lived with me, but she never helped me. I did not have an electric stove and the wood fire was too hot for me. So my brother, Wilmer, built a ladder for me so I would not burn the hairs on my arms like before. At this time I was almost 8 years old.

Before my brothers went to work I prepared breakfast for them, then left for work, then went back to prepare lunch for them and then I went to school. I left their lunch on the dining room table.

When I came back from school I took off my uniform and put on shorts or something like that because I just had an hour and a half to prepare dinner. Then they left for work and came back after midnight at 12:30pm. My brother, Wilmer, was special because he always told me that life was not easy for poor people, but if you work hard you can get out of it and achieve every goal. My brother is like my second father. He will always remain in my mind and heart as my father. I love my brother Wilmer.

Magdalena Talavera is originally from Nicaragua.

My Life

MUNTAHO ABDU, ST. PAUL

I came from Oromia. When I came to this country I spoke little English and my pronunciation was very poor. For the first five months I took the bus and visited around St. Paul. The bus driver asked, “where are you going?”

I said, “visiting St. Paul.”

Then he asked, “where do you live?”

I said, “St. Paul.” One day I tried to open a computer and could not. So, I went to school at the Hubbs Center and now I can use the computer.

Muntaho Abdu is originally from Oromia.

Coming to America

ABDIKADIR BASHIR, MINNEAPOLIS

I am Somali. I came to the United States December 30, 2013. When I came, I had never seen a lot of snow. The outside was very cold. Usually I stayed home. I stayed seven days, after seven days, I called my uncle. I went to the Social Security Office. After that, we went shopping. I bought a jacket, boots, a hat and gloves. I started studying English at Hubb Center School in St. Paul. After three months I moved to South St. Paul. I lived in St. Paul for 10 months. I did not have a driver’s license. I could not drive. Now I have had a driver’s license for two years. I have experienced the roads in Minneapolis, because I have lived in Minneapolis for two years. Now, I am hopeful.

I have work. I go to school three days, I work four days.

Abdikadir Bashir is originally from Somalia.

Problem when First in America

FAIZA FARAH, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to the U.S. two years ago, my sister was lost. She didn't know any of my family's phone numbers, she only knew 911. She called 911 because she wanted help to find her house. Then the police came and asked her for her address. She said that she didn't know her address. Then the police asked for her ID card. The police told her, "This is your home... go ahead." She was standing in front of her house the whole time and she didn't know it! The police told me later that my sister didn't want to go out again.

Faiza Farah is originally from Somalia.

My Country, Somalia

FARAH MUHAMUD, MINNEAPOLIS

I was living in a refugee camp for 18 years. I was so glad that I would be going to the USA. All of my family was happy for us. Most of them were crying at the time we left. The whole reason was because of the war that's been going on since 1991.

I couldn't go back to my country. So I went to Ethiopia for a better life. From there on, I started living in a refugee camp for 18 years. After a while, inside the camp, I met my wife, and we had seven kids. We waited years and years to get to America.

We finally made it November 12, 2009. I landed in Missouri. Three months later, I decided to leave Missouri because I couldn't find anyone to help me out, like buying groceries.

When I came to Minnesota, I was glad to find people who helped me out. Now my kids can speak English. So far, I have two kids that finished high school, and are in college. Now my family is happy

and I am happy.

Farah Muhamud is originally from Somalia.

When I First Came to the USA

FARDOSA ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to this country I saw different things like culture, religion, and different people who came in the world. One day when I needed to go to Somali Mall, I saw a bus stop. I needed to take a bus, but when I took the bus it went to another place that I did not need. I felt worry and fear that day. It was a bad day. However everybody, when they come here, knows different things. But when I came here I understood English but could not answer. But now I understand very well and speak a little bit. My goal is to speak English well. I have free education at school. And also I have good work and peace of my own. Everything is good. God knows everything.

Fardosa Ali is originally from Somalia.

My Favorite Place: School

FARDOUSA DAOUD, MINNEAPOLIS

When I first came to the United States, things were very hard for me. I didn't speak any English. I remember how sad I felt when people met me and asked me questions and I couldn't answer them in the beginning. Not only the English language made me confused, sometimes the weather did too. I didn't know about cold weather; I thought every place in the world was the same and I wasn't ready for the cold and snow. The systems in the United States were also a problem, I didn't know anything. One day my friend told me about ESL (English language classes), these classes helped me learn many things.

First, my life changed when I learned to speak English because then I could communicate with my teacher, at my work place, and in the school. Every day I try to improve my English.

Second, after I learned English, I was able to learn more about American systems at my school.

I learned how I could get a job and how I could communicate in the work place and how I get along with my neighbors, saying “please” and “thank you.” I learned about checks and credit cards and I learned about my rights and the rights of others. I got a lot of advice about systems from my teachers at school.

Third, for the weather, I bought a jacket, scarf, and boots. I learned about that from my friends and neighbors and also from my school. Now I am more used to living here, still it is difficult for me the weather especially wintertime. The reason it is hard for me is because Somali weather is not cold. Summer in Minnesota is enjoyable.

Finally, thanks to my teachers and schools for supporting me and helping me find the way to live in the United States. Let me say, this is my beginning not the end. Thank you for everything America.

Fardousa Daoud is originally from Somalia.

My Life

OMAR AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Omar Ahmed. I was born in Somalia. I live in Minneapolis. I go to school four days a week. For two hours a day I take ESL classes. I look back on my life before. I didn’t understand English. Now it is different. Now I can understand.

Now I got a job. I am an experienced mechanic. I worked before as a mechanic in Somalia. I fixed car engines and car bodies before and right now.

Omar Ahmed is originally from Somalia.

My Journey from Somali

SAFIYO SHAFIE, BURNSVILLE

Today, I would like to talk about an interesting journey when I departed from Kenya and came to United States of America. It was in my early twenties and it was a life changing moment when I found out that I was coming to the United States of America. Back in Kenya, I lived with my siblings and both of my parents in the capital city of Nairobi. I had mixed feelings of doubt and happiness for the uncertainty

for the upcoming journey to the new country and people. I was worried about my language barrier as I did not understand one single word of English at the time but I believed that life in America would be amazing place so I was excited and happy to arrive here in U.S.

Back in Nairobi, Kenya, I never went to school. However, when I arrived in Minnesota, I started to work at Jennie-o Turkey store. They did not need me to speak English at my work and I spoke Somali to communicate with my supervisors through an interpreter. As time went by, I became overwhelmed with the stress of work schedule and I did not have time to go to school. It took me four years without going back to school, but luckily, I supported my family during this time. I finally realized three years ago that it was time to return to school. After I decided to pursue and start school and I recognized the truth of the saying “without knowledge is without light.” In addition, I had my family responsibility and the urge to learn English so I consulted my husband to get help and support me during this critical time. My husband was considerate and accepted to help me with kids and other family responsibilities. I am very grateful for his sincere support throughout these years and I am also grateful with my English and computer teachers who taught me how to read, write and communicate with my fellow Americans.

In summary, my dream to come to U.S. was a life changing moment. I never attended school back in Kenya and after years of hard work at Jennie-o Turkey store here in Minnesota, I decided to change my plan and return to school. After three years of challenge at my English classes, I can write my journey from Kenya to the United States of America.

Challenges in America

RASHIKESHAN RAVEENDRAN, ST. PAUL

I am Rashikeshan from Srilanka. My wife’s name is Thakshayiny. I have one daughter, Aaradhya, and one son, Sharron. Now we live in St. Paul, Minnesota.

When we came to America a year and a half ago, we faced many difficulties. When we got here, we didn’t know anyone, didn’t know how to shop and didn’t know how to take the bus. One day my

family and I were waiting for the bus, but we were waiting on the wrong side of the street, because in my country the driver sits on the opposite side that they sit on in the U.S.

Now we are happy because we are managing and handling everything. Now we know some people. My children and I are attending a Family Literacy class. We are improving our language and the children are doing many activities. My wife and I both have jobs.

The weather in my country is very warm. The temperature is more than 36 degrees Centigrade. My children love winter in Minnesota. My wife and I do not like winter. It was very painful for us last year, when we did not have a car. One of our care workers helped us a lot. His name is Saw Oo. I am so thankful for him. He works at the International Institute of Minnesota. This year we are prepared for everything. Now we are OK.

We are happy to be living here, our life is peaceful and happy.

Rashikeshan Raveendran is originally from Srilanka.

Story About Struggles

FELICIA KIRK, MINNEAPOLIS

Hi, I'm Felicia and I've had many struggles in my life's journey. I've taken on educational goals with many difficulties, when "life throws you a curb ball," or, maybe more like in the commercial "Help, I've fallen, and I can't get up." It feels like that old enemy, the devil, keeps on trying to knock me down. Or, am I looking for excuses?

The real truth is I suffer with seizure disorder and dyslexia. It hurts when I've had to suffer with this all my life and no one understands. I've dealt with this since childhood. I had a really bad fall at four and a half years of age. My grandmamma put me in school too soon. I was too young on my first day at John H. Vohr in 1972. It was recess time and I saw this big playground with so much fun stuff to play on. I chose to climb up on the monkey bars and swing upside down. My feet were too small, and not strong enough to hold me. I fell on top of my head. I still

have soft spots on the top of my head from the brain damage.

I'm a nice, kind person. I wish people would look at my heart and spirit, and not my clothes, or my face. All I have is God, and my special gifts, and my slight memories from my lists. I write little messages down every night to remind me things in the morning. Sometimes I don't need it because God, Jesus Christ is always in the midst looking out for me, looking in my heart to get to know me.

Felicia Kirk is originally from USA.

Two Specific Things I Am Thankful for This Year

HIEP TRAN, SHAKOPEE

Time flew too fast, for it is now the end of the year. This year was really not easy for me at all. However, I am happy and thankful to those people who helped me a lot: my mother-in-law and my best friend.

When I wanted to go back to school, there was a big problem that occurred. It is my little girl. She was just one year old and needed someone to care for her. If I did not solve this problem, I had to postpone for many more years my schooling. But this is my lifelong dream. Suddenly, like a miracle, my mother-in-law, who lives in California, returned back to Minnesota and accepted helping my wife and I. What a wonderful thing! She is a resourceful and ingenious person. Therefore, my daughter will always be taken care of in the best way. So, my wife and I were very reassured to go to school or go to work.

Someone else who helped me a lot in a past difficult time is an old friend in high school. In fact, we got back together very unexpectedly. Although of the opposite sex, we are very close and understand each other. She can be called my soulmate. Coincidentally, we have renewed contact with each other via the social network Facebook. Thus, all difficult things in my life, I can talk to her about. Especially in this year, she listened about the difficulties of the children, the time and issues about money. In general, I can tell her

everything I feel unhappy about in my life. I admire her and I am very thankful for the time that she has given to me.

Now, everything has stabilized and I am able to concentrate on schooling and going to work on weekends. There are still difficulties in the future. However, I think about the help and dedication of everyone, especially the help from my mother-in-law and my best friend, with a deep gratitude from my heart. I feel how beautiful life is and I am full of happiness in my soul.

Hiep Tran is originally from Vietnam.

My Life in Thailand

KYAW DAY HTOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Kyaw Day. I will write about my life. I am 21 years old. I was in Burma six years and I moved to Mae Ra Moe Refugee Camp because the Myanmar soldiers killed my Karen people and killed my villagers and burned my home. I don't forget about the Burma leaders and the army killing my dad and burning my home. I don't hate and I'm not angry but I can't forget this ever. We didn't have a home and we lived in the jungle. We didn't have food and clothes — nothing. We moved to Mae Ra Moe Refugee Camp in Thailand in 2001.

I can remember a little bit about Burma. We lived in a small family village. My parents grew rice and vegetables. I had the mountain and the Glay Lo Glo River and the hills in my village. I can remember when I was six years old. I played with my friends and my cousins. We were happy in the jungle. Sometimes we went to find the vegetables and fruit in the forest. We went fishing in the river with my uncle.

I moved to Mae Ra Moe Refugeee camp the Thailand in 2001. I lived in Mae Ra Moe section 4. I lived with my uncle and near my relatives. I was a student in Mae Ra Moe section 4 No.2 High School. I had a hospital, church, and school in my section. I had a section office and a U.N. office in my section.

I lived in Mae Ra Moe Refugee Camp until 2014. I moved to the United States in 2014. I live in St. Paul,

in Minnesota. I live with my uncle. I am a student in GAP school. Now I don't have a job. In the future, when I graduate, finally I will get a job. I am thankful.

Kyaw Day Htoo is 21 and originally from Burma.

Information About My Life

LAY WAY, ST. PAUL

My name is Lay Way Htoo. I was born in April, 1995, in Burma. I am 21 years old.

When I was five years old I went to school. My village name is Glee Lo. My village was very beautiful but in 1997 the Burma soldiers came to the village and also burned my village. After the Burma soldiers came and burned the village the people moved to another place. Some people moved to another village. Some people moved to the Thailand refugee camps.

In 2005 my family moved to Thailand too. We moved to the Karenni Refugee Camp #2. I started school again there. It is Mae Surin School. I learned about the Karenni, Myanmar and English.

On April 5, 2015, I came to the USA. I live in St. Paul Minnesota. I have lived two years here.

Lay Way is 22 and originally from Burma.

My Life in Thailand

SAW MOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Say Nay Ya Moo. My date of birth is in January 1994. I was born in Burma. I have three brothers and three sisters. My village is near the Pwe La Klo River and close by the farm. I lived in Burma for 11 years. Sometimes Burmese soldiers came in to our village and killed my people for no reason. Because Burmese soldiers always came to our village and bothered us, my parents had too many problems to send me and both my brothers and my sisters to school, so my parents decided to send me to Thailand.

I moved to Thailand in 2005. I lived in Mae La Oon Refugee Camp. I was going to school for seven years because I moved to Thailand a little late, so I was late to register for school. Then I only studied for seven years so I don't really have a lot of education.

Because God blessed us we finally decided to move to the United States. I came to the U.S. in 2015. I live with my aunt and her children. I'm a student at G.A.P. School. I study English because I need to get more education.

Saw Moo is 22 and originally from Burma.

My Life in a Refugee Camp

KSER HTOO, ST. PAUL

I was born on the Burma, Thailand border. When I was four, my parents moved to a Thailand refugee camp. We were like animals living in a cage. We couldn't find a job. A UN organization gave us food for one month at a time. They gave us fish paste, rice, beans, and oil. Sometimes we ran out of food before the end of the month, and we didn't have money to buy more.

We also didn't have a good education in the camp, because we had to pay for it. My life in the refugee camp was very poor. We didn't have freedom. My parents didn't have a job in the camp, and weren't allowed to go out of the camp to work. So, they didn't have money to buy meat and send us to school.

Now we are fine. We are going to school, we can eat meat when we want, my parents have jobs, and when we run out of food we can buy more.

Kser Htoo is 26 and originally from Burma.

Challenges and Changes

ZAR LWEE, ST. PAUL

When I first came to America I experienced big challenges that I will never forget. I found myself having to get used to a lot of changes when I arrived.

I came to America with my three brothers. That was my first time to live apart from my parents. It

was too hard to live without them. I was the only girl from my family to come to this county with my brothers. The first big challenge was time. Day and night are opposite in the United States and Thailand, where I had come from. It wasn't easy to turn my night and day around. I couldn't sleep at night and I couldn't wake up in the morning. It was so hard for me. When I started working I had to wake up early in the morning and that was very difficult. Sometimes I fell asleep in the bus. When I lived with my parents I didn't have to wake up early in the morning. I missed them a lot when I started work, waking up early. Sometimes I wanted to cry and give up. I didn't have a car and I didn't know how to drive, so I had to take a bus, which meant I had to get up very early to make it to work on time. It was especially difficult on Sunday when buses were not running. I had to call my friends to drive me to work.

I had a lot of depression when I began living in America. However, when I looked around and saw a lot of people who were refugees like me, I became stronger and cheered up. I said to myself, "Don't give up. They can do it, so can you."

Finally, time is flying, and things are still changing a lot, but I can easily wake up whenever I need to and I can drive wherever I need to go. Success is possible, just keep going and never give up.

Zar Lwee is 31 and originally from Burma.

My Life

WAH MAN, ST. PAUL

My name is Wah Man. I was born in 1972 in Ku Graw Dum Village. I have three brothers and four sisters. I am the oldest brother. When I was eight years old, I went to school. I did not have money because I was born in a poor family, in a poor country.

When I was 12, I went to school and lived with my friend's family. My friend helped me when I needed help. Sometimes I felt good and sometimes I felt sad, because I was not living with my own family.

When I was 20 years old, I went to a Thailand refugee camp. I lived there for 15 years. In 2010 I came to America. I have been here for almost seven years.

Wah Man is 44 and originally from Burma.

Growing Up in Poverty

ANTONIO QUIZHPI, MINNEAPOLIS

Growing up in poverty makes a person's life difficult in many ways. First, poverty forces a child to grow up more quickly. When I was a child it was hard to buy things that I wanted to have, so I started work early. My first job was shining shoes in the big city everyday. I left home to live with my oldest brother, but every two weeks I liked to go to visit my mom and give her all the money I had. Second, poverty can interfere with your plans for the future. I was trying to go to college, but I couldn't make that happen because the price increased each year. As a result, I decided just to work in construction until I moved to America. Finally, growing up in poverty means always being aware of how your life is different from people with money. On the special days, I couldn't wear nice shoes or pants. However, now I can buy anything I want, and I can help others. In conclusion, life is hard, but you can always have a better future.

Antonio Quizhpi is 32 and originally from Ecuador.

My Journey

RORY WOODFORD, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Three years ago I was struck with a life-threatening illness, ESRD or End Stage Renal Disease. Dealing with such a devastating ailment was tremendously difficult. Constant hospital stays and dialysis treatments, which is a process that removes toxins from my blood that my kidneys otherwise cannot, had me feeling like giving up. Even the things I love, like singing, writing, or even dancing did not help to dull the blow of kidney failure. Knowing that ESRD could take my life at any point made me decide to not let what is left of my life go to waste. I applied for GED classes after being out of school for over 10 years and found out I still have a chance at a great education. People have tried to say things like "you can't do it" or "you're going to fail," to which I simply say "watch me." No matter what hand life deals, believe in yourself! We are a resilient race of beings and I'm living proof. While being on dialysis and attending school, I know that I am on a path to a healthier, more educated life.

Rory Woodford is 35 and originally from Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

Cultural Adaptation

MARIA BALVINA CHIMBORAZO YUPA, MINNEAPOLIS

One cultural adaptation I had to make in America was winter time. In my country it is always summer. Here it is dark around 4 p.m. and it is still dark in the morning when I wake up. For me that was a problem. Because I am afraid of the dark. I have to take the bus to work. Now even though I am still afraid of the dark, I need money. So I go to work.

Maria Balvina Chimborazo Yupa is 31 and originally from Ecuador.

A Bad Day

HADDIS ISMAIL, MINNEAPOLIS

I had many obstacles last Tuesday. First, I forgot my go (transit) card at home. Second, when I rode the bus, I didn't find my go card. I had a lot of money that time, but I didn't have change. I missed the bus, and I wanted to get change. I went to the bank, and I got change. I came back to the bus stop again. I felt sad, because it was very cold. I lost my time. I was late for work. My manager was not happy. I didn't lose my job, but I got a warning. So, sometimes I got little problem, sometimes not. Last Tuesday was not a good day for me.

Haddis Ismail is 24 and originally from Ethiopia.

Life in America

ABEBA TAFERE, ST. PAUL

My name is Abeba. I am from Ethiopia. I came to the US in January 2011. After three months I got pregnant with my first daughter. It was a hard time for me, because everything was new for me in this country, and I had no friends or family here. My appetite decreased. I only ate baby crackers. I didn't drink milk, I only drank water. My doctor warned me every time I went to the clinic. In December 2012 my daughter was born. I remember there was a lot of snow that day. It was scary to drive. Nobody was there to say welcome home to me. After six months, my sister came to take care of me. She stayed for six months. It was really good for me. After a year and five months, I got pregnant with my second daughter. One year later I started school with my daughter in a Family Literacy program. It has been good for me to make friends and learn new things.

My husband was a driver and got in a car accident. He is now disabled and cannot work. He was an artist in Ethiopia and still likes to do water colors and oil painting in Minnesota. I like to sew, model designs, and cook. We are a happy family in Minnesota.

Abeba Tafere is 30 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

BADRIYA TILMO, ST. PAUL

When I was nine years old, I went to a refugee camp in Nairobi, Kenya for 10 years. Then I went to a different refugee camp for four years. Then, in 2003 I came to the United States. The first two years were really hard for me. I had no English, no job, and no studies. I went to school, but instead of studying I was thinking about my future, wondering whether it would be good or bad.

Now everything is good for me. I have a job, I have a baby. From 2010 to 2014 everything was new again, like a newborn and it is all good. Thank you God and bless you America.

Badriya Tilmo is 35 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Goals

MESERET WELDETNSA, ST. PAUL

I want to tell you about my family goals. I was busy for one year. I could not take good care of my son. He was three years old and I needed to do many things for him, but I couldn't because I worked at night. The night shift was very hard work. I couldn't get enough sleep. When I got up I still felt fatigued. I was so tired I couldn't even make food for my son.

I tried sending my son to day care for three hours. That daycare had many children. That was good for my son, but he often got sick. So, I decided to quit my job and stay home with my son.

Now I attend classes for parents. I am learning how to raise children, how important reading to my child is, and how to discipline. I have learned what to do to calm my child down when he gets angry. I am also studying English. Life is better for us now.

Meseret Weldetnsa is 35 and originally from Ethiopia Harar.

This is My Little History

FREDY BATRES SOLARES, WORTHINGTON

On this date, May 30, 2015, I was at a party. My best friend's wedding. It happened around 10:00 p.m. at Eagle's Bay. I was dancing. I was happy but there was something more. I was a little bit drunk, so I only remember that I walked to the bar to drink a beer. But there were wires laying on the floor and I got tangled up and fell on the ground and I broke my right hand. I was surprised to see my arm broken. After that my friend picked me up and took me to the hospital and the doctor said "Oh my God, you have a big break!" and I was like, "Really?" and the doctor said, "Yeah."

They had to perform two big surgeries and put titanium inside my arm. It was sad because I stayed at home for three months. Three months no working, not earning money, cannot do anything that I like. My parents got worried too about my broken arm. After two and a half months I started to do some exercises at home. It was not easy, but thanks to the doctor, my arm is 100% good.

God bless America.

Fredy Batres Solares is 24 and originally from Guatemala.

My Family

ELVIA SOTO PEREZ, WORTHINGTON

When I was born I had seven brothers and four sisters. When I was growing up my parents told me that my dad had a rare sickness. This rare sickness was called Epilepsy. My mom worked so hard to try to take my dad to the doctor and get the medicine he needed but it was expensive. My dad had this sickness for 18 years. He still has it today, but it is not as bad. This rare sickness caused my dad to fall to the ground and tremble. He would fold his hands over and he would bite his tongue which could cut his tongue and hurt his hands. So, to prevent that from happening, my mom would put sticks in his mouth and hands. Because of my dad's illness, my mom was the only person in our family that worked. It was hard to keep all of my family healthy. It was also hard for her to buy food, clothes, and medicine for my dad.

Out of all of my siblings, four of us came to the United States of America. The rest of my siblings stayed in Guatemala to care for my mom and dad. We were originally 11 brothers and sisters but three of them died. One died at eight months of age and the other two died in their teenage years. They died because they were sick and we couldn't afford to take them to the doctor. It was hard for my mom and family to see them die but we will always remember them. Someday I would like to go visit my family in Guatemala and if that does happen it would be a wish come true.

Elvia Soto Perez is 29 and originally from Guatemala.

My Experience in the United States

ANONYMOUS, PLYMOUTH

In my life, I have never been outside without my parents except school and college, but I came to the USA with my husband when I got married. Minnesota is the first state to which we came in the USA. The two most difficult things here for me have

been weather and making friends.

I am from southern India which is one of the hottest places in India, but Minnesota is one of the coldest places in the USA, so I had the worst experience during my first winter. I didn't go outside during that period and that was really a horrible experience for me in the USA.

I didn't have any friends when we came here. My husband could have met a few people at his office, but I got too bored. During the day time, I looked outside through the window and I could see only vehicles, but no people. Then I wanted to come out my loneliness, so I had to walk outside around the apartment. Because of that, I got a few friends.

Slowly I have learned how to manage American life. First I got a driver's license because without driving we can't do anything here. Then I had my kid and I am very busy. Now I need time to rest but I can't get it. Now I am looking for a job and I have more friends in my apartment. Every weekend, we meet and enjoy. Finally I have realized that I like Minnesota.

My Transition

LAKSHMY KADAVIL FALGUNAN, PLYMOUTH

I would like to take this opportunity to share my experience with you all. When I came to the United States from India, it was hard to separate from my family. I was missing them very much. I also missed my friends whom I grew up with. I was missing my favorite Indian foods too.

One of my difficulties was I did not speak English very well. So I was not able to communicate with the people in this country. As years go by, I have taken some effort to improve my communication and because of that I have improved a lot!

For example, now I can travel alone in the U.S. for my kid's preschool and I am also volunteering in her school to get some experience to start my career. My new target is to get a good job in the U.S. Now I have the confidence to communicate with the people from the US.

I have also completed eight years here and I am also adjusted with the culture and new surroundings. Now I don't miss my family like before, but I call them every day. One thing I learned from my experience is when we are alone in a different country we will build a strong bond within our family and community.

Lakshmy Kadavil Falgunan is 33 and originally from India.

The Lollipop

JORGE MARIN, MINNEAPOLIS

Hi, my name is Jorge. I am from Mexico. This story is about not having enough money and tough decisions. When I was a child I was fighting with my mom every morning because she wanted me to go to school, and I did not want to. It was not because I did not like the school, but because I did not have any money. Almost every morning I had to go without breakfast, and without money to buy something to eat at school.

At lunchtime, my classmates were buying food and making friends. I was most of the time thinking about what would be my food when classes ended. Seeing other people eating when you are very hungry is a terrible feeling. Sometimes classmates shared food with me and I was so happy. But it didn't make them my friends.

I remember one clear moment that I will never forget. On weekends I would work for pesos for lunch at school, but the money was not enough. Every lunch always cost more than what I had in my pocket. If a lunch cost five pesos and I had only four, I had to borrow money from classmates, or buy something less expensive. I thought if I borrow, I would not be able to pay back, so I ended up buying something that was only one peso for lunch, a lollipop. That way I would have enough money for four days instead of one. One lollipop a day, for four days. Having something to eat gave me the confidence to go with the group and make friends.

When I finished my secondary school, I had to decide between surviving (work) or studying. I wanted to study, but I chose surviving. I left town to

work in construction in Mexico City, far away from my family. I left with a few pesos and a one way ticket for the bus. I left alone and knowing that this one way ticket was real. That if something goes wrong, I would be in the streets for the rest of my life. I can tell you now my decision was good but life was tough every day.

Jorge Marin is 30 and originally from Mexico.

Difficult Decision

JOSE VILLEGAS, MARSHALL

Coming to the U.S. was a hard decision. I still remember when my father asked me, "Son do you want to go to the United States with your brother?" I was in shock for a few minutes when he asked me. But the next day I was ready to come to America.

I'm from Durango, Mexico. My story starts here. I had to travel 600 kilometers (400 miles) to arrive at the Texas border. My friends and I crossed the Rio Grande at night. I was afraid, and I missed my family already. The first three nights nobody spoke. We just headed north and watched the compass. After those three nights, my companion said, "No more walking at night." I was happy because we would walk during the days but I didn't know that the sun was very bright and the days were hot in the desert. Also, we were running out of food, but we had to walk several more days.

The next day we started walking again, and my friend saw a hunter's house. Everyone got so happy because maybe there would be food and guess what? We found food! All of us were happy that evening. The worst came the next day.

We started walking again, but suddenly we were lost and we were afraid. My friend asked me to go for help. "How?" I asked him. We were desperate, but another friend said, "Take it easy! I know where we are. Let's take a break." After ten days of walking in the desert, we arrived in a town called Eola, Texas. Eventually I made my way to Minnesota.

I have lived in Marshall since 1999. I worked at

Jenny-O Foods, then I began taking English classes. I had a dream to get my GED. In the same year, I met a beautiful person who is now my wife. We have four kids and two grandchildren. After eight years, I completed my first goal: I earned my GED. I was so excited. I want to say thank you to all my English teachers and the education program in Minnesota. My other goal is to enroll in the Minnesota West Community and Technical College. Even though I spent only \$200 to come to this country I would not ever risk my life again.

Jose Villegas is 46 and originally from Mexico.

Difficulties in America

MAY HTOO, WORTHINGTON

Everything changed for me when I came to America. I didn't know how to speak English and I didn't understand English at all. It was difficult to go shopping because I didn't know how to drive. I didn't know how to do laundry or how to make an appointment at the clinic. So many difficulties for me. Now after eight years it's better for me because I know how to drive. I can go everywhere. I speak English a little bit. I know how to make an appointment. It's easy for me. I can go by myself to the clinic.

May Htoo is 31 and originally from Myanmar.

My New Life

ALEXANDRA SEFFER, ST. PAUL

My new life began in 2012 when I landed in Minneapolis. It didn't feel real. I have to tell you that. A city with over a million inhabitants and a large immigration population.

Unlike other people, I came to the U.S. without any special reason, except for the fact that my husband began working here. However, since I came here, my life has absolutely changed. A brand new life spreads in front of me, which has affected me mainly in language, my family and friends, and adjustments. The first effect on me was that I could not communicate in English. The language became

the first and the biggest problem. I couldn't speak and couldn't understand what other people were talking about. Thank God my husband was always with me when I needed to speak in English, because I didn't even dare to go out anywhere without him.

I choose to stay here with my husband and adapt to the American life, as soon as possible. It took me more than one year to start simply communicating with others, which gave me a lot of confidence. This was my biggest challenge and I will do my best to continue improving myself.

Another thing that has an effect on me is that I had to say goodbye to my friends and family. I felt a little bit lost. It wasn't simple at all. For me, the most important person is my husband who I can rely on and trust.

We are expanding our family, and I want to provide a good education and a good life for my children and create the life we want for ourselves. Thank you to America for these challenges in my life.

It Is My Belief

ARAD SUGULE, SAINT CLOUD

A long time ago, I was a skinny and beautiful young lady. I would like to keep that way forever. As I got older, I was gaining weight. It was changing my beauty, and my health. Before I was gaining weight, I didn't feel tired. My sleep was good. I was not worried about what I ate and at what time I ate, but that my body was changed. I felt heavy, had a lack of sleep, and was uncomfortable. I tried to lose weight and did many different things. It didn't work at first, and it was hard to lose even one pound. I believe it is hard to lose weight when you become an adult, but I never gave up. I kept trying and trying. Finally, I lost a lot of pounds. I realized that if you try something and work hard, you can win one day.



Life at School

ASMA MOHAMED, SAINT CLOUD

When I was 10 years old I was a student in fifth grade. I lived with my parents in Hargeisa, Somaliland. One day my Mother told me that we were moving to a new country. It was sad for me. I liked my school and friends, but I had to listen to my mother. We moved to Ethiopia and lived in our new country for two years. After that my father died. I had to help my mom, so I didn't go to school. I started working in a coffee shop and helped my mom at home. I helped take care of my siblings. My mother started a small business. She went out of the country and bought some clothing and shoes. After that she came back and sold everything. We only saw her face once a month. I just tried my best to take care of my four younger sisters and three younger brothers. We were all happy, but after a few years we moved again.

On May 18, 2014, we came to America. When we first got here we went to Wichita, Kansas. A student must not be over 18 years old to go to high school in Wichita. I was over 18 so I didn't get to go to school. It was really sad. I remember I cried for a week and I didn't leave my room. I started working part-time and went to ESL classes at night. The teacher at night school told me that I could take GED classes.

We moved again to Minnesota. We have lived in St. Cloud, almost one year. When we came here I could not take English classes during the day because classes were full. I started night school again. Now I am in classes during the day. I found out I could get my high school diploma. I'm close to getting into the Diploma Program.

I had a dream when I was young and I still have that dream. My dream is to go to college and become a lawyer. I hope my dream will come true.

Feeling Empty

BILAN AHMED, SAINT CLOUD

Imagine a woman who was a refugee in another country who loses her family! When I had parents, I felt the world was full of life. I had someone who cared for me. However, when my parents passed in

the same year, I felt the world was empty. I felt alone. After four years I prepared to be a strong person and to help others when they have a problem. Now I am a business woman, I am a student, and I have a job in the same school where I study.

Although I'm an adult, still I miss my parents. Getting a visa to come to the USA helped me to make changes. I thank God first, but I also thank America for giving me opportunity.

My Journey

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Carolyne. I'm from Mexico. I'm 22 years old, and I have two beautiful daughters. I love them so much. Right now I live in Minneapolis, but my journey began when I was 16 years old.

I was in high school. My boyfriend didn't like being in high school, and he didn't like living in Mexico either. He told me, "Let's go to the United States." I said yes, but it was so hard to live here because English wasn't my language, and I didn't understand anything people tried to say to me. I had to work and then I got pregnant, but my boyfriend didn't love me anymore because he knew I was pregnant. He left me with a friend and never looked for my baby or me. I had to find my grandmother to ask for help, and she supported me. Then, the police got him and deported him to Mexico.

That's when I decided to study again. It was hard to study and work at the same time, so I left the school. After this, I met Sara's father, but he abused me. He was a bad man, too. Now, I would prefer to be alone with my daughters and work for them. Nobody should have to live with somebody they don't love. Right now I'm so happy to be alone with my daughters, and I give them love and the things they need. My goal is to learn English and overcome any obstacles to having a good life. Nothing is impossible. If you just work hard, you can achieve your dreams.

Wings

DAVINNA MCCOY, SAINT CLOUD

There is a bird that flies.

His wings get so heavy.
His wings get so tired,
Yet he still flies.
He flies against the wind.
He flies against the rain.
He flies against all obstacles.
He flutters and flies.
His wings get so much stronger.
He makes good and bad decisions that cause him to,
Fly low and almost break his wings.
He flies and he soars. His wings are anything but broken,
When he flies against the wind.

Why I Lost Interest in School

DORRENE BRYANT, MINNEAPOLIS

There is a reason behind everyone stopping school. It's not that I gave up. There were just obstacles that got in the way. When I was about 14 years old, I was enrolled in North High School, and I started getting into trouble because of the bad influences. I was in the eighth grade so I started going to Phillips Junior High School. I didn't know anyone there until I started making friends. I guess at that time that's what I thought they were. I was young so like any other young girl I just wanted to fit in. I started getting into fights and got suspended and also went to juvenile detention center. I got right back out that same day and from that point on I just couldn't stop getting into trouble. That school year finally came to an end. Then I was kicked out of that school for fighting, and then my mother moved us over on the south side of Minneapolis.

So summer time came. Because my mother didn't know that we had moved onto an Indian reservation, I pretty much had a fight everyday throughout the summer. Eventually, we left the reservation, and I was later suspended from South High School, this time because someone reported me. After that I just lost interest in going back to school. My mother was always working so she never knew what was going

on with me. My mother was a single parent raising seven on her own. I was best friends with my mother. We were like twins.

Over the years, I have had my own health issues, and my mom struggled with medical issues and passed away two years ago. My mom was first priority to me. Now that my mom is gone, there is a gap in my life that gives me the chance to do something positive for myself. I think my mom is still with me in spirit. I know she would want me to do this. I am more focused because I have more time. Without an education you can only get so far. Never give up. If you feel like you need to go back, go back. There's always that window of opportunity. It's never too late. If I can do it anyone can. You can be your own inspiration.

A Different Feeling

HEBA DAMMAG, BLAINE

I remember when my husband called me. He asked me, "What is your opinion about a vacation together in Egypt for one month?" He said after the month together, he would return to the U.S. and I would go back to Yemen. I couldn't go to the U.S. yet because I didn't have a visa, so my husband and I lived in two different countries for one and a half years — Yemen was my country.

I told him, "Okay, it is a good idea." I was seven months pregnant, so I told my husband I only wanted to be gone for one month and then go back to my country to have the baby. He said, "Yes, sure you can go back to Yemen." So, I met my husband in Egypt and we spent an amazing time together. After we finished our vacation, I booked my ticket to return to Yemen. Suddenly, the news said the airports in Yemen were closed, and no one could come in or go out because the war had started there. What could I do? My husband told me, "No problem, you can go back to the airport in just a few days, and the airport will open, and you can go home to Yemen."

The war was not over after a few days. It continued to go on, and it continues to this day. I stayed in Egypt until my daughter was born. After that my husband asked me, "What should we do?" He said he should go back to the U.S. because he has to go

back to work. He said he couldn't stay more than five months in Egypt. After 5 months, he needed to go back to the U.S., but he didn't want to leave me alone. So I suggested I travel to my sister's house in Algeria and he return to the U.S.

After four months of living in Algeria, I went to the embassy to get my visa, I received the worst news of my life. My father was dead. I couldn't believe it! Just the day before, my father talked with me on my cell phone, and he told me everything was okay. I was very, very sad and couldn't do anything. I couldn't go back to Yemen to see him before he was buried. I also couldn't leave my sister because she was pregnant and she was so tired. So, I stayed with her for one month until her baby was born. On December 10, 2015 my baby and I were able to go to the U.S. for the first time. This date is a special date in my life. I love America.

My Life in Minnesota

HERIBERTA FUENTES, OSSEO

When I moved to America, I was so excited for my little kids and I. We expected to see snow. My first day on the job was so frustrating because I did not understand English. I felt very nervous and uncomfortable. I found some people who helped me communicate with my boss. The first day of kindergarten for my older son was so hard. He was nervous, uncomfortable and disappointed because of the language. He couldn't go to the restroom because he didn't know to say it. We felt like strangers in this country. After one month, my son started to learn English and every day he taught me some new words. After ten years in Minnesota, we're happy because we have a better life than we had in our county. We also enjoy every season of the year. My oldest son is now 15 and he's in 10th grade in high school. My youngest is 13 and he's in ninth grade in middle school. Now we adapted to life in Minnesota.

My Home

ISMAHAN NUR, SAINT CLOUD

In Somalia I lived in Galgaduud, Caabudwaaq for seven years. Then I Somalia because it had problems. I felt happy when I left and went to Ethiopia. I did not come to the U.S. until 2015 and when I got to the

U.S. I had a normal feeling. Today, living in the U.S., I don't know how I feel. It is better than Somalia, but I don't know. I miss my culture and my family. If I could return to Somalia I would go back because it is my home.

Take This Wheel

JAIMIE RAE MAXSON, SAINT CLOUD

Somebody please take this wheel,
I'm failing, too messed up to feel,
Shadows creeping,
Window peeking,
I'm thinking,
Is this imaginary or real?
This is my confession,
My mind's messed up,
By meth infection,
I'm lost with no direction,
Where do I go from here?
To my grave I do fear,
If nobody takes this wheel to steer.

Beautiful Hate

JARED LEE, SAINT CLOUD

The man so aesthetically pleasing;
Stands so proud and stout,
You know pride ain't the thing,
The perceived confidence, there is no doubt,
The philosophy's intertwined and wrestled with in,
Relates to all and every single wing,
Now externally and internally with in,
Beauty an assured definite state of him,
The beauty deeper than skin,
Can falter any question,
When criticisms heard;
It's a saddening thing,
Criticism with no passionate intent;
Ignorance aired actually meant to be heard;

Hurt/heard none the less the equivalent,
Where was the positive you once in chained?
Off course it's right there,
Strong and proud within,
Doubt unconditionally here to implode,
Trust or fear you decide,
Simply it's not I'm afraid you'll find,
The ugly truth as beauty in the weakest to most
powerful;
To all who can balance truth?
Love you'll find from all kinds.

Humanity

JOSH PETERSON, SAINT CLOUD

Humanity,
The only species capable of spite,
Yet the only ones who fight for what's right.
The only species willing to do evil,
Yet at times the brave stand up for the fearful.
We are a species that strives to do good,
Yet daily, we don't do what we should.
Humanity,
The only species with conscious thought,
Yet the only ones who kill for naught.
The only species with a superiority claim,
Yet we commit heinous acts without any shame.
Humanity claims to be better than earth's
creatures,
Seems to me we're the worst of its features.
Humanity.

Coming to America

ANONYMOUS BROOKLYN PARK

My name is 2k. I came from East Oromiya which is in East Africa. On May 9th, I came to Michigan and I lived there for one year in Grand Rapids. After one year in Michigan my husband and I moved to Minnesota, because many of my people lived there. The first year it was very hard for us. We didn't drive and we always

caught a bus. Sometimes the weather was very cold. It was hard to get a job. Every time they called to interview. We didn't speak English and didn't know how to answer their questions. Finally, my teacher helped me prepare myself for an interview, she took me to the place. How lucky I am they hired me as a cashier. I really appreciate that teacher.

Watching the One You Love Lose Himself and Family, Too

KIM GREENE, MINNEAPOLIS

It seems like yesterday. We were living the good life. We would sit up all night long on the phone talking to each other. Making plans for our future. I never knew that girl (cocaine) was a factor in your life. I didn't have a clue she would come like a thief in the night and steal you away. After all we had been through, starting our life together. Now here we are, the kids and I crying, praying every waking moment of the day that the man, father, we once knew and loved so dearly would show up again. But it really seems like our prayers continue to go unanswered. So we continue to pray, but distance ourselves from you because ten years is too long. Everything we once loved about you is gone. You once were so warm and welcoming but now it's so toxic. I hope, I pray and wish you would realize that we're not the problem, but that your hidden life, that other life, is.

Events in My Life

LESLEY TABORA, WAITE PARK

I had two big events happen in my life. One was when I lost everything in my country. Before this happened, I could afford to have all the things I wanted. Now I've learned that nothing is stable. Our lives can change quickly. The strongest event in my life was when my son was born with special needs, and I was traumatized because I didn't know how to work with that. Now I have learned to take care of him. I am happy because I accept that things are not going to change for him. All those events in my life helped to me to be a better person.

New Day

NICK ERICKSON, SAINT ANTHONY

Up or down, left or right; do I lie down and give up,
Run or fight?

Fighting through the darkness to seek the light,
Acting brave but filled with fright.

My Mom had to fight for me all of her life,
I lost my children from my bad decisions one night.
It is so much easier for me to blame,

To point my finger saying, "You did the same."

One day I will realize this isn't a game,

There are lives at stake that will forever be
changed.

If I could go back and fix anything,

It wouldn't be to stop the drugs or drinking.

It would be to take the distortions out of my
thinking;

To stop looking at that devil on my shoulder
winking.

To realize I have talents hidden away,

To realize loving someone is not just about today.

To love for the faults as well as the virtues;

To realize life will constantly hurt you.

Most of all I want to say,

"Never give up. Tomorrow is a new day."

Walk In Beauty

TARA LEE, CAMBRIDGE

Hate.

Misery.

Self-Loathing.

Where did these things come from?

How did I pick them up along the way?

--"Ya'll dance with the devil" ..isn't that what they

say?

Pain.

Fear.

All alone.

Who is this woman I have become?

How did I not see her coming?

How do I get rid of this darkness festering inside
of me?

Where can I strip it off? Lay it down?

Take this mask off from my face?

I am afraid the time will come when it will be
much too late.

That she is now in me.

Where am I supposed to go?

Where will this sidewalk take me?

Who is supposed to know?

Where was I supposed to go?

If only somebody, something could have shown
me.

Upside down, trying to figure this out.

Life was never meant to be easy.

Where was I supposed to go?

Maybe the only answer is to be found inside of me.

Please hold out your hand. I can see you.

Please help me, please guide me, please show me.

Before it's too late.

Please help me,

Walk in beauty.

My Illness Had a Happy Ending

VERONICA BEDOLLA DE DIAZ, COLD SPRING

When I was 12 years old I had a horrible virus in
my stomach. I remember that I couldn't eat any food
because anything I ate would make me vomit. Also,
I had a high fever. I could not stand because I was

not strong enough. My mom cut my hair a little. She believed my body needed all the vitamins possible for me to be stronger. For that reason, I was in a hospital for a lot a time.

My family was very worried for me. My mom didn't have enough money to to pay the hospital. In Mexico, not all people have insurance, and my family did not have insurance. However, two doctors, my mom's friends, decided to help me and they brought me to their house to take care of me. I remember how they looked after me. Before they went to the hospital in the morning, they checked me. Their family prepared soup for me and they liquefied my food. When I started to feel a little better, my mom and I were able to go to my house.

My illness made me miss many weeks of school. During that time, my classmates were preparing for graduation from Miguel Hidalgo Elementary School. I also missed all the training for the final dance of the school year. I thought that I would not graduate from school that year, but my teacher gave me a test and I had good grades. Therefore, my teacher told me, "you are ready for secondary school." Also, he had a place in the dance for me. He thought that I must graduate the same as the other kids, so he gave me a place in front of the dancing group, and he prepared a few easy steps for me. I remember that day. It was awesome for me. We had a big party in a wonderful place that we call La Carreta, and the dance was perfect. My parents took many pictures. Finally, I was graduated, but I never forgot the magnificent people that took care of me.

Grandmothers

VERONICA HERNANDEZ, MAPLE GROVE

I lost my two grandmothers in 2015 with only six months apart. This was very hard for me, because all my life they were with me. One knows that it is a normal thing for your grandmother to die before you, but you are never ready. They taught me different things, because their lives were different and their ways of seeing life were very opposite. One was working during all her life and the other never had to work. One was a good cook and the other never cooked. One had a thousand stories to share and the other preferred to forget the past. One felt

independent and the other never knew how to be alone. Where they coincided was in the immense love that they gave to those who surrounded them. Thanks to them, now I am the woman that I am, with defects and virtues. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to have them for more than 30 years. They planted the roots to form a great family, and always will be in my heart.

Recovering From a Bad Experience

ANONYMOUS, SAINT CLOUD

Last year, one night on the way home from work something very bad happened to me. I will never forget it.

I took the bus to go home after work. When I got off the bus, a man, who got on at the same place as me, also got off at my stop. The man followed me, but I didn't pay attention. I thought he was going in the same direction as I was. When I got to my apartment and I was right in front of the door, suddenly someone pushed on my back and pushed me toward the sidewalk. He hit me, but he did not say anything to me. I was very scared: I yelled for someone "Please, help me!" I yelled all the while, but nobody helped me. It was during the winter, and neighbor people had closed their windows and doors. There wasn't anyone walking outside, although it was only 8:00 pm. I pushed against the man. I wanted to stand up and run away, but he was more powerful than me! I could not get away!

I bit his hand! Then he was angry. He pulled me under my neighbor's balcony and used his hand to choke me. I could not breathe! Fortunately, my neighbor heard the noise under his balcony. He opened the door and shouted at the man, "Get out!" The man saw my neighbor was very strong and ran away very fast. I stood up and said, "Thank you very much." I was still horrified. I couldn't go home because I looked very bad. I was bleeding from my mouth, my hair has been pulled out in places. My children were young, and I did not want to scare them. I needed help.

I went directly to my friend's apartment and told her what happened to me. We called the police. After 10 minutes, policemen came to my friend's apartment, and I made a report of the crime, but I never saw him. After around one month, the guy was arrested and in the jail.

Living in a new country is difficult. I'm hard working. I go to school to study and take care my children. I also have part time work so I work often in the evening. As a result of this attack, I am scared to walk alone in the dark night, but I still do this. I need to earn money to support my family. I often think I need to be positive and enjoy every day. I don't know what will happen in my life, especially something I cannot control, and I need to look for happiness and laughter.

Challenge and Change

ANONYMOUS, NEW HOPE

I have some challenges. My biggest challenge is being a mom with four children and being a student at the same time. It is very hard for me to come to class when I have a sick child at home. Sometimes I feel like I need to stay home until my youngest one goes to kindergarten, but we know the kids will grow. I always tell myself when the kids grow I will have time for myself to learn better, more hours and get a good job. I will always be their mother but everything will be better and beautiful. Sometimes they make me forget all the challenges I have in life because some day they will get old and be responsible.

Coming to America

ANONYMOUS, BLAINE

I am Heba and my husband is Thaer. We got married in 2013. He has been in America since 1999. I was 12 years old when he left. While he studied and worked in the U.S., I finished high school. Then I studied at the university for four years. I graduated in 2011 as an Arabic teacher.

After I got married, I came to America to be with my husband. After I arrived, life was very difficult for

me, and some things were different because I didn't speak English well, especially in conversation. That's why I'm here now, to improve my English language. The first year, I didn't work because I didn't have a driver's license, but now I have it and I can find a job in a school.

Life in America has become easier for me, I know the names of cities in Minnesota and the country. That's made me more comfortable than at first, but one thing that is not happy for me and every time I think about it, it makes me sad: I miss my family. I went back home this year in July, and I saw my family

My Happy Ending

SAMANTHA BARTON, FRIDLEY

My journey starts when I first tried methamphetamine, also known as meth, crystal, glass and the list goes on. The feeling and rush was, at the time, amazing. The pain that I felt physically and emotionally would disappear with that first hit. I continued my drug use for many more years leading me to homelessness. I lived in my car for months, during this time it just felt like I was losing my self all together. Finally I found someone that cared and helped me and got me out of my car and into a great place to live, with loving people all around. Not even that could stop me from my drug abuse. I continued my bad habit for a little while until the day came and I found out I was pregnant with my baby boy. I've always promised my unborn baby that I would stop it all! And that's what I did. I stopped completely and have been sober since then, nine years later. Now, I have two amazing boys that brighten my day, looking into their eyes and seeing how much they love their mommy makes me smile and that alone right there, is better than any drug, any day. My life is so much better and brighter because of them and I wouldn't change that for anything else in the world and I owe them my life.

My Life Has Changed in Many Ways

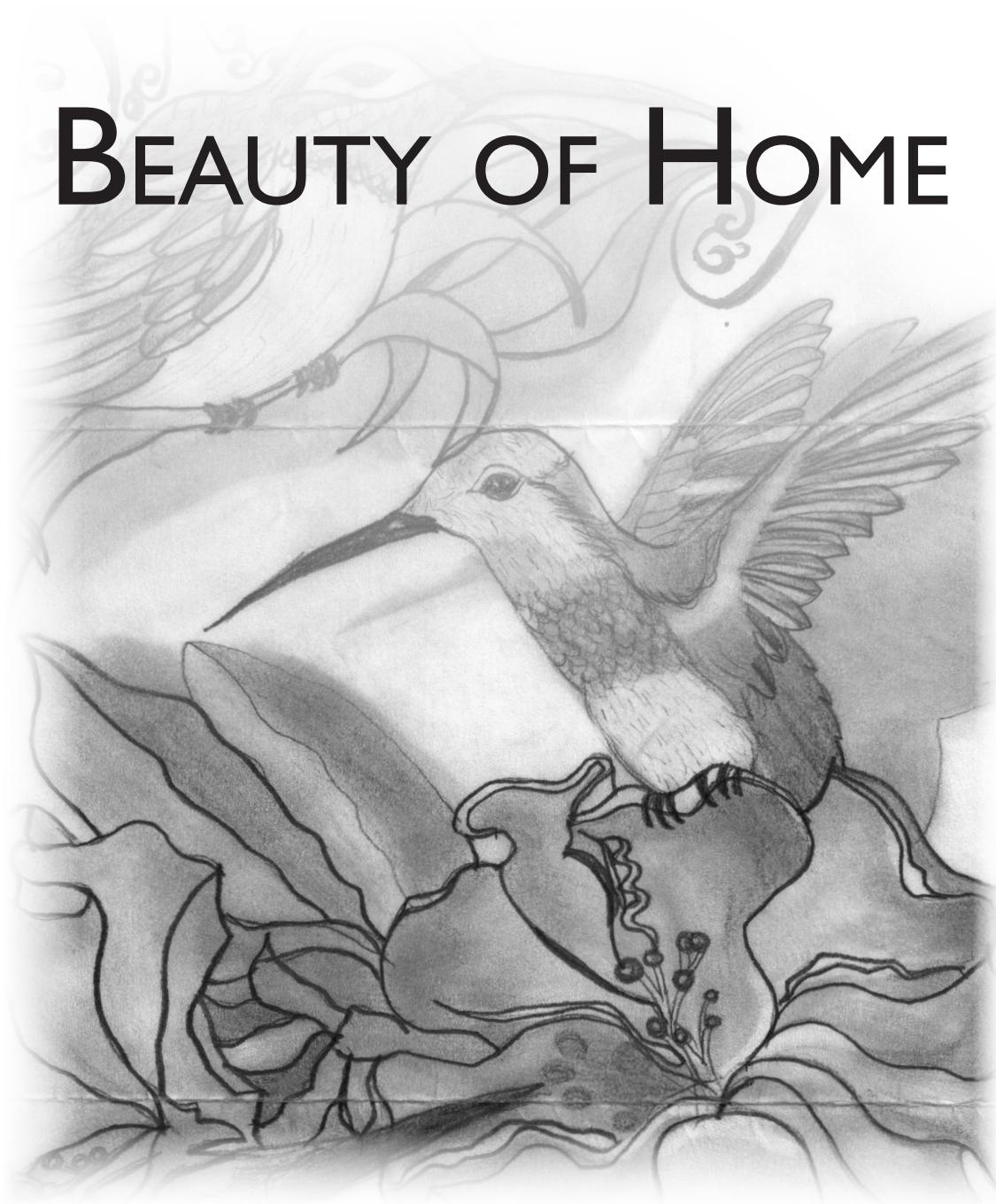
PATRICK JOSIAH, WORTHINGTON

My family lives in Liberia. I'm the only one here in the United States that's helping my family back home. I came from a poor family, so I'm here to help my family with some money for living conditions such as food, housing, and rent. In my country we used to walk on foot to go to school. We farmed to get money to pay the school fees and to get food for the family because we didn't have jobs like in the United States. We suffered a lot to make a living in my country. Since I came to America my life has changed in many ways. I've been able to help my family and friends back in Africa with some money and help with other family problems. I've been able to help them with money for food and help them with school fees, and send money for my kid's fees. If you visit my country you will see a big difference from the United States, because my country is very hot. The houses are different from the houses in the United States, and the road conditions are very bad. There are no good roads at all. The rain begins in the months of April to September and it lasts for six months. August has the highest rainfall. We have two seasons, the rainy season and the dry season. In the future, I would like to work at the airport because that that would be a good job for me with my disability.

Patrick Josiah is 47 and originally from Liberia.



BEAUTY OF HOME





Rosana Minchala Rivera was born in Ecuador. She is the youngest of six siblings and has a wonderful family. She holds advanced degrees in Business Administration and Biochemistry, and studied at the Catholic University of Cuenca. She has also studied English since childhood. Rosana came to the United States in October, 2016. She chose to attend the Lyndale Education Program in South Minneapolis with her sister Maria. “They have been a great support for me. I feel very grateful to all those who work at this institution.” Rosana’s great ambition is to found a tourism company in Ecuador, so that she can introduce many foreign tourists to her country. Her poem is likely to convince anyone to take her up on a tour of Ecuador!

Ecuador Poem

ROSANA MINCHALA, MINNEAPOLIS

Ecuador, a land of charm
That gave birth to me,
The birthplace of my parents,
Full of brave men and beautiful women,
Diverse and supportive people!

Surrounded by wonderful landscapes,
From the Carchi to the Macará
And the Pacific to the Amazon.

You are the face of God,
Full of love!
In your mountains, the Pachamama,

On your coast, your fascinating beaches,
In your east, biodiversity; and
In your Galápagos Islands the wonders of the world.

Beautiful country,
Lucky your children,
You promise us varied seasons in a single day.
At night in your sky stars shine,
In the morning we warm to your Astro King,
In the afternoon you bathe with your rain.

I will always be proud to be Ecuadorian,
My beloved homeland!!

Rosana Minchala is 43 and originally from Ecuador.

Trip Back to Africa

NYAPENI CHAY, ST. PAUL

In the summer of 2016, I went to visit my family in Ethiopia. I was very excited to see my family when I got off the airplane. My family and I had been separated for 24 years. I was filled with joy that I would finally be able to reunite with my family. I looked around hoping to see my sister, aunts, and uncles. As I was making my way to the door, I saw them waiting for me at the entrance. We were so happy to see each other. We began hugging and crying tears of joy.

I spent two months in Gambella, Ethiopia. I stayed at my uncle's house. A lot of people came to visit me, including my old friends, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. We had so much catching up to do. We ate foods like shiro, injera, and rice. We also went to church and praised the Lord. When I was in Gambella, I walked everywhere. I even got a chance to see my old neighborhood.

I was having so much fun that I didn't want to leave. The morning of August 4th was my last day in Gambella. I woke up and ate food with my brother. It was about 11:00 P.M. when it was time for me to leave. I said my last goodbyes knowing it wouldn't be my last time seeing my family. My uncle drove me to the airport. I got on the airplane, and 16 hours later I was back in America..

Nyapeni Chay is 43 and originally from Sudan.

My Life

DAKAM MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Khutoum, Sudan in 1954. I grew up in a big family of 12 people. I started my education at around seven years old and continued until I finished high school. Then I went to the university and graduated in 1982. I speak Arabic and some English. I taught Arabic in the United Arab Emirates for 25 years. I moved to the U.S. in 2013.

Dakam Mohamed is 62 and originally from Sudan.

My Story

EH MOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Eh Moo. I'm 19 years old. I was born in 1997. I was born in Thailand. I lived in Thailand for 14 years. I never moved to other places before I lived in Thailand.

Thailand is the most beautiful place in the world. We have a big jungle with a lot of bamboo, big trees, and a lot of different kinds of beautiful flowers. The flowers are so beautiful and the place in the jungle was really amazing and made you feel so good and relaxed if you went and visited there. I never forgot where I came from and never forgot where I was born, so Thailand was the best place for me and Thailand was my favorite place.

When I lived in Thailand I first went to Number One Elementary School. We built our school of bamboo, trees and leaves. My school was small but it was very beautiful. Everyone was really nice to each other and both my teachers and the students worked together on Fridays to clean our school. I went to school for 11 years. When I lived in Thailand I was a really good student and smart, too. I always got first place any time when I took a test. Before, when I lived in Thailand, my parents rented land to have a farm near the camp. Sometimes when I had no school I went and helped my parents on the farm. My parents' farm was very large. We grew rice, beans, vegetables, and a lot of other different foods.

I came to the USA on February 12, 2012. I came to Minnesota. I have lived in Minnesota for four years already. I have never moved to another state. I live with my parents. I have eight people in my family. I have two brothers and three sisters. All of my brothers and sisters are going to school.

In my future, when I finish high school, I want to go to college for four years to learn how to create my own business. So, I can go back to Thailand and create my own business. Then I can help my people and teach them how to create their own businesses and how to live better lives.

Eh Moo is 19 and originally from Thailand.

My Native City

GALINA KOLTUN, MINNEAPOLIS

I lived in Russia. I was born in Leningrad, which is now St. Petersburg. I think my city is the most beautiful city in the world. It was founded in 1703 by the Tsar Peter the First. Many foreign architects from Italy and France built this city. For example, Ermitage's (Winter Palace) architect is Rastrelli; Isaakievskiy Cathedral, the architect is Montfara. Very famous suburbs were residences of Tsar's family. Many monuments of the famous people are established in my city.

There is a monument of A.S. Pushkin. I love it.

My city has many squares and parks. Before the revolution of 1917, Leningrad was the capital of Russia. This city is the history of Russia. It is better to see it one time than to hear about it many times.

Galina Koltun is originally from Russia. **Somalia**

Untitled

ASHO ADEN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Asho Aden. I come from Mogadishu, Somalia. I was born in Somalia. Somalia has a good environment. It has warm weather. Because it is so cold here it is difficult for me.

Asho Aden is originally from Somalia.

My Home

ISMAIL ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My home city Jigjiga, Somalia is different than St. Louis, Missouri, the location where I first came to in America. St. Louis is larger than Jigjiga, but my home country is better because all the food is fresh and organic.

The weather is very nice, and you don't need a hat because it isn't cold. You can sleep outside in my country if you are homeless. You can make a lot of money and become a rich man. But in America, you can't change some situations. That is why it is different.

Ismail Ali is originally from Somalia

Education

MARGRET JUDA, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was young I liked to live in the village in my country. I liked to be with my mom and dad in the village. They always encouraged me to go to school, and be a good girl at school. I love them so much. I walked from my village to school. The school is in downtown, which was very far. But I managed to walk that long distance because of education. I liked reading, writing, and listening and understanding what the teacher was teaching. I also liked to speak and ask questions. I showed respect when the teacher was teaching. That is why I liked to be in the village near my parents.

Margret Juda is 24 and originally from South Sudan.

Food in Africa

MAHADO MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I grew up in hot weather. I ate fresh food. I drank fresh milk, fresh meat, fresh papaya, fresh potatoes, fresh corn. I never ate frozen food when I lived in Africa. Everything was organic food. Then when I came to the U.S.A. I did not eat any organic food. I miss the hot weather and organic food.

Told by Mahado Mohamed and translated into English by Ruqia Guled

Mahado Mohamed is originally from Somalia.

My City Aleppo

RANIMALCHAAR, APPLE VALLEY

My name is Ranim. I'm from Syria. My city is Aleppo. Aleppo was the main economic center of Syria and also one of the largest cities in the Levant. Aleppo has many historical places and one of the most important landmarks in it is the Citadel. The Citadel, one of two museums in Aleppo, appears like an independent kingdom. Souq Al-Madina, Aleppo's largest and oldest covered market in the world, is 13 kilometers (8.1 miles) long. Aleppo has also a lot of historical Mosques, Churches, and Schools. Aleppo's location is at one end of the Silk Road which passed through central Asia and Mesopotamia.

This important city in history won the title of the Islamic Capital Of Culture in 2006. I love my city Aleppo. It was a beautiful city but since the battle of Aleppo started in 2012, my city has suffered massive destruction and has been the worst hit city in the Syrian Revolution. Pray for my city Aleppo.

Ranim Alchaar is originally from Syria.

My Native City

ASYA VINER, MINNEAPOLIS

I came from the former Soviet Union. I was born in Odessa. Odessa is a great city on the coast of the Black Sea.

Odessa was founded more than two hundred years ago. They used natural yellow stone to build the city. This stone was cut from under the ground in this area. Very famous architects created many beautiful buildings. Odessa is a great trading port. Many ships bring different merchandise here. Special tourist ships come to this port.

There is a very mild climate in this area. Many rest homes are organized around the city. Thousands of people come here for vacation. Odessa has a very beautiful Opera Theatre. I heard many famous singers there and saw the best ballet-dancers of my country. I like very much my native city.

Asya Viner is originally from Ukraine.

My Village

EH PAW, ST. PAUL

I would like to visit my village. I would like to see my family and my friends in my village. My village has trees, flowers, rivers, mountains, houses, and no snow. My village is a beautiful place and a wonderful place to live.

Eh Paw is 23 and originally from Burma.

Thailand Refugee Camp

WAH WAH SAY, WORTHINGTON

I grew up in a Thailand refugee camp. I lived with both of my parents, four sisters, and three brothers. In the Thailand refugee camp, it was hard to find food, but I liked it. I loved my camp. It's hard to explain. Even

though I couldn't leave, I liked living there.

When I walked out my front door, I saw children playing jump rope, tag, and just running around. I saw my sister and brother in front of my house. They were playing under the tree.

In the summertime, there were so many kids playing outside. In the winter, it is too cold, so we stayed in the house. When I came home from school, people were walking with their brothers and sisters all the way to their houses.

Me and my sister walked to the corner store. I bought Snickers and Sprite and my sister bought ice cream. Even in the winter!

I grew up there and I want to live there again.

Wah Wah Say is 30 and originally from Burma.

The U.S. and My Country

HANGYUTH MEAS, BROOKLYN PARK

1. Cambodia

The weather is beautiful and warm every day.

It is easy to find natural food.

I have a lot of best friends.

I didn't think too much about my life, because I lived with my oldest brother and he looked after me

I could play sports every season.

We can use bicycles or motorcycles every season.

We don't use much money to shop for something.

We have a lot of holidays and every holiday is really fun.

Last thing every morning it's easy to find breakfast.

2. United States

The most beautiful season is fall for me.

I feel like, I'm born again because I need to learn a new language and a new culture.

It is easy to find a job.

I like the laws in the United States.

I have my own car and more.

I thought a lot about my life, when I came here.

I love teachers over here, I love the way they teach.
I can go shopping with my sister every weekend.
The most important thing about my life here is that I can live with my mom and my sister.

Hangyuth Meas is 21 and originally from Cambodia.

Comparison of Cameroon and the United States

SYNTISH MASSON, BROOKLYN PARK

Cameroon is a country situated in Central Africa, north of the equator and it is on the Atlantic Ocean. It is shaped like an elongated triangle, which contains an area of 475,440 square kilometers, while the United States is situated in North America and bordered by Canada and Mexico with an extension of 9,630,709 square kilometers.

First of all, speaking of size and populations, there's a lot of difference between Cameroon and the USA. For the size, Cameroon is far smaller than the USA. Comparatively, the area occupied by Cameroon is slightly larger than the State of California. And for the population, with a demography of 323,995,528 inhabitants, the USA is far more populated than Cameroon with only 16,380,000.

Second, Cameroon's flag is a tricolor of green, red and yellow vertical stripes with one gold star imprinted in the center of the red stripe (Nations Encyclopedia: Cameroon). Historically, this flag had a wonderful evolution. Between 1957-1961 we had a flag with those three colors because of the status of Cameroon: The Republic of Cameroon. From 1961-1975, we had the same three stripes, with two gold stars in the green stripe. This is because of the Federal Republic status of Cameroon. From 05/21/1975 to nowadays, we have had the Republic of Cameroon with the three stripes and a gold star in the red stripe. The USA's flag, the "Stars and Stripes," has two parts: one-part colored in blue with 13 red and white horizontal alternated bands. Like Cameroon, its flag also has had changes; from 13 stars in 1777 to 50 stars in 1960 because each star symbolizes one state of the extended country.

Third, regarding family and ways of living, in Cameroon, we have more extended family than in the USA which has more nuclear families. We have lots of fresh food in Cameroon. For example, people harvest vegetables and directly sell them in Markets. That gives very good taste to foods. For meats, we have fresher meats than in the USA because people hunt, clean it immediately and then sell it. The USA has more opportunities like: hospitals, schools, work, infrastructure, etc. compared to Cameroon, a small country and economically far less developed than the USA.

Fourth, there's more care in the USA than Cameroon. Health care is available to the majority of the population here.

Syntish Masson is 19 and originally from Cameroon.

The U.S. and My Country

MOUKSAVANH CHITTALATH, BROOKLYN PARK

What I like better about my country than in the U.S. is that I prefer the food in my country to the food here. Even though there is still some of the same food here as in my country, it isn't fresh food, they usually just have freezer food. I like attractions in Laos more than here, because we have a lot of attractions like water falls, caves and natural views. In Laos we have one city that is very popular with tourists, if you go travel in Laos you need to go to that city. It's Laungphabang. Laungphabang is a World Heritage Site; that's why tourists should go that city. And it's a very beautiful city, it looks like an old city. There are still rules to keep everything in the old style. When I lived in Laos, I had more cousins, more friends and more fun. If I could choose now I would live in Laos because I miss all my family and friends so much.

The thing I like more about the U.S. than my country is money. Lol! I mean it isn't really hard to find money, if you're not lazy. Now I can find money by myself, and it makes me proud because I can take care of myself. And I like the weather here too, you can have different styles to wear every season and I like it. So one thing that is better about the U.S.

than my country are the jobs, you can make more money than in my country - we think it is not much for here, but if we compare it to my country, there is a very big difference. It means I can help my family with money too. That's why I feel happy about that.

Mouksavanh Chittalath is 23 and originally from Laos.

America and My Country

MARIA MURILLO, WORTHINGTON

When I came to America my life changed completely in all aspects. Everything was very nice for me on my first day in America: so many people in a different culture, the variety of food, very pretty places, and wonderful people. I miss everything about my country, especially the people, and the customs and traditions of our beautiful Mexico. I miss our parties and our delicious food, but somehow we prepare the food here. My favorite food in my country is tacos. Mmm...Yummy! I cooked different tacos and my family loved them and pozole, too. I remember my people, my friends, my family, and my work. In Mexico I was a kindergarten teacher. I love my profession, so when I came here my life changed. My favorite pastime in America is watching television, and going to the park with my daughters. I love these times. I have three pretty daughters. Their names are Nataly, Zuleika, and Alexa. I'm very happy when I spend the day in the company of my dear parents, my husband, and my daughters. We eat together and go shopping. I love my beautiful family!

Maria Murillo is 34 and originally from Mexico.

Guatemala

JOSUE AGUILAR, WORTHINGTON, MINNESOTA

My name is Josue Aguilar. I'm from Quiche, Guatemala. Guatemala is a very beautiful country. There are many beautiful things like lakes, rivers, volcanoes, and beautiful cities. In Guatemala there are three seasons: summer, winter, and autumn. People in Guatemala work in the fields and plant corn, beans, tomatoes, potatoes, vegetables, and fruit. In Guatemala there are many traditions, cultures, and languages. There are 21 languages. Each language has its own typical costume. I speak Quiche. This is my language.

Josue Aguilar is 24 and originally from Guatemala

Belarus

ALENA PUZENKOVA, ANOKA

My name is Alena. I am from Belarus. It is a small country between Poland and Russia. In our country there are many forests, small lakes and small rivers. We don't have mountains or volcanoes. Weather in Belarus is like weather in Minnesota.

Belarus is an agricultural country. It exports milk, meat, and grains to other countries. People who live in villages work in agriculture. They work on animal farms, where they raise cows for meat and milk, and they raise pigs and chickens for meat. They also work with tractors in the fields.

Some people live in the cities and have jobs in factories or in offices. Cities in Belarus have tall buildings. Some of them have about 20 floors. Cities in our country are very clean and have many beautiful buildings like theatres, churches, ice palaces, universities, and businesses.

Where I'm From

ANONYMOUS, COON RAPIDS

My home is Damascus, the capital of Syria. It is a big city with beautiful weather. In summer, Damascus is green with white flowers. It's always light and bright. I lived in a big house with a big family and my grandparents. I entered three kinds of schools, and I had to ride a public bus to all of them. It was fun when the bus moved through the city. To see the buildings, streets, people, and the parks. Syria is a happy country with friendly people. They help each other. I love my Syria. I hope to go back to visit my relatives and bring my kids to see this country. I love Syria, 'be safe'.

About Somalia

AMINA MUDHIR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Amina and I'm from Somalia (born and raised), a country in Africa. The capital city of Somalia is Mogadishu and it is also the biggest city. Somalia is located in the horn of Africa. It is bordered by three countries and the Indian Ocean to the east. When I come in USA, I learned so many things. I got experience what a cold weather in Minnesota would feel like. I learned a whole new language. I participated in metro south school. I work hard to speak English. I met so many people with different backgrounds (diversity) even though these two countries have their differences.

My Culture

CLAUDIA MENDEZ, BLOOMINGTON

In Mexico, we eat tacos and rice, and sometimes cook in the kitchen, and sometimes outside on the grill. There is good food in my home, we eat three times a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We use silverware, but to eat tacos, we use our hands and fingers. There are many traditions in my culture about food.

Myself

DAHABO ABDI, SAINT CLOUD

I like Somalia. My mom is Somali and it is where my children and siblings are from. Somalia has good food. I had a job in Somalia. In America I have to learn English. It is hard! I like America. I like America's food, homes, and medical care. My children are with me. Summer is my favorite, I can walk and be outside and exercise.

Missing My Home in Ethiopia

E. YESHIGETA, ST. PAUL

Since 2006 when I came to the U.S.A., I haven't gone back to visit Ethiopia. So I got homesick. I mean I am really missing a lot of things, such as family, friends, food, weather, culture, and so on.

First, one thing I am missing back home is my family. I haven't seen them since 2006. I grew up in a lovely family. I always remember them and the times we ate together, went shopping, went outside for fun, and celebrating holidays together too. In addition, I miss my family's sweet smell. Also, I miss my friends. So many things I miss about them.

Second, I miss my country's food. I can get Ethiopian food here, but it has a different taste. The reason why it has a different taste here is that back home all foods are natural and organic. It is not mixed with chemicals. That's why the food there is delicious and tasty.

Third, I am missing the weather back home. My country's weather is very nice weather. There is no severe weather in Ethiopia like tornadoes, storms, and snow. You go outside through all the year. The best time of weather in Ethiopia is from October to February. That is dry season. The rain season is between June and September, which is not severe or extreme. In the rain season, you wear a simple jacket, not a heavy jacket, mittens, and hats at all. That is the weather I miss back home.

Finally, I miss my culture. Ethiopia has over eight different ethnic groups. They have their own food and clothes. One of the cultural clothes is called Habesha Kemis. It is becoming a popular dress now. You wear it for different festivals, like holidays, weddings, birthdays, etc. In addition, kocho is a Gurage cultural food in Ethiopia. I really miss it. It is made from a plant called false banana, or enset. It is usually served with a meat dish called kitfo. It is tasty cultural food.

As you can see, I am missing my homeland, Ethiopia. I expect someday to visit Ethiopia, to see, and to taste what I am missing.



Me

FADUMO ALI, SAINT CLOUD

I like Somalia, it is a good country. My family is there. The Koran is there. I like Somali food. I like my mom. I like America. I like the teachers.

I like Somalia. I like America. I miss Somalia sometimes. And sometimes I am glad to be here. I like that in America I can go to school and the gym, so I am healthy and happy.

About My Country

HALIMA MOHAMED, ST. PAUL

My name is Halima. I was born in Somalia. Somalia is in east Africa. It is bordered by three countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. The official language is Somali. People also speak Arabic. The international holiday in Somalia is Eid. People celebrate together with their families and friends. A popular sport in Somalia is soccer. In their free time people enjoy making weaving wood. The popular food in Somalia is injera, people make it every morning.

Untitled

KHADRA JAMA, SAINT CLOUD

The flower garden is near our school. Rocks of different shapes and colors surround the garden. Big, hard mushrooms grow under the rocks. Patches of grass are among the flowers.

As summer came to an end, all of the flowers in the garden changed colors, so some are yellow, brown and red. But some are still pink and green. The pink flowers are magnificent. Their colors are bright and they are the only flowers that catch my eye. There are also green flowers with yellow stripes which are beautiful, but they, too, will fade and die. Fortunately, they all will come back next year.

About My Country

MARIA LEMUS, BLOOMINGTON

My name is Maria. I was born in El Salvador, Centroamérica. El Salvador is a small country but the people are very nice. We have 14 departments (states). The population is large. El Salvador is on the border of Guatemala, Honduras, and the Pacific Ocean. We speak Spanish. We have delicious traditional food called pupusas, made with corn, cheese, pork, and beans with hot chocolate or coffee.

My Favorite Memory

MONICA JIMENEZ, FRIDLEY

My memory is about my trip to El Salvador. I went with my son to visit my family.

It was fun when we went on vacation. We went to the beach. My son was having fun in the mountains with friends from the country. My son was talking in English but friends and family didn't understand him. When we were back in Minneapolis, Jeremy was speaking more Spanish.

When we go, we take two planes. One is from Minneapolis to Atlanta, and the other one is from Atlanta to El Salvador. My son did not have to go to school in July or August. The last vacation was last year, 2015.

Jeremy is now six years old. My son does not eat the food that they serve in El Salvador. He only ate fruit and drank Gatorade. When I went to El Salvador, we needed to stay for three weeks. I saw my friends and played together with them. The weather is always hot. My son can't wait to have his next vacation in El Salvador. I love going to my country and visiting my family and friends. Everything is different. I hope I will return to El Salvador next year.

My Experience

MUHUMED IBRAHIM, SAINT CLOUD

I like Somalia. In Somalia I lived in Buale for 30 years,

until 1991. I like Somalia because it is my country. Somalia is my birth place. I like Somalia because my brothers and sisters are from there. They are goat and camel farmers. We had a house there. We had a shop for people and for us to make money. I left Somalia because it had political problems. I feel like I would miss it. When I left Somalia I went to Kenya. I did not come to the U.S. until 2014. When I got to the U.S. I felt good. Today, living in the U.S., I feel good, very good. The things I miss most about my country are goat milk, goat meat, and the Somalia culture.

Somali Food

ANONYMOUS, EAGAN

There are a lot of foods to eat in my country, but we always eat beans, Ajele, rice, and Sambuse. People like to eat Sambuse but they do not like to cook Sambuse, because it is not easy to cook. We eat three times a day. Some people eat snacks, but not everybody. Farmers cook their food over an outdoor fire. Other people cook their food inside their house. There are many different ways to cook and eat in my country.

Upon Once a Time in Thailand

ANONYMOUS, OSSEO

Once upon a time I went to the most beautiful beach in my country with my college friends. During the time that we were driving to the beach, we had to stop to buy some food and drinks and put gas in the car. When I stopped by a gas station, I saw a guy who wore dirty clothes and slept on the corner, but I didn't pay attention to him. While my friend put the gas into the car, we went into the gas shop to buy something to eat. After we came out of the shop, the guy woke up and walked straight to me and asked for money to buy food. He was about 30-35 years old and looked very pitiful. He told me that he had stayed here for a few days and was very hungry. I gave him some money and food that I had bought

from the shop. He said thank you to me. When I came to the car, my friend who drove the car said the car engine wouldn't start. While I was looking for the phone number of my auto mechanic, the poor guy came up to me and asked if he could help. I told him my car was broke and the engine wouldn't start. He said that he knew how to fix it. He used some tools in the car to fix it. About one hour later the engine started. I was very appreciative of him and gave him some more money and then drove the car to the beach. I think he is the best man I will ever meet.

Born in Jamaica in the 1940s

HYLTON DACRE, SAINT PAUL

Hi, my name is Hylton Dacre.

I would like to tell you just a little about me growing up in Jamaica as a boy born on a farm. I had one brother and two sisters, my mother and father, six total in the family. The district was on the mountain. Our house was the 3rd to the top of the mountain, and you know what? We had to come down two miles to get water. Why? We were ruled by the British, and they took the flat land for their farms.

My mother got sick when I was 2-3 years old. My mom was sick for 14 years and 6 months. Out of the four kids, I am the baby. My brother and I never went to school. When we were young, my father would send my two sisters to school. In those days, girls went to school and boys helped on the farm. And I was one of those boys. We were poor and never had much. My father had two little farms, and he worked for the English man as a ranger so he could make a little cash. When I was fourteen years old, I took myself to school.

Now I am 70 years old. I came to the U.S.A. when I was 34 years old. That was in 1981. Now I am retired and I am in school learning to read, spell, use a computer, do math, use English, etc. My teacher's name is Kristen, and she teaches every subject you can think of. She is one great teacher.

In my conclusion, brothers and sisters, never give up. You are never too old to learn, so don't give up. If you try one time and you don't succeed, keep on trying again. Don't give up, no, my brother, don't give up, no, my sisters. Keep on trying again.

Coming to the U.S. to me is a gift from God. There is a lot more to tell you. I will tell you more about me and Jamaica in the next Journeys. God bless the U.S.A. Bye.

Love, Hylton.

Untitled

FATOUMA HASHI, SAINT CLOUD

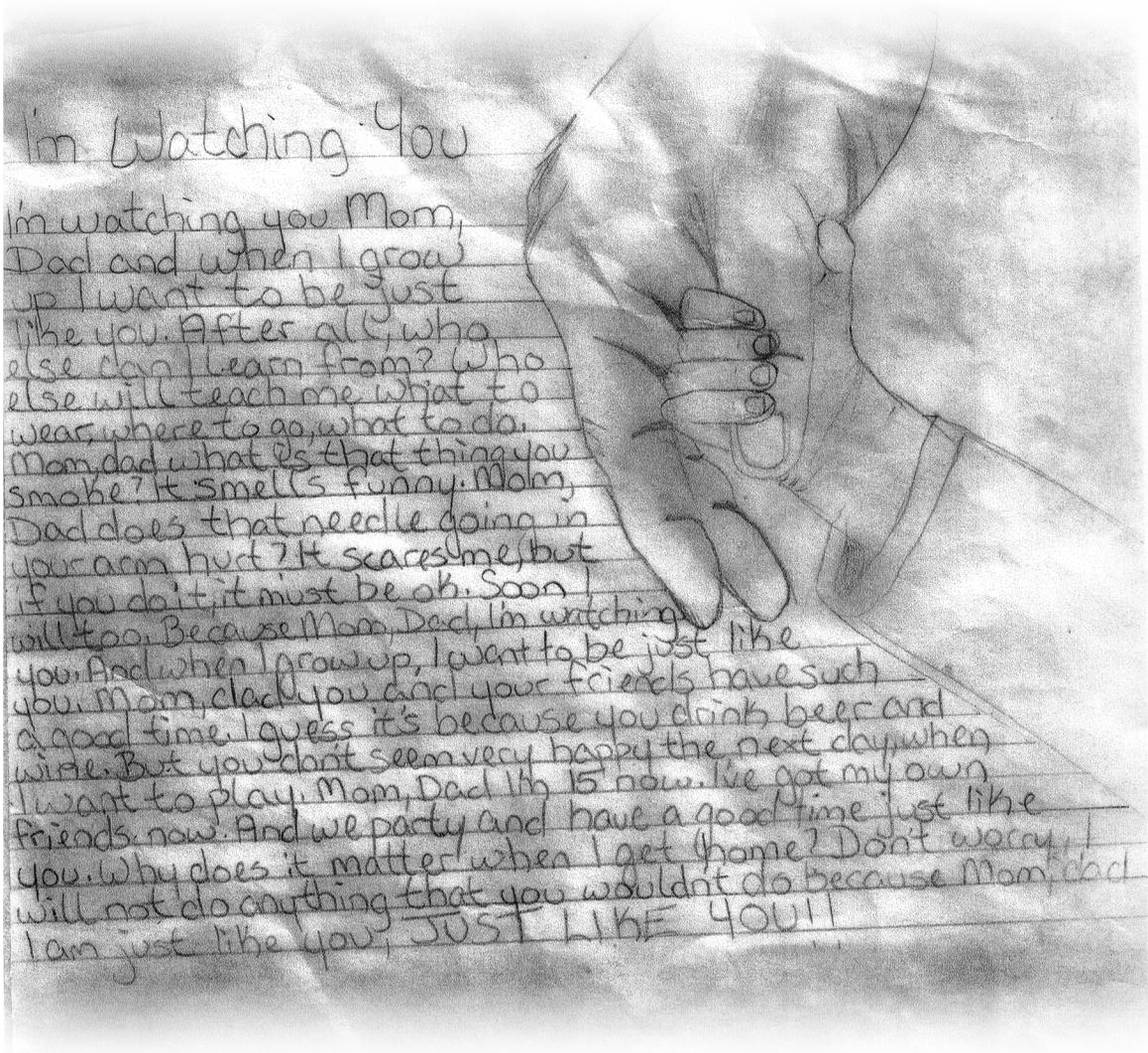
I like Somalia. I like America. I miss Somalia sometimes. And sometimes I am glad to be here. I like that in America I can go to school and the gym, so I am healthy and happy.

My Country of Iran

MOHAMMADREZA JANATKHAH, EAGAN

My country is Iran the second largest country in the Middle East and the 18th largest in the world. Iran has 4,000 years of history. It's the only country with both a Caspian Sea and Indian Ocean in the country. Iran is the world's largest producer and exporter of handmade carpets. Iran has a number of famous poets most notably Rumi, Ferdousi, Hafez, Saadi, and Nezami. Iran has lots of beauty from North to South and West to East, lots of tourism attractions, and a great history. Every corner of this land is my home because my heart is left there, but Tehran, the city that I was born and raised in, means something else to me. I made all my memories there good and bad my beloved family and friends. My house, my car, and everything that belonged to me are truly missed. I even miss the crazy traffic in Tehran's streets and cruising through the city growing up in a fast paced environment like Tehran has taught me a lot and made who I am right now.

FAMILY LIFE



I'm Watching You
I'm watching you Mom,
Dad and when I grow
up I want to be just
like you. After all, who
else can I learn from? Who
else will teach me what to
wear, where to go, what to do.
Mom dad what is that thing you
smoke? It smells funny. Mom,
Dad does that needle going in
your arm hurt? It scares me, but
if you do it, it must be ok. Soon I
will too. Because Mom, Dad, I'm watching
you. And when I grow up, I want to be just like
you. Mom, dad, you and your friends have such
a good time. I guess it's because you drink beer and
wine. But you don't seem very happy the next day when
I want to play. Mom, Dad I'm 15 now. I've got my own
friends now. And we party and have a good time just like
you. Why does it matter when I get home? Don't worry, I
will not do anything that you wouldn't do because Mom, dad
I am just like you, **JUST LIKE YOU!!**



Halima Talha was born and raised in Morocco, North Africa. She graduated from high school and received an IT Management Diploma and a Business Accounting Diploma in Morocco. She came to St. Michael, Minnesota seven years ago knowing five languages, and then started studying English at the St. Michael-Albertville school. She loves to help others as her father taught her. For example, she volunteers at a St. Michael-Albertville school and cleans an older friend's house once a month. She and her husband also take care of three orphans in Egypt through a friend there. She is carrying on her father's legacy through her actions. Her goal is to go to school to be able to work with autistic children.

My First Love

HALIMA TALHA, SAINT MICHAEL

He is the person who loved me before he saw me. When I was born, he was the happiest person in the world. When I started talking, "Papa" was my first word. When I started walking, my direction was always to him. He taught me everything in my life; the most important lesson was how to be a real human who is selfless. He taught me that we all are human, but not all of us have humanity inside. He was a philanthropic person. Whenever I imagine him, he is smiling, useful, and benevolent to others.

Losing my father meant that I lost the great wall I was basing my life on. The world stopped when he died. On which in my mind, I say to my father, "Baba, you are a man like no other--very kind and thoughtful, with warm and loving arms and heart. When people need help, you always play your part in their life, always have a beautiful smile to share, love to give, hope to sow in pessimistic hearts and time to care about the poor, needy, homeless, and orphans in my city."

It doesn't matter how much time it has been, the pain of losing you will pinch me, my family, and all who love you for a lifetime. I still get a lot of hugs but none of them as warm as yours. I wish I was there to hug you, then I would hold you tight and never let you go.

You were on the Earth for a short time and you have touched the hearts and minds of all the people you had met and the entire city. In your huge walking funeral, thousands of people were there for you. A bystander asked, "Whose funeral is this?" The answer came from your friend, who said he was a "real human."

Your memories become my heartbeats, which means your soul is with me every second of my life. "Baba" you taught me everything except how I would live without you.

HALIMA TALHA IS 32 AND ORIGINALLY FROM MOROCCO.

Happy Students

NAW HTIKE, ST. PAUL

My name is Naw Htike. My first country was Myanmar. My second country was Malaysia. The U.S. is my third. When I was young I could not go to school, because my family didn't have enough money. When I was 26 I got married. We have one daughter. My husband and I pray for our daughter's education. When she was one year old, my husband went to Malaysia and my daughter and I stayed in Myanmar. After five years we followed my husband. My family lived in Malaysia for five years. My daughter went to school nine hours each week. The whole family worried about her education. My daughter cried about her education everyday. My family is so happy we can all go to school in the USA.

Naw Htike is 46 and originally from Myanmar.

I and My Family's Life

ALYA OTHMAN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Alya. I live with my mother. I have six beautiful sisters and four brothers. We were all born in Saudi Arabia, in Jeddah, except my mother and my father. Both of them were born in Somalia, but they were married in Saudi Arabia. My parents were thinking about our future. They wanted to see us go to school, wanted to know what we would like to eat, and what we would like to wear. They wanted to see us feeling happy and kind. Some of us are working and some are learning. For now, I'm working at Walmart. Also, my parents are working at Walmart. We're very happy when we work and help each other. I and my older brother are going to the same school. We are spending more time on improving our English. We are working hard to build our future, but I feel so sad because my father is not with us. He is in Somalia. I wish to see and hug him before anything happens to him. I don't want to stop talking to my father. I hope we will be together everyday and enjoy.

Alya Othman is 22 and originally from Somalia.

Most Important Person

BASHIR MUHAMUD, MINNEAPOLIS

The most important person in my life is my lovely baby. My baby is my fiancé. We are always thinking about how to build our future. We take care of each other and respect each other. She is the most lovely person in the world. My lovely is a beautiful girl. She is a good person. I have never seen a person as beautiful as her. We trust each other. We decided to unite our futures by getting married as soon as possible. I will never break.

Bashir Muhamud is 30 and originally from Somalia.

My Life

SHUKRI MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Shukri Mohamed. I grew up in Somalia. My family and I lived in Somalia. I have five brothers and one sister. One brother is in Minneapolis. One brother is in Germany. One brother is a student in Pakistan. Two brothers, one sister and my parents are in Somalia. I love my family. I am a mother. I have three children. I am a student. I came to the United States 10 years ago. I met a man that I was with for six years. He is my ex-husband. I am proud of my life. I am so happy.

Shukri Mohamed is 32 and originally from Somalia.

My Mom

AHMED NADIFA, ST. PAUL

I'm talking about my mom, her name was Fatima. My mom died. She was a younger age at that time but I remember her. She was born in Somalia. Her job was to take care of her children. She was a nice mom, she was a kind person. She had a beautiful smile and she was happy. That is why she is important to me and my family.

Ahmed Nadifa is 55 and originally from Somalia.

My Family

KUEI-CHANG PENG, ST. PAUL

My family is originally from Taiwan. Chen, my husband, is a retired engineer. I am retired from a national university in Taiwan, where I worked for 25 years. We have two daughters, Yin and Hsin. Now, all of us are living in the U.S. and we plan to be here for the rest of our lives.

Yin, my eldest daughter, went to California to study design in 2006. She met Robert in school and they got married in 2012. They moved to Minnesota for good jobs with 3M. They have two boys, Grey and Renn, two years old and one year old.

Hsin, my youngest daughter, followed her sister's steps and also went to California to study. After graduation she met Kazu on the internet. They got married last year.

My family has become so international, interesting and multi-cultural. That is because Robert is Mexican-American and Kazu is Japanese-American. They are both wonderful cooks. We have Chinese, Taiwanese, Mexican and Japanese food. We speak Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese, and Spanish, as well as English, when we get together for family gatherings. It is so enjoyable and so much fun.

Grey and Renn, the two grandsons, are gifts from heaven to me. In fact, I came from Taiwan just for them, the beautiful babies. Being with them gives me the happiest of moments I have ever had. I watch them cry, smile, crawl, teethe, and walk while I am aging. I was too young and too busy to have these precious moments with my daughters when they were babies. Now I can get it back and make my life complete.

Chen, my husband, and I have mutual interests in swimming and playing piano. We spend time in the YWCA for exercise and play the piano at home in the winter. We will try to do some skiing and cross-country skiing. These sports are what people in Taiwan dream of. Chen says the snow is a gift from heaven to Minnesota and to us.

I am so lucky to have this wonderful family. I am thankful for my daughter's efforts, my son-in-law's help and my husband's support. I enjoy every day here in St. Paul, Minnesota, with my family.

Kuei-Chang Peng is 55 and originally from Taiwan.

My Life

CHRISTINE MOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Christine Moo. I am 21 years old. I am Karen. I was born in 1995 at the Thailand Mae Surin refugee camp. I have eight people in my family. I have one sister and four brothers. I was not born in Karen State, but my parents, brothers and sister were born in Karen state, Burma. They lived in the village a long time ago. They didn't get freedom. They didn't have time to study. Every day they worked at paddy, but they didn't get the rice, because the wild Burma soldiers came and destroyed the paddy every year. They were so sad because they didn't get all the rice and had many problems at the village. In 1993 my family moved to Mae la Oo camp. We lived there for one year, but my father didn't like this place. In 1994 we moved to the Thailand Karenni refugee camp Mae Surin. When we got to the Thailand Karenni refugee camp the first year we didn't understand the language. My parents had many problems but, they never gave up trying to do better. My brothers and sister went to the school first. They studied Burmese, geography, history, and math. In 1995 I was born. When I was five years old I went to School NO-1 in Section 4. In 2010 I went to middle school and in 2013 I went to the high school. I lived in the Thailand refugee camp for 19 years. In 2007 my father got a disease and in 2008 he died. My mother worked to send us to school. We had many problems but my mother tried to do better for her family. Next, in 2015 we came to the USA. In 2015 I studied in Leap high school. Now I study in GAP school.

Christine Moo is 21 and originally from Thailand.

My Aunt and Uncle

MU BER, WORTHINGTON

When I was small, my parents passed away. My aunt and uncle took my siblings and me to their house and took care of us until we were grown. My aunt and uncle have four children. Even then, they took care of us and their children too. My aunt and uncle are very kind and very nice people. When I was small I told my aunt and uncle that when I grew up I wanted to be an interpreter or a nurse. After I completed high school, I was an interpreter for a year. Before I applied at R.S.C. I worried whether I would get the job. When I got the job I was very happy because a lot of people went to the interview and only five or six people passed it. When I went home, I told my aunt and uncle that I got the first job of my life. My aunt and uncle still love me and my siblings and they both still take care of us. Thank you, my aunt and uncle! You are both very kind to me and my siblings. Even though I don't have my mom and dad, I feel I do have them. Thank you forever for taking care of me.

Mu Ber is 28 and originally from Thailand.

What Being a Parent Is All About

NATASHA DUEL, FRAZEE

Raising kids is not the easiest of things to do. You want to make sure they are successful in life and are good people. It happens with you. You have to teach them many things. Things such as morals, respect, and honesty. They will not always agree with you or even like you, but that is okay because it is part of your job. It is your place to teach them how to be responsible. Tell them all about family and what it means. We need to guide them to make the right choices. Allow them to make mistakes so they can learn. Teach them to be kind and helpful to others no matter how they have treated you. You won't be the perfect parent. You will make mistakes along the way while making them into great people. Doing the best that you can is all you can do. Putting effort in and being positive is the best way to succeed at raising your children.

Being a parent can wear you out. By the non-stop moving, boo-boo fixing, boogie grabbing, butt wiping, referee, laundry, dishes, cooking, picking up toys, and not having time for a shower. You feel a moment of relief when you drop them off at school or daycare. The hugs and kisses make all of the craziness fade away. It will instantly change your whole day and mood. Kids are not just about all the craziness and constant fighting. They teach you so much more, it's not just you teaching them. They show you to never take a single thing for granted. They show us how wonderful life really is and how much there is to be excited about. Such as when they get to hang something like their artwork they did that day. It's so messy but the most beautiful picture because they made it with their heart and all the love they carry. They teach you every day that these are the moments to live for, moments that put a smile on your face from ear to ear. When you're a parent you never have to worry about being alone because your kids fill your heart with so much love and happiness, nothing else seems to matter anymore. At the end of the day it doesn't matter how much you have struggled, or how stressed you are, because it's all worth it for your babies.

Natasha Duel is 25 and originally from the USA.

Nana, My Princess, My Little Sister

TRAN VU, MINNEAPOLIS

Coming to the United States, living in Minnesota, was the biggest change of my life. I came here in April 2016. Life was hard, everything was new for me. I felt like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. But as difficult as life may be, I miss my lovely sister in Vietnam, my home country. You know what? My sister back home has my first dog that I adopted.

I had wanted to adopt a dog when I was 16 years old. I asked my mother: "Please! Please! Buy a dog and then I will take care of her" many times. But, unfortunately, she always said no. When I went to university, I sold handmade baby clothes on my Facebook. After a couple months, finally, I saved a little money. I decided to buy a dog without my mom's decision.

That was my 20th birthday. I went to a house that had five puppies that had just been born. I met my dog there. I don't know why, when I just came, she stepped up to me and then slept in my arms. I feel like we have a special connection. I decided to bring her home. She was very tiny. She was just two pounds. I named her Nana, it's the name of a princess in a Vietnamese drama. Finally, after many years, I could have a puppy, my dream came true. It took me a long time to know how to take care of a dog because she was so small, and she didn't eat much. But after all, everything was fine, she is a good girl. I felt so happy.

But nothing lasts forever. After two years of taking care of her, I had to leave her to go to the United States with my dad. I felt terrible. I miss her a lot. Luckily, my mom stayed in Vietnam. She loves Nana, too. She said she will take care her for me. I know she will do it well. But every time something bad happens to me here, I always want to go back, to take care of her, and stay with her my whole life. In my heart, staying in Vietnam with Nana, with my mom, it is always the most peaceful place.

Staying in the United States is still unfamiliar for me. Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving. I'm still trying to be brave and keep going. I hope as time goes on, I can feel used to this country. And definitely, someday, I can bring my mom and my Nana here, to make America become my home.

Tran Vu is 23 and originally from Vietnam.

My Life

AWEE MON, ST. PAUL

I was born in Burma in a small city, Yn, in 1979. I liked to read Mon language. I lived with my parents and helped my parents. In 1998, I left my city and went to Malaysia. In 1999, I went to Thailand to a refugee camp. My father and mother are in Burma. I have not seen them for 20 years. I feel sad. I want to go back to see my parents. I hope to see them. I did not like to live in Burma. There was fighting every day in the city with the Burmese Army. Right now, I do not know. I hope now it will be better than before.

Awee Mon is originally from Burma.

My Short Life

BWAY PAW, ST. PAUL

My name is Bway Paw. I was born in Burma. I have five brothers and two sisters. I'm the third daughter in my family and I got married in 2000. I moved to Thailand in 2001 and my husband worked as a farmer and I helped him sometimes. I have three children—two daughters and one son. My family lived in Thailand for 13 years. My husband and I started going to school together. After seven months he started working and I kept going to school.

Thank you to all my teachers for teaching me English. They are very nice.

Bway Paw is originally from Burma.

I Miss My Family

EH TA MU, ST. PAUL

I have eight brothers and no sisters. The oldest and second brother live in Canada. The same country, but different provinces. The third and seventh brothers live with my mom in Burma. The sixth brother lives in Australia. Three brothers and I live in the United States. I want to live with all of my family. I miss them so much. Thank you for reading my story.

Eh Ta Mu is originally from Burma.

My Journey

KIN THEIN WIN, ST. PAUL

Before I came to the USA, I lived in Thailand. I came to St. Paul first in 2015. After that, I got married. My husband worked in St. Paul for nine months and I studied English. Now, I am still a student. My husband speaks a little bit of Thai.

I have four children. One son lives here in St. Paul. My other two sons live in Thailand. My daughter also lives in Thailand. I miss my family in Myanmar in the Karen State. Thank you, God bless you.

Kin Thein Win is originally from Burma.

My Story

GANO AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Gano Ahmed. I was born in Ethiopia in 1994. I have four brothers and two sisters. I am the youngest. I help my mom and dad when I am at home by cooking and washing clothes. I help take care of my family. I came to the U.S. on October 27, 2016. Then after one week I started school.

Gano Ahmed is originally from Ethiopia.

What Makes Me Happy

SHUKRI IBRAHIM, ST. PAUL

One thing I like about my family is that we are very connected to each other. We are not stuck on electronics. The way we have fun is we either talk or play physical games. Every Friday I make fresh pizza, cake, popcorn, cookies, and other things. We all sit down and tell each other stories that are funny. We have dinner, watch Islamic movies, and the kids play games. These things make me happy, as well as when my sons get good grades. All my kids are doing their education wonderfully.

Shukri Ibrahim is originally from Ethiopia.

My Story

SOFIYA ABAFOGI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Sofiya Abafogi. I came from Ethiopia in East Africa. I have lived here now for three years. My dad has lived in Minneapolis for 10 years. My mom lives in Ethiopia. I have three sisters and three brothers and two kids I miss very much.

I like America now. I have a full-time job and send money to my kids in Ethiopia. I cook for my dad every weekend and I go to school after my job is done. I am a busy woman and a hard worker. I have a plan to bring my kids here. I hope to see them soon.

Sofiya Abafogi is originally from Ethiopia.

Family

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

I have four children, two boys and two girls. My oldest boy likes to play baseball. My daughter teaches Bible study at school. I like going to church because it is important for us.

Hilda Escalante is originally from Guatemala

The Life That Travel Gave Me

STEFANY PORTER, BECKER

My name is Stefany Porter and I'm 22 years old. When I came to the United States I first lived in Austin, Texas. While I was there, I lived with my mom for four months. Then I moved to Houston, Texas, with my cousin. We wanted something different so we moved to Minnesota, which had more work opportunities. I worked for almost one year with my cousin. At work I met the man who is now my husband, whose name is Michael Porter. He opened up more opportunities for me. After a year I fell in love with him. He then asked for my hand and we got married.

Soon after getting married we found out that we were having a baby! We were so happy. While I was pregnant, my daughter, my mom, and my brother came to Minnesota from Honduras. I quit working so I could have my baby. With my family here, I have been able to study English. I like learning a new language and I am happy and excited about the future I could have here.

Stefany Porter is originally from Honduras.

Diamanté Poem

UBAH AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

Ubah Ahmed

Tired, busy

Learning, running, raising children

Somali, mom, student, friend
Playing, laughing
Friendly, smart, generous
Ubah

Ubah Ahmed is originally from Jijiga, Ethiopia.

Code to Live By

SOMTHEO SAENGSOORY, SAINT CLOUD

Give yourself respect and honor and do the same for someone you love. This will help to become a better family ever after. Every day tell your spouse, your children, and all those who mean the most to you how much you love them. Send a letter or card, email or text as often as possible. Leave a note in a lunchbox, or any place they will find it. Say you love them out loud when you see them. Make sure the people in your life know how much you appreciate the sacrifices they make to support you. You wouldn't be where you are if somebody wasn't paying the price to help you move farther down the road.

Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking our families know we love them. We think we show it. We're often so busy working and rushing around that we forget. Take a break, no matter how pressed you are, to put your love in words. Remember that old song "Love Will Keep Us Together". Well, it will. Trust me on that. Love is the spiritual gravity that draws families together. Amen.

Somtheo Saengsoory is originally from Laos.

My Husband

XONG THAO, CHAMPLIN

My husband and I have been living together for many years, and while we get along well, we sometimes disagree with regard to saving money, learning, and keeping ourselves busy.

We both like to save money and only spend money if needed. However, when I purchase something, I just pick it up and pay for it. I am not very careful about the price of the products if I like it and need it. On the other hand, when my husband purchases something, he likes to compare prices of the same

product at many different stores and see which store gives the best price. Also, he likes to focus on coupons and rebates. Therefore, he always gets good products with very low prices.

When I learn things, I like someone to show me every detail. For example, I say draw me pictures, explain it to me. I like to ask questions such as why do I have to follow the directions? What happens if I do it wrong? How do I solve problems? Also when I teach someone to do things, I teach them the same way I learned. My husband does not like anyone to show him how to do something. He would rather figure it out by himself no matter how long it takes him to figure it out. He does not believe anybody and is not patient enough to watch someone demonstrate it. Again, whenever he teaches someone, it is just like when he learned it. He just summarizes it. That's it! If that person asks more questions, he says, "Use your brain." He does not understand that people learn differently.

My husband and I like to keep ourselves busy in two different ways. In my spare time, I love to learn new skills. I like to learn something that I think is important to me: refreshing my English and math, reading books about history, and designing my own traditional clothing. All these keep me busy all year round. Therefore, I don't have much time to do fun things. My husband keeps himself busy by fixing things and cleaning. For example, he fixes the car and cleans the house indoors and outdoors. These can cause him to be busy all year round, too.

We do things differently, but our relationship still works because we got used to the way we are.

Xong Thao is originally from Laos.

Happiness

ABDI FARHIYA, MINNEAPOLIS

Happiness is like my family.

Happiness looks like my children.

Happiness sounds like my mom cooking in the kitchen.

Happiness is sometimes my sister playing.

Happiness is like my grandmother.

Abdi Farhiya is originally from Mexico.

My Daughters

BERNARDA LUEVANO ZUNIGA, WORTHINGTON

I'm from Mexico. I arrived in March 2005. I was impressed that all the trees and everything were green and then it snowed.

In September 2007, I had my first daughter, and one year later I had my twin daughters. They go to school here in Worthington. My girls like to play in the snow and go fishing. They especially like to be together with family. They are my love.

Bernarda Luevano Zuniga is originally from Mexico

My Family in Minneapolis

CRISTINA CIRIACO, MINNEAPOLIS

I am from Mexico. I have been here since 1989. I have three children. The oldest one is 24. Her name is Cristina. Andy is 17 and Diana is six. My husband is from Mexico, too. He has two jobs. He runs an apartment building and works in a bakery full time. My son and I help at the apartment and we pay Andy for his work.

When I was little my parents were separated, so my grandmother raised me. My mom was a single mom. She had to work hard to support my sister and me. She visited us every month. When she came over she brought gifts for us. I am proud for her because she didn't give up. My mother never said anything negative about my father, but my aunt told me some things I never did like to hear about my father.

Now I am getting to know more about my family in Minneapolis. One of my uncles went to Chicago first. After five years, he moved to Minnesota. My mom and aunt came, too. This was when I came to Minneapolis with my sister.

In my family I am the oldest. My sister Maribel is second, my brother John is third, and Jose is the littlest one. I have two uncles. One is living in Minneapolis, and the other is living in Willmar. My aunt is still living in Minneapolis. My two nieces and two nephews live in Minneapolis, too.

My grandmother visits us from Mexico every summer. She doesn't like the winter because she gets very cold. I feel blessed because so much of my family is here, and we can celebrate our birthdays and holidays together.

Cristina Ciriaco is originally from Mexico.

Dog

LILIANA HERNANDEZ MORAN, MINNEAPOLIS

My dog is the most important animal in my life. I love walking in the park, in the street, in summer it is very nice. Sometimes the dog goes to visit my best friend. The dog is very naughty when he is with my friend. We play ball two times a week in the park. My best friend takes us to the park. My dog eats small portions of food three times a day and drinks a lot of water. He visits the doctor one time a year and I don't like to go to the doctor. The doctor finishes the visit by giving one bone to my dog. My dog wants to visit the doctor more. The doctor is very good with my dog. My dog needs to get a shower two times a week and if he showers more than two times the dog gets sick. When my family visits we love to play all day at the park. My dog is very happy with my family. My dog is my best friend.

Liliana Hernandez Moran is originally from Mexico.

My Brother and Sister

ROSARIO CORTES, MINNEAPOLIS

I have a brother and sister and they are a blessing in my life. They live in Mexico, but it does not matter that we are apart because, thanks to the internet, we always keep in communication.

My brother is called Ruben. He is a cheerful, kind, and affectionate person. Since he was a little boy, he always liked to study a lot. He always gave everything to his studies. There were days he did not sleep because of the homework he had to give to his teacher. But, every effort has its reward. Now he has the university degree that he longed for. I love him very much and I am very proud of him.

My sister is called Paloma. She is very brave and

kind. I do not know why, but she almost never expresses what she feels. I told her that she has to express her feelings because otherwise, she will become a stone statue. She started to laugh. I know that even if she does not say it, she loves us.

She is a nurse, and one day saved a cow for my dad. My dad went to look for the vet and couldn't find him. The cow urgently needed a serum and injections because of a scorpion bite. My dad asked my sister, "Do you think you can inject the serum?"

My sister said, "I can," and went quickly to where the cow was. I was afraid that she would only know what to do for a person, but not a cow, and she might kill the cow. But the surprise was the cow lived to see another day and is healthy. Now we remember, and it gives us much laughter.

I have many memories of my childhood. I want to say thanks to my brother and sister for being a part of my life.

Rosario Cortes is originally from Mexico.

My Story

BASRA HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Lasqoray, Somalia next to the ocean. I just put my feet in the water, I was nervous to swim. When the water would bubble, I would run away. Lasqoray has the most fishing in all of Somalia. It is a beautiful place.

My husband went to Kuwait for work. He got a visa and I got a visa. I was 25 when I moved to Kuwait. Kuwait was a good place. They are rich. They have oil. We were there between 13 and 14 years.

In 2015, I came to America with my two children and my husband. One child is 10 years old. This child was born with an open heart and needed extra help. The United Nations said we could get more help in the United States. Here my child is happy and I am happy.

Told by Basra Hassan and translated by Afifa Muhumed.

Basra Hassan is originally from Somalia.

Untitled

BOOSTEEYO AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Boosteeyo Ahmed. I came to the United States in 2008 from my country, Somalia, because my country was in civil war. I have four children, two boys and two girls. Two live in Ohio and two live with me in Minneapolis. I have 11 grandchildren. My children love me and take care of me and I love my children and grandchildren. I learn English and computer at school. Now I speak better and can use a computer myself.

Boosteeyo Ahmed is originally from Somalia

My Story

DEQO HAJI ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Kismayo, Somalia. I lived with two brothers and my father. My mother died in 1994. Kismayo was good, now it is not good. Too much fighting. When I was 20, we had to leave because of the fighting. I went to South Africa with my brother and my aunt. I stayed home to help my aunt who was sick when we were in South Africa. I got married on July 17, 2001. In 2008, my aunt died. I had two children in South Africa. My son, Ahmed, was born in 2002. I didn't work in South Africa. I took care of my children. In 2010, I started the application to come to the United States in July, 2014, I came to the United States with my husband, son, and daughter. First we lived in Memphis, Tennessee, for 9 months. Then we moved to Minneapolis in 2015. Now I work, go to school, and have too many jobs at home.

Deqo Haji Ali is originally from Somalia.

My Family

MAGDALENA CARDENAS, WORTHINGTON

I was born in Mexico to a large family of eight kids. Growing up, we had a lot of financial issues, but always got past all of the struggles with a lot of love. I'm the youngest of all my siblings. Growing up, I never really knew my older siblings because they had

already immigrated to the United States searching for a better future. I didn't meet them until we were adults. I'm very thankful that I finally have all my family together again here in Worthington. This town has given my family so many opportunities. It's given us a better life. It's helped us achieve our dreams.

Magdalena Cardenas is originally from Mexico.

About Myself

HAFZA MOHAMOUD, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Somalia in 1992. My mother, father, and I loved each other. I'm happy about that. My mother had nine children. We are alive and we help our parents. My mother and my father are happy because they have nine children. I love my family so much. Now that we are grown up, we live in different countries. The oldest in my family is a girl. Her name is Halwa. Now she has five kids. She lives in Somalia. She has a good life with her family. Now we are happy and enjoy our lives, mother, father and children. I am so happy when I see my family. We are happy all the time. I remember when I was 10 years old my mother gave me good, motherly advice. She said, "If you see a person doing bad things, don't do them too." I see a lot of people who are doing bad things, so I just give them the same advice.

Hafza Mohamoud is originally from Somalia.

The Hidden Greatness of a Large Family

HAMDİ EGAL, BLAINE

What comes to your mind when you see a mother with three or more kids? Do you see full hands, dirty house, disorganized, no working parents, and kids not getting enough attention?

Let me explain the other side of a large family. As a mother of six, I always encounter people stereotyping us based on the number of kids we have. What they don't realize is, how incredible a large family can be.

When you have a large family, you may never be lonely. You always have more chances to socialize

with each other. Each of the family members are unique and have important roles. They help each other cook, clean and organize the house. The fact that you have a large family means they can help you maintain and clean your house. The more people in the household, the more chores they can take care of.

As we get older we worry about who is going to care for us. When parents have more kids, they have more chance of getting taken care of by their loved one. What is better than getting care you need from your own lovely family?

Next time when you see mom with three or more kids, keep in mind that behind those full hands is a house full of love and fun.

Hamdi Egal is originally from Somalia.

Diamanté Poem

ISNINO MUSA, MINNEAPOLIS

Isnino Musa

happy, friendly, generous
working, reading, walking
Somali, friend, mom, woman
laughing, joking, raising children
busy, tired
Isnino

Isnino Musa is originally from Somalia.

My Children

KAWSAR MUSE, MINNEAPOLIS

I have two children. I love my children. They are very important to me because my children are my future. Sometimes I feel bad because it's been many years since I have seen my children. Also, I miss my mother and father. I miss my family. I wish I could see my family. Please help me, God.

Kawsar Muse is originally from Somalia.

My Daughter

OSMAN MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

A person I admire is my daughter. She is 13 years old. I admire her because she is very intelligent. She gets good grades. She takes very good care of herself. She helps all my children. She cooks for them.

Osman Mohamed is originally from Somalia.

Soup

SAGAL OMAR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Sagal. I was working at home after school. I wanted to cook soup for my family. I made chicken soup. They ate the soup. They said, "Mom, this soup is delicious!" I felt happy.

Sagal Omar is originally from Somalia.

Motherhood, A Perfect Job

SAHRA ALI, ROSEMOUNT

I learned a lesson about motherhood. Being a mother is a huge responsibility. It changes your life forever. It's a process that every mother has gone through or will go through. When I had my first child, I didn't know anything about raising kids or how to run a family. Nobody ever shared with me, not even my mother. In my country it was embarrassing for girls to talk about marriage and the future. For that reason, I learned a lot after I had my children.

So being a mother is like going to school every morning and learning a new vocabulary every day. After all these years of being with my kids and my family, I thought, "It's a perfect job, being a mother!" I also like to help mothers who are expecting their first child and those who want to get married. I want to show them the obstacles and how to prepare for this precious work ahead of them.

Sahra Ali is originally from Somalia

I Like To Cook

UBAH ABDI, MINNEAPOLIS

I like making food at home. I like rice and pasta. I like vegetables, carrots, oranges, lemons, salad, and bananas. My children like different foods. One son likes chicken and pasta. My other son likes bread, milk, and fruit. One daughter likes fruit, bananas, apples, oranges, and she likes to drink juice. She doesn't like rice and pasta. My other daughter likes chicken, beef, goat, and she likes a lot of water. My children like the food I cook at home.

Ubah Abdi is originally from Somalia

Raise Good Teenagers

ZEINAB AWALE, MINNEAPOLIS

It is easy to raise good teenagers if you follow some simple steps. First, you should use polite language. Talk nicely and friendly all the time. Parents should say "I love you" and "How are you feeling? How is your school?" Second, give some good advice. Tell them drugs are not good for body and mind. Go to school and help your education. Look to your future and help yourself. Third, spend time with your teenagers. You can go together for dinner, fun places, shopping, and movies. Finally, watch who your teenager's friends are. Make sure they don't go to bad people because many teenagers are dangerous these days. They have many problems, such as gangs. Parents want teenagers to have a safe life. This is my idea for how to raise good teenagers.

Zeinab Awale is originally from Somalia.

My Parents and Me

PADAO XIONG, BROOKLYN PARK

My name is Padao Xiong. When I was kid, I had a lot of trouble with my parents. I did not listen to them and I also thought they didn't love me. This made me think like that. My parents have a lot of children and they couldn't take good care of us. I have five sisters and two brothers. We were little when we came to

the United States. All of us still needed their help. They never helped me, they always chose to help my little sister to prepare her to go to school. After that my mom took my older sisters and older brother to go to wait for the school bus. I had to cook breakfast for my little sisters and brother to eat before we could go to school. They never helped me, but I also had to help them to take care of my little sisters and brother.

In that time, I felt everything they did was not fair to me. But I couldn't yell or tell my parents about that. I kept everything inside and got mad at them. Day after day I felt far, far away from them, and got lonely because I felt like in this world I only had myself.

My life changed when I met my husband. He made me feel like my life has the sun come up. Everything changed when I had my son. I try to give him the best things and stay with him all the time, but I need to go to work. My son makes me understand my parents. I want to say sorry to my parents and tell they I love them so much.

Padao Xiong is originally from Thailand.

My Brother's Shoes

ROY MORGAN, ST. PAUL

My brother's shoes are open, wide, and loose.

The strings which holds his shoes together are made

Of a woven fabric much stronger than wool.

The bottom of his sole is that of a soul of a well-prepared and endowed king all the way through every ring which holds his reign together.

Whatever the season or the reason he lives and gives

More than existence itself.

My brother's shoes are made with the hue of many vibrant

Colors.

The transparent one helps him to walk right.

The black color helps him to endure long suffering.

The tan one gives him more support to stand.

The beige, white, and yellow ones lead to the sun

The green, brown, and blue ones make him live.

The red, orange, and pink ones help him live and Love.

But the most important strings are the clear ones which are three intertwined as one which come from above, above water,

Above dirt, above hurt, above air. These shoes of my lovely brother are everywhere.

Roy Morgan is originally from the USA.

My Harvest

SONJA SAVIC, CORCORAN

The harvest of my life is my children and grandchildren who are loved unconditionally. I was one young woman in this huge world. I looked for a life companion but I never succeeded with this wish. I immigrated from Bosnia to Australia in 1971. I was 22 years old. There, I married the wrong man with many problems. We got a wonderful, healthy daughter. She was my beautiful, amazing little baby girl. She was like a miracle from God to me. I gave her the name Svetlana that means shining light. Maybe I couldn't love her dad, but I gave my feelings toward her. He forced me to come back to Bosnia. That was the end of our five year marriage. I tried to find a job, but there was no help for separated mothers. I immigrated to Sweden in 1976 with my adorable daughter. I felt free from the 15-month torture in ex-Yugoslavia.

I found a second man in my life in Stockholm, Sweden. We got a wonderful healthy daughter in July, 1981. The relationship with him didn't work. My life was tough as a single mother, but I was very happy with my life. We were three females in the wide world with different second names. For 30 years we lived in the beautiful city of Stockholm, Sweden.

Svetlana married Magnus, and I got a third "child" in my life. They gave us two amazing beautiful boys

,so that I feel like I have four “children” in that family. They healed my sustained heavy losses through my life.

My youngest daughter Anna married Jacob. They have three adorable, beautiful children now. I feel that today I have five “children” in that family in my life and heart. Now Svetlana and Magnus live in Australia, and their children were born there. Anna and her family live in America. I live with my daughters where they are. I just can’t imagine how I, one woman from a small village area in Bosnia, without family help or education, could have the life journey I have had in all these countries. Today I speak three languages and like to study. I can truly say that I have a rich harvest in my life from my children and grandchildren. The happiness that comes through them helps me overcome all adversity.

Sonja Savic is 68 and originally from Bosnia.

My Life In Burma and Thailand

DAH MU, ROSEVILLE

My name is Dah Mu. I was born in Burma in 1995. I lived in the place where I was born only one year and then my mom and her eight children fled to Thailand, to Mae La Oon Refugee Camp.

My mom told me about her story. When my parents lived in Burma they didn’t have anything to eat and they didn’t have freedom to go anywhere. It was not easy to find money and not easy to study. If the people were sick it was not easy to find medicine, either.

When I was one year old my dad died. Two or three months later my mom and my sisters and my brothers and I moved to Mae La Oon Refugee Camp. When I saw someone called a daddy, I wanted to call my daddy too, but I couldn’t. My mom took care of us and was kind to us, we grew up step by step to now.

When I lived in Thailand, I had to start to go to school when I was five years old in Mae La Oon Camp. My camp has 13 sections. I just stayed in

Section 10. I went to Mission School Number One in Section 10 in the Mae La Oon Camp. I went to school only seven years for Mission School. I didn’t go to high school because my mom didn’t have money to send me to school, so I just stayed home and helped my mom and my sister. I helped take care of my sister’s baby and wash her baby clothes.

In 2010 I just tried to come to the USA but my brother got married, so I just stayed in Mae La Oon again. My brother couldn’t come to the USA, so my mom and I stayed in the camp for about two more years. I just stayed at Mae La Oon until I was almost 18 years old, and I came to the USA in 2013.

I have just stayed in Minnesota for only three years. I live in Roseville, Minnesota. I live with my family. I am married. I have one baby. My baby is a boy. He is six months old. He was born in the USA in 2016. I don’t have a job. I only just come to school and go back home to take care of my baby and cook for my husband.

Dah Mu is 21 and originally from Burma.

My Story

TA NAY GAY, ST. PAUL

My name is Ta Nay. I was born in Burma in 1995. When I lived in Burma I didn’t go to school because it was too expensive, and we had no money to pay for school. In 2006, our family moved to Mae Ra Moe Refugee camp in Thailand. There are ten sections in Mae Ra Moe Camp, and I lived in section 5/A. In Mae Ra Moe Camp we build our house with wood, bamboo, and leaves. My house was near hills and rocks. I have four sisters and two brothers. I started to go to school but it wasn’t free. We had to pay money. However, everything was better than in Burma. When I lived in the Thailand refugee camp, my sisters and I really wanted to go school but didn’t have enough money. My parents worked every day to financially support our family. My father always had to climb over the mountains that surrounded our camp in order to find a daily job with local Thai people. The payment was not good, but my father is a persistent hard worker. He cut lumber. On the other

hand, my mother always stayed home and wove Karen traditional costumes or clothing. She made a little money by weaving. This was the only source of income that we had in the camp.

I lived in the Thai refugee camp for about eight years, and then I moved to Minnesota with my family. My older my brother still lives in Mae Ra Moe Camp with his wife and one son. In America we get free school and we don't need to pay for school. I am very glad that I immigrated to America. I have a great school and learn a lot and have enough opportunity. I love staying in America because the education is free. However, I am not sure about the future and what things will happen to me, but I have to believe that everything will go well while I stay alive and get a better job and a better life in Minnesota.

Ta Nay Gay is 21 and originally from Burma.

My Family

SAY BO, ST. PAUL

I am Say Bo. I was born in Burma. I have two brothers and four sisters. My older sister and my older brother are in Thailand working for my family. My older sister is married and has three children. My younger brother is going to be in the army. My younger two sisters go to college in Thailand. My mom and dad live in Burma.

My family, living in Burma, works on a farm to eat everyday. They plant vegetables for a person who sells them to buy clothes. My family works so hard, night and day, just so they can eat.

I am the only one who came to the USA. After one year, I got married. I have one child. I live with my husband and his dad. I hope my family in Thailand and Burma are happy. I also hope I can see them soon. Now I only talk with them on the phone. I love my family so much.

Say Bo is 25 and originally from Burma.

My Family

NAY POW, ST. PAUL

My name is Nay Pow. I am from Burma. In 1998 I

moved to a Thailand refugee camp, because of the Civil War. I have four brothers and four sisters. In 2011 I arrived in the United States of America. It is a beautiful place and peaceful. I never ever dreamed I would come to the U.S., but I thank God for blessing my family. When I came to the U.S., I had no chance to go to school. My English was so poor, but I will keep fighting for the future. Now I study English at a Hubbs Center Family Literacy Class.

In 2012 God blessed me because I met my husband. He is handsome and a very kind person. He always stands up for me and loves me so much. He is a good man. He does not smoke or drink like other men. In 2013 I had a beautiful daughter, Isabella. She is a smart girl and likes to play with me. I am sometimes tired, because she wants to play too much. She is a healthy and strong girl.

Nay Pow is 26 and originally from Burma.

My Husband is the Best

PAW LAW, ST. PAUL

My husband and I dated on the phone. He was not a Christian then, but later became a believer. After dating for awhile, we got married. When we got married, we didn't know a lot about each other. The path we made was not easy, but we passed through it and everything is good now.

He was a person who drank alcohol, but he was also a hard worker. He did everything that I thought he would never do. When he found out I was pregnant, he was very happy. At that time, I was working two jobs. My husband told me to quit working and stay home to take care of myself. He said, "Don't do anything. I will take care of you." He woke up very early, cooked, cleaned, packed his lunch, and cooked for me. When I woke up, everything was done for me. After he came back home from work, he cooked and cleaned again. Before we went to sleep, he laid on my leg, read a book, sang, kissed my tummy, and talked to his baby, "Daddy loves you very much, I will try to become the best father for you and good husband for your mother." Then we prayed and went to sleep.

When I went into labor my husband was very

worried about me. He smiled and kissed me. I was in labor for a long time because the baby was upside down. The doctor decided to do a C-section. My husband sat on the floor and cried. I told him, "Stop crying, God has a plan for us. God will protect the baby and me." After a while, my husband stood up, took my hand, and we prayed. During the C-section he stood close to me and looked at me with worry. He apologized for not being a good husband. I told him he IS a good husband.

Even after we got home, he worked hard. In our culture, when a woman gives birth, she needs to eat three times a day. My husband cooked for me, gave the baby a bath, and fed the baby.

So, I see my husband as a person who takes care of others. I think he is the best husband. I am very happy and very lucky to be his wife. Even though he was a drinker, when he became a father he quit everything he did in the past. Now I am pregnant again. I will have another baby for him on March 18. He is so happy. He says, "I will try to be the best." He is already the best for me. I hope he will continue to be a good father, husband, and leader in our family. I love him so much.

Paw Law is 26 and originally from Burma

My Life

BAH BLU HTOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Bah Blu Htoo. I am from Burma. When I was seven years old my mom passed away. I lived with my dad, two brothers, and a sister. I thank my dad because he took care of me and my siblings. I'm the oldest, so I took care of my brother and sister. Every day I cooked and fed them. We all went to school.

When I was 19 I got married. We moved to the United States. We have three children. They always make me happy. I have two girls and one boy. My oldest daughters go to school every day. Before my daughters go to school, I make breakfast for them. Before they go to school, they hug me and say, "Bye, bye Mom. I love you, Mom, see you later, Mom." I go to school with my son at a Hubbs Center Family Literacy Program three days a week. He is so happy going to school, because he has friends he plays with

there. When I have free time I play with my son and teach my daughters how to read and write and help them with homework. At 9:00 we go to bed together. We are happy everyday.

Bah Blu Htoo is 28 and originally from Burma.

Parents

CELIA BELL, ST. PAUL

I had never seen my parents fight with each other in my life. I knew that they may have had some problems, but they had never argued in front of my siblings and me. I have seven siblings. My family is pretty big. Also, my family was poor. Only my father worked, and my mother took care of us.

As a child, my siblings and I liked to play. We never thought or worried about our future. Sometimes we didn't have enough food, but my parents tried to feed us. They didn't care about themselves. Some of my parents' friends gave suggestions to my parents:

"Don't send your children to schools."

"Just let them work as labor, and you will get a lot of money."

"If you have an education, you eat rice, and if you don't have an education, you eat rice, too."

But my parents never listened to them. They encouraged us to study whenever we had time. Also, they always said, "Wealth can be stolen by someone, but education never can be taken away." I always remember that and keep it in my mind. As we grew up, my siblings and I had more individual needs. My parents tried to fill our needs. They never complained about being a big family.

When I was a child, my house was filled with guests. My parents always welcomed everyone and gave them fruit and vegetables that they grew. So people told us that we had good parents. Every Mother's and Father's Day, I always remind myself what my parents did for me, and I appreciate them with all my heart.

Celia Bell is 31 and originally from Burma

Family

KNA CHIT, ST. PAUL

There are six people in my family. I have three sons, my mother and my husband. My husband works every day. My mom stays at home. She drives my children and me to school at Wheelock Elementary School, where we attend Family Literacy classes. We go to class Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. On Friday and Saturday we stay home. On Sunday we go to church. We are a happy family.

Kna Chit is 32 and originally from Burma.

Family

PAW TOO BWEH RAY, ST. PAUL

My name is Paw Too Bweh Ray. There are six people in my family. I have four children, two boys and two girls. We lived in a refugee camp in Thailand. I came to the United States last year on December 9. Now I live with my parents and siblings, three sisters and four brothers. My husband is a Personal Care Assistant. His job is to take care of my mom.

Paw Too Bweh Ray is 33 and originally from Burma.

My Story

LAH SHER, ST. PAUL

My name is Lah Sher. I am from a Thailand refugee camp. I have four children. I live in Minnesota now. I go to school for the first time in my life. My husband has a job in a flower garden. I am happy.

Lah Sher is 35 and originally from Burma.

My Family

MAE MAE, WORTHINGTON

My family has four people. I have two sons. The first one is 16 years old and the second one is 11 years old. My husband works at JBS. I work there, too. My family is very happy.

My family likes to go to parties in the summer. Every week on Sunday evening, my sons play soccer and they run around. My oldest son likes to fix cars. We like to watch movies together. My family likes to eat together on Sunday afternoon.

My family is happy together.

Mae Mae is 35 and originally from Burma.

My Lovely Family

MOO AH, ST. PAUL

My name is Moo Ah and my husband's name is Poo Loo. We came from Burma seven years ago. We have three children, one daughter and two sons. I have to wake my husband and children up every day. Before we go to school we have to warm up and eat breakfast. My family loves to eat. Once a month my husband brings me and the children to a buffet and we eat healthy food and we are so happy. In the evening when we come home, I cook and we eat together. After that we do exercise and sing.

Moo Ah is 36 and originally from Burma.

My Father

ARROW PAW, ST. PAUL

When I was in 10th grade, my parents told me not to have a boyfriend. The day my father found out about my boyfriend, he came home with an angry face. He called my name and asked me to stand in front of him. He asked me to bring a stick that he usually used to hit us every time we did wrong. Then he started to hit me on my whole body.

My mom cried, "What's wrong?" My mother was the one that protected us all the time. She knew my father very well.

My father said, "Your daughter will shame us."

My mom said, "For what?"

He said, "You know that she has a boyfriend?"

Then my mom said, "OK. Hit until she dies." After that, my father stopped hitting me, but the next

morning I couldn't go anywhere because of all the pain.

A few days later, my father asked me to call my boyfriend to come to my house. I wrote him a letter and said my father wanted to see him. He was afraid of my father. He had heard about my beating, so he came with his three friends. My dad asked me to stay inside the house.

My dad told them to dig the old well behind my house and then get into the well. My boyfriend was scared to get in but, because my dad asked him to do it, he did.

"Your dad is a scary person," he told me. "He asked me to work hard, but he would not let me meet his daughter. I know how you felt. I am so sorry. Let us keep this a secret."

Arrow Paw is 38 and originally from Burma.

My Family

JA PAW, ST. PAUL

My name is Ja Paw. I have a big family, five children, three girls and two boys. I am married. I am happy and also sad, because it is a long time since I have seen my family: mother, father, brother, and sisters. When I came to the United States my oldest son was 16. I am happy to be in the United States, but wish I could see my family. I love my family.

Ja Paw is 38 and originally from Burma.

About Me

KYU KYU HLAING, ST. PAUL

My name is Kyu Kyu. I am 40 years old. I am from Burma. I came to the U.S. on September 15, 2008, with my mother and one of my sisters. On August 18, 2013, I got married. I have one child, a boy, who is two years old. I am going to school three days a week with my child, in a Family Literacy program. I am learning English.

In my free time I like to learn and read books with

my child. I don't work. I live with my mom, sister, child, and husband. Sometimes I go to the library with my son.

On Christmas I will be so happy. I will have a fun time eating with my family. I wish all of my family could be together. I hope they will all be happy on Christmas.

Kyu Kyu Hlaing is 42 and originally from Burma.

Mother's Day

NGA TRAN, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember George Washington said, "My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute my success in life to the moral, intellectual, and physical education I received from her."

Every year, I remember my pain when Mother's Day comes. My father died in the war in 1953, and my mother didn't remarry. She worked hard to raise me from a child to be a good person. My mother sustained her positive attitude while undergoing many difficulties to support my college studies.

When I finished school, I got a good job, my mom found me a husband, and she planned my wedding. When we had children, she sacrificed her life for me and her grandchildren. Sometimes I hugged my mother. I said to her, "You are my mother and my friend in my life."

I hoped one day I would be able to bring my mom to the United States. I wish I could care for her the way she cared for me. Then my dream came true to come to the United States! Before I left Vietnam, my mom passed away. In the temples in Vietnam, people who still have their mothers are given a pink rose, and people who lost their mothers are given a white rose.

My life is very good, and I have freedom in the U.S. My advice to people with parents: take care of your parents, because you have only one mother like you only have one heart!

Nga Tran is 71 and originally from Vietnam.

My Family

Jose Aguirre Pineda, Worthington

My name is Jose. I was born in Salvador. I came to the United States in 2002. I worked in California for three years cutting watermelon and lettuce. I moved to Worthington, Minnesota, in 2005. I worked at JBS on the bone line for nine years. Now I work at Sunrise Farms doing night maintenance.

I visited my mom last year. My mom was sick. The doctor had to take her leg off. She was in the hospital for three months. Now she is home with my family. They look after her at night. I plan to visit my mom next year.

Jose Aguirre Pineda is 36 and originally from El Salvador.

Tsega's Story

TSEGA AFRASSA, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Tsega. I am from Ethiopia. I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I speak Amharic. I live with my mom in Minneapolis, and my brother, Tebebe, lives in Rosemount, Minnesota. He lives with his wife and three children. He works for the post office. I go to school at the International Education Center. My class is in downtown Minneapolis. I am speaking English language. My mom cooks chicken and bread. It is delicious. She cooks pasta and macaroni, rice, and broccoli. She cooks Ethiopian food like enjera and fir fir. She mixes enjera and hot peppers and beef, onion, and garlic. I like cakes and cooking. My brother in Minnesota has three children. They are 12, 10, and nine years old. We go to the park together. We cook together. We cook Ethiopian food and anything. I like coffee.

My mom and I flew to Nashville, TN, to see my brother, Dawiit. He does not work at the post office. My brother's wife works at the telephone company. They have two children. Junatan is a six-year-old boy. Mehered is a seven-year-old girl. We played soccer and basketball, and Frisbee. We went walking. We walked in the park. I went shopping with my mom

and my brother, Dawiit. I bought boots, leggings, a jacket and many shirts for me and my family. I have two brothers and one sister. My sister lives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. My sister gave me earrings, a necklace, and a matching ring as a going away gift when I left Ethiopia. I miss my sister. I liked Ethiopia and Tennessee and I like Minnesota.

Tsega Afrassa is 27 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

LAMROT YITBAREK, WORTHINGTON

Ethiopia is a beautiful country. Ethiopia has a lot of different historical places, for example, Lalibela, Axsum, Harara, Tana and Hawasa. There are so many places, different religions, different languages and different cultures in Ethiopia. A lot of tourists come to Ethiopia to visit historical places and Ethiopian culture.

My name is Lamrot Minwuyelet Yitbarek. I'm a black African. I was born in Ethiopia. I have two brothers and one sister. My mother's name is Etenesh Mesele and my father's name is Minwuyelet Yitbarek. I love my family. When I was 20 years old my mother became sick and after one month she passed away. My mother was very beautiful. Her hair was long and she had beautiful eyes. When she smiled she was so beautiful. She loved her kids and all her family. She took care of her kids and her husband. She did everything. When she passed, my family and I were very sad and life was difficult for me because she made food, she washed the clothes, and she cleaned the house. She did everything. I'm the oldest in my family. I now had the responsibility to take care of my family.

After six years, I got married. Then I lived with my husband. After three months, my husband returned to America and I lived alone. After two years, I went to America and lived with my husband.

After one year, my father passed and for the second time I was very sad. I love my family. My father was a very handsome man. He loved his family and kids. I don't have words to describe my father. When my mother passed, he lived with his kids and family. He

didn't marry another woman. This is amazing to me. He took care of the kids and he worked.

Dear Readers, everybody knows how to feel pain when a family member passes. Life is sometimes happy, sometimes sad. It's the rule of life.

Lamrot Yitbarek is 30 and originally from Ethiopia.

Coming to America

ROBDU GUYE, ST. PAUL

I came from Ethiopia. I arrived with my 18-year-old son in America in December 2010. My husband picked us up at the Minneapolis airport. I have four children. They are 20, 18, six, and 18 months. My 18-year-old goes to college. My husband is a taxi driver. I am a housewife. I also attend a Family Literature class with my child.

Robdu Guye is 54 and originally from Ethiopia.

Emma Jean

SHARON SHUCK, DULUTH

"Who is 'Emma Jean'?" My birth and baptismal records, written and sealed with a stamp, confirm that I am, indeed, Sharon Ann Doolittle. So, how did "Emma Jean" come about? A nickname? A Christian name? Maybe a pet name?

To clear up loose ends, get the facts and stories straight, I asked my two older siblings, Sho-Poke (Patsy) and Junior (Fred). "Why was I called 'Emma Jean'?" They began with the story telling from the beginning and what they could remember. Junior goes on to tell, "I was born April, 1939, at the Old Indian Rez Hospital in Cloquet, and Mom could not handle the birth of you, the fourth baby in six years. She had a nervous breakdown." Sho-Poke interrupted Junior, "And the Bureau of Indian Affairs Corps nurses kept Mom at the hospital for four months."

I asked, "Who took care of me?"

"You were farmed out. Grandpa and Grandma Couture took you to their Rez farm house in Brookston."

"What about you, Fernie and Sho-poke?"

According to Junior, Grandpa had a name for everything, everywhere and everyone. With that said, when he saw me with a mop of straight black hair and brown like a mud puddle, he said, "She looks like Emma Jean in the funny papers! No wonder Ta lease (my mother Theresa) had a nervous breakdown!"

And so it was, I am told, Grandpa Couture took me in, so I would not be left in the cold.

He laughed, chuckled with a beam then he decided, he would call me, "Emma Jean."

Sharon Shuck is 78 and originally from Fond du Lac Reservation.

I Like

NICOLASA LOPEZ LOPEZ, WORTHINGTON

I am from Guatemala. My name is Nicolasa. I like my family. I like to go to school. I like to go to the church. That is important to me.

Nicolasa Lopez Lopez is 24 and originally from Guatemala

I am Thankful for My Sister

KHAMONVONGVILAXAY, MAPLEWOOD

I am grateful for my sister. Her name is Syvone. She is nine years older than me, so my sister was like my second mother. When I was young, Syvone helped our parents take care of me. She fed me, gave me baths, washed my clothes by hand, and played with me.

After I finished high school, I moved in with my sister to study in college, because my sister lived in the city and at that time in Laos we had only a few colleges. My sister's house is near my college too. While I was studying in college, my sister supported me a lot by paying for college, for school supplies, for my uniform, for food, and for gas. Syvone gave me suggestions and helped me do my projects. For example she helped me type, made PowerPoint, and cooked delicious food for me.

After I lived with my sister for one year, she got married to a nice man. My bother-in-law and I got along well together. He didn't complain about me like Syvone did. She complained about me a lot. So I fought with her many times. She wanted me to stay home, but I preferred to go out with my friends. When I went out, she worried and thought bad things would happen to me. She thought that if I got hurt or had a problem, my father would blame her. Sometimes she was stressed by my actions. However, everything she did for me was because she loves me and I love her too.

My sister is nice to me. She is a strong person. She taught me a lot. Syvone and I liked to visit our parents together every weekend. She loves her family so much. I remember one event when she knew that I had a problem with my friends because one of my friends told my secret to another friend and made me have a problem with her. My sister told me if I told my secret to my family, my secret would still be a secret, because family will not hurt you. Syvone said, "No one loves you more than your family." Today my sister and I still communicate by phone, video call, and message. I am really thankful for everything she did for me.

Khamon Vongvilaxay is 26 and originally from Laos.

My Story

DULCE ROLDAN P., MINNEAPOLIS

Hello my name is Dulce Alma. My story is that I am from Mexico. It is a country beautiful and hot with mountains. My family lives there, they like how it's beautiful and has different animals and a lot of plants. My parents live there thanks to God, and my family, sisters, brothers, my friends in Mexico, are important family. My mom's name is Manuela, my father is named Gorge. There's different food in the mole green with chicken, mole red, with pork and white rice. This is my story's end.

Dulce Roldan P. is 29 and originally from Mexico.

My Family's Journey

GUADALUPE AGUILAR, MINNEAPOLIS

The people I admire the most are my parents. They met each other in Mexico. My mother was 13 years old and my father was 15 years old. Then they started a family. I have six brothers and four sisters. In 1986 my father was thinking of immigrating to the United States, but it took two years to gather all the money so he could. Once he settled himself in California, he started working day and night. He had two jobs. He saved enough money to bring his whole family to live with him. After living in California for five years, half of my siblings married and moved to Minnesota. After seven years passed, my parents decided to move and enjoy the rest of the family. My whole family is here now.

Guadalupe Aguilar is 30 and originally from Mexico.

How to Be a Good Wife

CLAUDIA RIOS, MINNEAPOLIS

I got married 15 years ago. I am not a perfect woman or wife, but I try to do the best I can. The first years of marriage were harder than now, because at this time we know each other better. In my first years of marriage, I tried to make him do things my way. I didn't respect him; I was mad at him often for one or two weeks and I didn't forget and forgive if he made mistakes.

Now I have changed and I want to share with you my "recipe" for a long-lasting marriage:

1 gallon of tolerance

1 gallon of patience

1 gallon of forgetting

1 gallon of forgiveness

4 cups of being confident

1 gallon of respect for each other

1 gallon of controlling my temper (less grumpy/
more loving)

1 cup of enjoying time together or alone

1 cup of being responsible

I cup of resolving problems together
I cup of creativity
I cup of laughter
I pinch of fun

You need to combine all the ingredients and stir gently.

Now I learn and I try to be patient, to have a lot of tolerance, to control my temper. I need to respect his friends, his hobbies and his personal space. We need to learn how to resolve problems and also how to divide chores. The most important thing is to spend time together and with our family.

We are not a perfect couple, but we try the best that we can. I hope we can get old together.

Claudia Rios is 37 and originally from Mexico.

I Am From Mexico

AZUCENA COMPARAN SALAZAR, WORTHINGTON

My first day in America was in 2000. I felt very sad for six months because I had to leave my friends and my boyfriend that I love so much. But life changed after my parents and boyfriend visited me in America. God gave us to each other, and then we got married and now we have two children whom I love with all my heart. We're still here fighting to give them a better life. Sayuri is 10 years old and Jesus is eight years old. My daughter likes to study math. When she grows up she wants to study cosmetology. My son wants to be a cop. I hope that their dreams come true everyday.

Azucena Comparan Salazar is 42 and originally from Mexico.

Happy Christmas



GAUDENCIA VEGA, ST. PAUL

My mother, Eladia Cristobal, worked hard at a food stall in the market in Mexico City. In 1986, she decided to spend Christmas with her relatives in Veracruz. I was 12 years old then. I liked that idea

because my mother did not spend much time with me. My six year old nephew, Juan, my mother, and I left two days before Christmas Eve. In Mexico, Christmas Eve is celebrated on December 24.

On Christmas day, I celebrated with my mom and family. The party was held at my uncle's house in Poza Rica, Veracruz, Mexico.

My uncle's house was small but had a large patio. Around the patio were banana plants, chilies, tomatoes, and in the center he had mandarin, lemon, and orange trees. On the other side of the courtyard was my grandmother's house, a small wooden house.

My uncle's house smelled of fresh coffee, beans, and eggs. The dinner was varied, as there were different platters, such as chicken, pork, and fruit dessert. The drinks were soda and apple cider.

That night, my mother danced with her nephew and, most importantly, she looked very happy. My aunts made a piñata of balloons and a piñata that had fruit inside: oranges, sugar cane, jicama, and sweets.

What I remember most of that day was that my mother enjoyed the party because my brothers arrived and we all danced and sang until dawn.

I thank God for having an unforgettable Christmas with my mother.

Gaudencia Vega is 42 and originally from Mexico.

Me in USA

MARIA NELSON, SHAFER

I was born in Mexico City; it is one of the largest cities in the world. However, in 1994 I moved to Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. A totally different place and very hot.

And how did I get to Minnesota?

Now almost all people have Facebook and you can have friends in all parts of the world.

So I started having friends here in the United States. And I've always been a fan of snowmobiles, which is not the case in Mexico. And through that hobby I met Warren in September 2014. We

started being friends on Facebook and talking about different topics. I immediately liked the way he wrote and his intelligence (it seemed that I was talking to “Yoda” the Jedi), our affinity was incredible. We liked snowmobiles, science fiction films, cartoons, and the love for reading. We chatted (morning, afternoon and evening) very much every day. I discovered that he is the most wonderful and amazing man I had ever met.

The time went by and in early December Warren proposed marriage to me, and how?

He wrote by chat:

Place: My farm.

When: June 27th, 2015

Event: Wedding reception

Who: You and me

How: In a Drag Race (They are races of snowmobiles in grass, and that would be my first time being in one.)

I accepted!

We planned everything for my trip in March (Why March? Very simple, living in Merida my body was adapted to a very warm climate and here in Minnesota the winters are very cold, so we decided that in spring would be better). First we should meet three months in person, and so it was. I processed my passport, my visa, and my ticket to travel, arriving one afternoon on March 29, 2015.

He picked me up at the airport and immediately we knew our love was forever.

Now we are married for one year and four months. And I can say with my heart in my hand that it has been the happiest time of my life.

Maria Nelson is 49 and originally from Mexico.

About Me and My Family

KLUE WAH, WORTHINGTON

My name is Klue Wah. I was born in Burma. I am from a Thailand Refugee Camp. I came to America with my family. I had two children, one boy and one girl. I lived in St. Paul for five years. I moved to

Worthington almost five years ago. When I lived in St. Paul I went to Early Childhood Education with my little girl. When my older child went to school I had to go to Arlington Hill School with my younger child. A few months later I got pregnant. My children went to school, and I studied U.S. Citizenship for eight months, and became a citizen. I also went to ABE class. I have started to write in a journal. I was excited to learn many things from school. Right now I have three children. I'm still learning English.

Klue Wah is 30 and originally from Myanmar (Burma).

My Life in the U.S.

AMINA SAID, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Amina Said. I'm from Somalia. My family and I moved to Kenya 1991. My father was living in America since 1988. He sent a sponsor for all my family. We moved to America in 2000. I have four sisters and six brothers. My grandmother passed away in 2007. I want to finish my high school, nursing assistant, and TMA certificate. I am working and I like continuing my education. I have two kids and I love Minnesota.

My Childhood

ANZHELA CHILOCH, HOPKINS

I was born in the USSR and lived in a small house in my grandparents' village. My life was very interesting. My grandparents loved me very much. My grandfather had sheep, cows, goats, turkeys, and ducks. I often went with Grandfather to the hay meadow and helped Grandmother water the garden. I liked to ride the horses and donkey and to swim at the lake. Also, I went to the farmer's market, where my grandmother sold vegetables, fruits, and greenery.

My grandparents presented me a bicycle on my birthday, and I was very excited. I biked barefoot on the village streets and shouted for joy. I used to sing loudly and imagine different stories and fairy tales. I was a very happy child, because my childhood was

very interesting. I'm sorry that my daughter and sons don't have the same time. Children today spend too little time outside.

My Favorite Memory

AYAN ALI, BLAINE

In June, 2015, my daughters Aisha and Layla graduated from Spring Lake Park High School. When I saw my daughters had finished high school, I was very happy. All of my family and friends went to the graduation party together. All the students were wearing caps and gowns and were giving speeches. The principal was talking about how to achieve goals in the future. After all that, students started to get their diplomas. It was exciting to see my daughters finishing school and be ready for college. After the graduation ceremony, I hugged my beautiful daughters. Then I took pictures with their friends and family. It is an amazing night to remember!

My Life So Far

BALJINDER KAUR, COON RAPIDS

My name is Baljinder. I'm from India. I came to the United States in 1998. I was so excited because my husband was here. I had an arranged marriage. I wanted an arranged marriage, but I was a student at that time. I wanted to continue my studies. My parents convinced me to marry. I saw my husband for the first time and four days after that I was married. It was very difficult for me. When I arrived at the Minnesota airport, I met my husband and my sister-in-law.

Now I'm busy with my family. I have two kids, and they go to school. I have lots of chores at home. My husband always needs fresh food that I have to cook. I always miss my parents. My parents are in India. I have never met my brother and his family. I always miss my culture and festivals. I learned lots of things here, like driving a car and improving my English. Now, we celebrate USA holidays and Indian festivals. We have lots of fun living life here. It has been a great experience in life so far. I pray to God to make me happy every day and give me the opportunity to

learn new things.

Visiting My Family

BASRA HASSAN, SAINT CLOUD

Do you worry? I used to worry all the time, but now I am not worried anymore. My two brothers died in Ethiopia before I visited them. I worried about all my family. On July 10, my family and I decided to visit my family in Sweden. We decided to visit them because I was worried about my father's health. When we arrived, we saw that he was doing excellently. The rest of my family was there: my sister, brother, and step-mom. I was very happy to see my family for the first time in a long while. I miss them very much and hope to see them again soon. Before the visit, I worried about my family, now I am happy.

My Family

BING NGUYEN, GOLDEN VALLEY

My parents live in Hà Lan, which is a rural province of Ban Mê Thuot City. Ban Mê Thuot is in the middle of highland Viet Nam. The province is a basaltic soil area famous for coffee and pepper. The coffee tastes delicious and has a peppery taste which is spicier and hotter than in other areas in the country. The coffee and the pepper are exported all over the world. The name G7 Coffee Trung Nguyen of Ban Mê Thuot has been to America.

My home Hà Lan is under two hills and has two rivers passing over. On the top of the hill you can see endless green coffee. During flowering season it is white and has a nice smell in all fields.

My parents are farmers and my family has a coffee and pepper farm. After school, I usually help my parents with the farm. It is hard work, but I like it. The coffee is the main source of income for my parents and feeds a family of nine.

My three sisters and two young daughters are married and live at Ha Lan near my parents. I and two younger brothers and one daughter live in Ho Chí Minh City 400 km from my parents. The last born son graduated college and has a job in Ho Chí Minh City. He does not want to come back and live

with my parents. So, my parents live alone in a big house with a farm.

My parents work hard, live frugally, and sacrifice all for us. I love my parents so much. I always pray to God for my parents' health, peace, and happiness.

I am happy tell you that my father has just got a visa to go to America. He will come here in February 2017 and he will live with me for two months.

I am waiting for my father to visit. I am so happy.

I invite volunteers, classmates, and teachers to come to Viet Nam and visit my father's farm and enjoy his coffee.

Love Is...

CARRIE STOPPELMAN, MONTROSE

Love is when two people come together.

Love is when you can make each other laugh and smile.

Love is when you are close to someone and they make you happy.

Love is when you feel safe and comforted and cared for.

Love is when just the little things they do for you make you feel appreciated.

Love is when you come home from a hard day of work and dinner is ready for you.

Love is when you enjoy each other's company.

Love is when you don't go to bed angry, but you go to bed with a smile on your face.

Because you are totally in love with each other.

That's what Love is. . .!

The Best Day of My Life

CESAR LARIOS, WAITE PARK

When my baby boy was born, he changed my life. Before he was born, I felt alone. I was trying to find something, but I didn't know what. I felt incomplete and that made me sad. I did not believe in anything. But now, it's different. He changed my whole life. I

understand the importance of being a parent, I will never be alone. It makes me happy to see Noah play, sleep, eat, laugh, and grow. I appreciate this life, and I am happy because he will always be with me. I love that baby.

My Friend David

ELIZABETH TOT, SAINT CLOUD

My friend David is one of my good friends. He is also my husband! We have lived together and shared our children together. We work hard together to take care of our parents. We are outgoing people, too. I think we are going to be friends for 45 years.

David is 67 years old. He is 6 feet, 1 inch tall. He is very handsome. He helps other people a lot. His face is narrow, his eyes are dark, and his hair, too. He isn't fat or thin. He smiles a lot and he only has two teeth. David has a pleasant personality. He is fairly outgoing, but he is also very sensitive. He worries about his parents because they are old, but they are still in good health.

In the future, David wants to be a farmer. He would like to raise animals and grow vegetables. In order to raise the money that is necessary to buy the farm, he is working for another farmer and sharing part of his wages. He doesn't know how many years it will take to save enough money to buy a farm, but he is confident that he will have a successful future.

My Mother

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I love my mom, she is so sweet to me. When I was a baby, she taught me to be a good person. She taught me to talk, to walk, and how to take a shower. I remember when I had my first class, she went with me to leave me at school. I love my mom because she gave me life.

My Family From Ecuador

MARCO YUNGA, BROOKLYN CENTER

My name is Marco. I grew up in a big family from Ecuador with seven brothers and two sisters, who

are all still alive. My parents are very nice and friendly, but very strict in some ways. We demonstrate good behavior when we are in the family reunions, or in church, or somewhere else. My parents are very religious, therefore we celebrate a lot of festivals in our town in honor of the saints. It was fun, I can't forget that. Why do they keep doing that? They do it because they follow their ancestors and they want to teach us the same thing.

My parents are very open to talk about good and bad experiences. While we had lunch or dinner, sometimes they would tell funny stories, sometimes they would tell sad stories, and so on. They tell us their experiences because they want us to have a better lifestyle. I'm one of four brothers in the family, so I remember when everyone was at home the house was packed with kids playing with toys, or others were running around the house. It's our tradition that even when we get older, we still live with the parents, unless we want to go somewhere else. Afterwards everyone got older. My sister got married, after that my second brother married, and then my third brother. So, the family was getting small because part of my brothers and sisters moved to different places to build a new family. In my case, I thought a little different. I always wanted something beyond, like knowing other countries, other people or other languages.

After all these thoughts I decided to come to this country. But when I got here, I had to start over. After a while I got used to this country. Now, I have a new family, too: my wonderful wife and my two little and beautiful kids. I miss my parents, my brothers, my traditions, everything, but it's worth staying here because I can give a good future for my family and for my parents who are in our country of origin. I pray that God will take care of my family forever.

My First Baby

SHANNON GREEN, MINNEAPOLIS

At the age of 27, I had my first baby. Yes, she's a girl. Her big brown eyes and her curly black hair. The smell of baby birth in the air. Five pounds. I felt so happy and fulfilled. She is so special, and she is so precious. I let out so many tears; my baby girl is here.

I will protect you. I will love you. I will be here for you. You are my world; you didn't choose me, I chose you. I will be the best mom I can be for you, my first born baby. I feel her love, I feel her touch, the beat of her heart, the loving of her soul, as I tell myself I made this baby. I'm ready for you. I've been waiting so long to see you. I kiss her face and say, "I can't wait to see what life has in store. I love that you are all mine, my mini me." I have a little person looking up to me. My first baby. There's so much she needs. I have to feed you and bathe you. I have to clothe you. I have to keep you warm and safe.

Loving someone is all it takes to make sure they are ok. Still 'til this day my baby girl feels the love of her mother. It's a bond that no one can take. She knows her mother. She gives all her love. She smiles and all I see are sunrays. The grip of her hands and the strength of her pull. I know she feels safe and secure. It's a feeling that only a mother can feel. "ShanTy you are mom's girl. You make me feel so loved and you bring me so much joy. You mean so much to me. It's like a big cool breeze of fresh air when we wake up in the morning. Your laughter is so soothing. You're so calm and looking for me. I wouldn't change anything at all you are so special to me. You are a gift from God and you are so fragile. I'm here to make you feel loved and that I will do." My first baby ShanTy and me.

Young Mother

SHUKRI ABDIWAHAB, SAINT CLOUD

In the fall of 2008, at the age of 16, I was married and I had my first daughter. Therefore, I had to grow up really fast.

Most girls my age were worried about makeup, boys, and college. The only thing I was worried about was how I was going to take care of my daughter, Nasteho. How was I going to provide everything she needed? I faced many challenges. Having no car and taking the bus with my little one was very hard. I had to drop out of school and find work to help support my family. At the time, my husband was a college student and working a part-time job.

Unfortunately, I didn't have family in St. Cloud, and as a result of this I couldn't find childcare. I struggled with life as a young mother. With help from my husband, things eventually fell into place. He was able to watch our daughter so that I could work part-time. I got a job and bought a car. Things don't always turn out the way we planned them. Having kids at a young age made me grow up fast and I now realize there is more to life than yourself. It taught me to be patient with life and to be more grateful and most of all to enjoy life. I had two more amazing girls that I wouldn't change for the world.

In the end I went back to school. It was a long time coming, but eventually I found my happy place. Currently I have a new job that I love. I make enough money to support my family. All three of my girls are in school so I have more free time. I encourage my own daughters to not get married at a young age. With the perks of being a young mom, there are also hardships that come with it.

Feeling Grateful for a Good Year

SHUKRIYUSUF, EDEN PRAIRIE

First, I am thankful to Allah. Because Allah gives me everything I have. When somebody helps me, God gives that to me. This year is good for me because I am alive and healthy. That's why I am thankful to God. Another thing that I am thankful for is my husband. My mom is sick and she needs money. I did not have money. Then, my husband worked overtime. I didn't know he worked overtime. Then he gave me the money. He said, "This money is for your mom." I sent it to her and I was glad. My third thing I am thankful for is my teacher, Dale. When I came back to school, my score was low and the registration girl said go to the low class. Then he said that I could be back in his class, that it was ok. I am thankful to him.

I am thankful to my young brother. When the schools opened, he went shopping for all school supplies for my children. I like this brother more than my other brothers. My children like him, too.

When someone does a favor for you, you have to be thankful. I like people to help me. I can't get it out of my head. When someone does a favor for me and does something I need, I remember it all the time.

I Know Love

SONJA OLSON, SAINT CLOUD

I never really knew,
Love till I looked at,
My daughter's face.
I thought I knew,
I was clueless though.
Now I know love,
My child gave me,
The gift of love that no one,
Could ever replace.

My Family

SUZY VIGDOROVA, ST. PAUL

I was born in Moscow to a big family. I have two brothers. Their names are Alex and Varlen. They are retired and pensioners now.

My brother Alex is an actor. Varlen is an engineer. Alex lives in a small town. He has no family. Varlen has a big family.

I have a daughter and a grandson. They live in a village. They have a big home and they have many animals, like 40 goats, 10 sheep, and 7 dogs.

I was married this year. My husband Vlad has lived in Minnesota for 35 years.

One of my close friends lives in Crystal. We are seeing each other very often. We are visiting theatres and museums.

I like Minnesota.

My Brother

AYAN HUSSEIN, MINNEAPOLIS

My brother Abdifatah his my role model. He lives in my hometown. He is 28 Years old, and the oldest in my family. When he was 16 years old, he went to school in the morning and worked at a food shop in the afternoon to help or family. When he finished the 12th grade he started as a driver and still he helped us. After two years he bought a car. He married a woman and had his first baby in 2009. I remember that night, my family was so happy with the new baby. He had a boy. My brother said I want give my son the same name as my daddy. My daddy's name is Yusuf. He named my nephew Yusuf and all of the family loves the new boy and his name. When my father heard the new boy's name, he was so happy and he said I am so so lucky to have a grand son have my name. My brother has four boys and three girls. I love my brother more than my life and I miss him so much. I can't wait to go back my home country to see my dear brother and his beautiful family.

Ayan Hussein is 22 and originally from Ethiopia.

HEROES





Linda Chacon was born and raised in El Salvador. Linda came to Brooklyn Center, MN 7 years ago. She came to this country to get married. Linda is an architect in her country. She is wonderful with design! Linda has been a student with the Osseo ABE program for the past 2 years. She attended class with her 2 sons last year and this year attends with her youngest son. Her oldest son will be going to kindergarten in the fall. Linda believes in education for all. She shows this by providing her young sons with the education they need, early on, to be successful later in life. One of Linda's main goals is to help her sons be successful and go to college. Family and God are very important to Linda. These two things encourage her to reach her goals.

My Amazing Parents

LINDA CHACON, BROOKLYN CENTER

I am Linda. I am from El Salvador. My mother is Maria and my father is Jacobo. They got married and formed a warm home. They worked hard to give their children the best. My mother worked as a teacher and strived to get many diplomas. I say that because it was hard working, studying, and complying with her responsibilities as a mother. (Take care her children, help with the activities in the home and be a good wife). I remember her dedication to comply with her responsibilities and to achieve her goals. My father is a hard worker. He is responsible and dedicated. He worked all week and came back on the weekend. It didn't stop my father from spending time with his family. I remember enjoying time together. He worked and studied at the same time theology to get his diploma and served in the church as a shepherd. He worked hard to make his responsibilities at work, in the church, at home, with his wife and studying. He worked to achieve his goals. They taught us the Bible and to follow rules for a good life. They helped their children to achieve their goals. I give thanks to God for giving good parents. I would never change my parents. They aren't perfect but they gave us a good example of life and effort and how to trust in God to achieve our goals. I want to follow the good example of my parents working hard to achieve my goals and help my children to get a good life and achieve their goals with the help of God.

Linda Chacon is 43 and originally from El Salvador.

My Mother

JAMAL ABDULAH, BROOKLYN CENTER

My mom is an important person to me.

My mom, she took care of me when I was a baby. When I grew up, she told me stories. My mom taught me to stay away from the bullies, and only play with nice kids. Another thing I will not forget is that when I was six years old I laid my head on her lap and she scratched until I fell asleep. I love my mom; my mom loves me, too.

Jamal Abdulahi is 34 and originally from Oromiya.

A Person I Admire

MOHAMED OLAD, MINNEAPOLIS

One of the people that I most admire is my mother, Darmano Abdi Guled. She came to the Ban Nadir Region in 1991 as a young woman. At that time the civil war began in our country. My mother is originally from Somalia. She was born in Mogadishu, Somalia. My mother has 10 children: four boys and six girls. We were a big family, so all of my family lived together in the same city, but some of the family moved out when Somalia had a civil war. Therefore, we lived outside of the city during the war. I was not able to learn some studies, like math, biology, chemistry, and physics. Everything was hard. My mother works hard every day because of the war. She is a wonderful woman.

Mohamed Olad is 31 and originally from Somalia.

My Mother

KHADRA ABDI, MINNEAPOLIS

My mother is my life. My mother, she raised me. If I didn't have my mother, life wouldn't be easy. She helped me with everything and I won't forget that. My mom is my life, my heart, and my sweet-heart. Her name is Aamina Abdi Hassan. She's my important person. I love her so much.

Khadra Abdi is 32 and originally from Somalia.

Volunteers — The World Needs Them

REGINA SOUZA, MAPLE GROVE

During my first day in school I was lost because I didn't speak English and I didn't understand anything that the teacher was saying. Suddenly, one woman came into the class. The teacher stopped the activities and she started to lead us in physical exercises. She was very lively, and for five or 10 minutes, all of the class was moving their hands, feet, legs, and whole body. It was very funny!

After that day, I started to meet the volunteers at the "Adult Academic Program": Marsha, Mary Ellen, and Linda. All of them are lovely, patient and very supportive. Each one has a different way to talk with us, but they have various traits in common. They are so helpful, they encourage us to speak, they are available to correct our mistakes, and they are there to praise our successes. I imagine that they have very busy lives, but they still dedicate part of their time to help people. In every part of the world, there are many Marshas, Mary Ellens, and Lindas who are working and helping people in their lives in many different ways. Certainly, volunteers are the most important, wonderful, and special people in our world.

Regina Souza is originally from Brazil.

Different Personalities

LAMIA ESHAQ, LINO LAKES

It is hard to live life alone. We need people around us to connect with them. We need someone to understand us. People could be our family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. All people have different characters. I think this is good for us. We can learn from each other. We can learn something new. Life will be more interesting. So it is good to have friends who have different personalities. In my country, I have a lot of friends. I have known them for a long time. But my best friends are Boshra and Somia.

They are active and smart women. We understand each other very well; however, everyone has different characters. For example, Somia is an organized

woman. When she works on a project, she likes to do everything by herself and quickly. On the other hand, Boshra likes to work in groups when she works on a project. And Boshra likes to work slowly, and she doesn't care about the time.

My best friends are funny and attractive. Somia cares a lot for her appearance and she always gives us good advice about that. But Boshra is a simple woman. She thinks that spending time shopping is wasted time. She lives her life simply.

I like both of them and I respect their ways to live life. They stay my best friends and I miss them a lot. I think when people have different personalities, this means they have distinct experiences.

Lamia Eshaq is originally from Brooklyn Park.

Three Different People Who Are Important to Me

MARIE CLAIRE P., ST. PAUL

Life is a fight; you need to work hard to win it. My father told me not to have the idea to marry first. First is to work hard in school and to get your diploma, and second will be marriage. If you do not have a chance to marry, your diploma will be your husband.

Mostly, my grandma told me to be nice to everyone and share with whoever needs help, most importantly your neighbor. If your enemies ask your neighbors about you and you are nice to your neighbors, they will not give them information about you. Or your neighbor will be with your enemy to destroy you. Your neighbor will sell you or save you.

My elementary teacher's name was Marie Claire and she was a hard worker. She did all the kind of work the women were not to do at that time. One day, she looked at me and said, "You will be a hard worker like me. Could you tell your father to come tomorrow?" When my father came, she said, "I want your daughter to be called Marie Claire because she will be a hard worker." My father accepted.

A good life is not for the lazy. You need to work hard to have an easy and nice life.

Marie Claire P. is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Most Important Person

CARLOS GONZALEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My mom made me who I am. My mom taught me to love, respect, help others, be patient, and to be a good person. My mom also has these qualities. She taught me how to work hard, cook, and take care of my family and community. That is why my mom is important to me.

Carlos Gonzalez is originally from Ecuador.

My Auntie

AYENTU AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I come from Ethiopia. I am Oromo. I was 20 years old when I came to America. I came to Minnesota on August 30, 2016. It was the first time I had traveled to another country.

I have my auntie here. My auntie is very nice. She is 37 years old. She is a very strong and very kind lady. She has lived in the United States for 20 years. She knows a lot of things. She works and has four children (two girls and two boys).

My auntie likes rice very much, and all her children are like their mom—they like rice, too. Most of the time, when my auntie has lunch, she eats her rice outside. She does good things for me, so I love her.

Ayentu Ahmed is originally from Ethiopia.

My Grandmother

CHALA URGO DARAFU, ST. PAUL

I am from Ethiopia. My grandmother was a very important person in my life. Her name is Gexe Chubata Gubi. She was a very tall woman and she was warm and strong in character. She told me, "Your mother left you when you were six months old, because she was separated from your dad." There were many people living in the house, but she always kept milk for me.

She advised me, “When your mom comes to visit you, don’t run away. I will introduce you.” She also bought clothes and shoes for me. I always remember her because she did everything for me.

Chala Urgo Darafu is originally from Ethiopia.

My Mom

FASIKA LEMESA, MINNEAPOLIS

My mother is the most important person in my life. Not only did she carry me for nine months, but she also continues to support me. She cooked for me, she is very beautiful, and has the kindest eyes that I have ever seen. She is such a sweet person, she loves me regardless of what I put her through.

Fasika Lemesa is originally from Ethiopia.

About My Son

ANONYMOUS MINNEAPOLIS

My son lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He grew up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He attended class at Minilic Secondary School. He finished high school in Ethiopia. After that, he went to Greece and lived with my sister and his sister for a couple of years. After that, he moved with his sister to Canada. He took a short course and was hired by a big company.

In 2006, he went to Ethiopia with family members. He got married. We invited a lot of people and a famous artist. There was European and Ethiopian food. It was fun. After three months, he came back to Canada with his wife. Between one and two years, he had a baby girl. After two years, another baby boy.

Now his children are grown up. The girl is eight years, and the boy is six years. I was very proud and happy to get grandchildren. I am enjoying it.

When it is summer, they come to Minneapolis, too. I am very happy in my life. Thank God!

My Mother

Suweab Sham, Minneapolis

My mom’s name is Zeynaba, and she is the most important person for me. She was pregnant for nine months and was tired because of me. When I was born, it was a very hard time for her. My mom used to carry me until I was bigger. She helped me all the time. For example, when I was learning, she encouraged me. She taught me how to cook and how to wash. She was my first teacher for everything. My mother is the most important person for me in my life, and I can’t finish one day without my mom.

Suweab Sham is originally from Ethiopia.

Dedication to My Mom

DULCE SILVA, ALBERTVILLE

I want to thank you for being that person who has always been by my side, for guiding me along the way, and for giving me much love. I admire your strength day-by-day. You know how to be a mother, friend, and grandmother. Thank you for guiding my steps, for being part of my laughter, and for being the support for our whole family. I love you so much.

Dulce Silva is originally from Mexico.

A Letter to My Mom

SARAY MORA GRANADOS, SAINT MICHAEL

I will always remember you as someone with a lot of joy. Just like you were—funny, talkative, a partier, positive attitude, confident, and enjoying every moment and place. And you always left memories where you were. Making friends in minutes. Loving without reserving. Treating people like they were your own family. And giving without expecting something back.

I have always been proud of you! I thought to myself that I might never see you again, and sadly that happened. I thank you for all that you did for

me. I am thankful to God and the universe for having you as my mom. You always lifted me up at bad times.

It still hurts me for not being able to be at your side when you died. But in my mind, you are still in Mexico, and we just can't see each other. That brings me calmness. What really calms me is that you lived to the max and found yourself as a person. You taught me to enjoy every moment. You are my pride. I love you and you will always be in my heart. Now, you are one more angel in my life.

Saray Mora Granados is originally from Mexico.

An Important Person

ANONYMOUS, ST. PAUL

My parents are very important and very helpful because they put me on the right path. They helped me grow up. When I am sick and unhappy, they can make me happier than anyone. So my parents are very important. They can do anything for my family. I am thankful for them.

Important Person

NOHEMY RAMIREZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My boyfriend is very important to me. He is my everything. I need him in my life. He is a little angry. My boyfriend is the father of my son. He doesn't speak English, he only speaks Spanish. I love him very much. That is why my boyfriend is important to me.

Nohemy Ramirez is originally from San Salvador la Libertad, El Salvador.

My Friend

ASHA BIHI, BLOOMINGTON

When I was in high school, my best friend was named Fadema. I met her in 1984. We talked together. She liked going out, but I did not like going out. She helped me with math because she knew modern math. I helped her with writing assignments. We liked

sports, and we spent two hours playing volleyball. She is still my friend. My friend lives in Denmark. My friend talks with me on the telephone. I like my friend Fadema.

Asha Bihi is originally from Somalia.

Untitled

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My mother is important to me because she was the only one who is the best out of all the others in my own family. I'm sure that she was the strongest mother in the world. She saved my life when I was young and our country was at war, and we didn't know how to get to a safe place. It was very difficult to find out how to get to a safe place. We tried to run under the mountains through a cave in the jungle. I was just eight years old and my mother put me on her back and she tried to run, but she hit a rock and fell down.

I couldn't get up, so my mother ran out of the jungle, and we stayed until the end of two days. After that, the war was very dangerous. We had to leave to get another chance. My mother and I were lost in the morning. My brother and sisters were lost in the jungle, my youngest brother was only one month. She didn't know what to do. He was hungry, she gave to him her big thumb, and then he slept. Three days later, our neighbor saw them and kept them. The first time that we came down, everybody came out of the jungle, and we saw each other and we were happy.

Grandmother

DEGMO ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

I grew up with my grandmother. Her name is Hirsia. She raised six children, including me. She paid the expenses of the children. She is very patient with the children. I never forget my grandmother. My father was dead. When he was dead, my mother didn't take care of me. The only person who took care of me was my grandmother. She likes to work outdoors. Sometimes she sold stock such as rice, sugar, beans, flour, and pasta. She lives in Somalia. Her personality is a very compassionate person.

Degmo Ali is originally from Somalia.

Why Mothers are More Merciful Than Fathers

FARDOWSO DINI, MINNEAPOLIS

I would like to write about our amazing mothers. But why do I call mothers more merciful than fathers? I know that every mother is the same. They love and care for their kids. That doesn't mean our fathers are careless, or they hate us, or that I hate my dad. No! I know some fathers are hard workers, but our mothers are rare jewels. We all know how mothers are important in our life. Mothers are a great gift for us from God. As for me, I have a great amount of respect for my mom. I'm the 10th of her children. I'm the youngest one in my family. However, when she was nine months pregnant with me, she got sick. She went to the hospital and asked them, "If I take this medicine, would the baby have trouble with it?" She was very sick, but was still thinking of her little baby girl's health. We cannot imagine how much they love us. No one can take the place of a mother.

A couple of days ago, my friend, Ayan, and I were walking down the street on a very, very, cold day. We saw a cute little girl with her father. She was about three or four years old. They were waiting for the bus, but the little girl was not wearing a jacket and she kept saying, "It's cold! It's cold!" She put her little hands inside her T-shirt. Her dad was wearing a big jacket! I hugged her and I asked, "Why didn't you wear your jacket?"

She answered, "Because I couldn't find it."

I asked the man, "Are you her father?"

And he said, "Yes, I am."

"Ooooh!" I said, "You are wearing a big jacket but your little child is wearing a T-shirt. What kind of parent are you? Please give her your jacket and never do this again." I swear to God that mothers wouldn't do that. Definitely they could not do that. That's why I said mothers are more merciful than fathers. We should be friendly to them, and we should respect them. We should pray for them, we should make them happy, we should listen to them, and we should admire them. Please listen to your parents and say: "My Lord! Have mercy on them both! As they did care for me when I was young."

Fardowso Dini is originally from Somalia.

Remembering My Mother

HUSSEIN NUR, MINNEAPOLIS

I admire my mother. She was a good mother. The first reason I admire my mother is because she raised me very well. Another reason is because she was an excellent cook. She cooked rice and meat. Finally, I admire my mother because she was like me. We are both hardworking. Hussein Nur is originally from Somalia.

Story About My Family

Rukiya Omar, Minneapolis

My name is Rukiya. I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I have two beautiful daughters living with me. I have a mom and father. My mom lives in Minneapolis. My father lives in Africa. I have three brothers. Two live in Minneapolis, and one brother stayed in Africa. I don't have any sisters on my mom's side, but my father has girls. When I was young, I helped my mom wash dishes. I did so many things because she didn't have another daughter. That's why I helped my mom a lot. She was a single mother. She did so many things and was a nice person. She loves me and I love her. Now, we still help each other. We are happy to help each other, and I will help her until the day I die.

My mom is an important person in my life because she took care of my brothers and me. She still takes care of me. She is smart, and I feel that she is the best person in my life.

Rukiya Omar is originally from Somalia.

My Mother

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My mother is very special. I love my mother because when I was young she helped me and took care of me. She didn't go to a job, because she always stayed with me. She also cooked food, cleaned our home, and did the laundry. That is why she is important to me.

Most Important Person

AHMED MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

The most important person to me was my mother. She was a loving and caring person. She was a friendly person. She was a teacher and provider. She was supportive and encouraging. She faced a lot of hardships and challenges raising us. My mother was an amazing person.

Ahmed Mohamed is 31 and originally from Galkacyo, Mudug, Somalia.

My Mom

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My mom is important because she is everything. If I wanted something, she gave it to me. She gave me things like my food, my clothes, and my health. She took care of my nine brothers and five sisters. That is not easy. When I was growing up, sometimes we were sick and my mom had to pay the doctor. I love my mom.

One Life

LARRY HILL, JR., DULUTH

One life taken so many can live

With nails driven.

We were given a gift.

The ultimate sacrifice of God's only Son,

Illustrates the power of His love.

A love never-ending and a love so true,

A love unmatched for me and you.

With outstretched arms and the Passion displayed,

He saved us all and conquered the grave.

Larry Hill, Jr. is 45 and originally from Jackson, Mississippi.

I Am Thankful For My Mother

CRYSTAL LOR, MAPLEWOOD

A person that I am thankful for is my mother. She is a strong mother for raising five children all by herself. My mother took care of us most of the time. My father worked away from home, so he traveled a lot. As a child, I lived in a little village in Laos. My mother's farm was about five miles from our house. She worked hard from sun up to sun down every day and we helped her. My mother grew rice, corn, beans, and sweet potatoes. We ate most of the food and my mother sold some of it to buy clothes and medicine for us. My mother got her water down by the river. The little river is about two miles from our house. My mother went down to get her water every day and we helped her.

As a child, I lived by my mother's side and I had no worries. When I got hungry, my mother cooked for me. When my clothes got dirty, my mother washed for me. When I got sick, my mother would comfort me and give me medicines to help me feel better. My mother loved and cared for her children equally. We were very happy children to be by her side because she protected us and kept us safe. My mother saw that the life was hard so she took us here to the United States. My father stayed in Laos and he is re-married. My mother raised five children all by herself. My mother always made sure that we had food to eat and clothes to wear. My mother did a good job of raising, loving and caring for us.

My mother still acts as our mother. She likes to tell us what to do and not to do. However, my mother is older now and we are old enough to take care of ourselves, and also we can now take care of her. Now, we all help to protect and care for our mother. We all have homes that she can visit and stay for as long as she likes. We let our mother do as she wishes. It's because she has loved us and has done her best for us. Now, it's time to love our mother back. I can't thank my mother enough for all that she has done for us.

The Start of My Journey

ALVIN KOLLIE, MINNEAPOLIS

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Alvin Lela Kollie. I was born in June 1990, in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, in West Africa. It was during a civil war that my story begins. I was a baby during that time who knew nothing of what was going on. I never had a chance to know my parents because when I was born my father gave me away to his mother, who is my grandma, I also call her Mom because she raised me. I love her dearly. After I was born, the government was looking for my parents, saying that they will kill them and our whole family. According to my grandma, they didn't have any choice but to save my life and run away. According to her, my parents were very worthy people and losing me was not something they were going to live with easily ever. I realize that they loved me, and I respect that dearly.

Growing up as a boy with my grandma was the best feeling, and the best thing that happened to me. Without her, I don't know where I would be now. It came to pass that on September 6, 1995, after my parents left, my grandma and I ran away to Ghana. That's where my long journey with my grandma begins, and why I have the chance to tell you my story today. Today we live in Minneapolis, and I thank God for America.

Alvin Kollie is 26 and originally from Liberia.

My Mom

MARIA DE LOS ANGELES VILLAFAN CAZALES,
BROOKLYN PARK

My name is Maria Villafan Cazales and I came to the United States in 2007. I decided to come to Minnesota for a better life and to help my parents. But life in the USA is very difficult because I miss my family, especially my mom. But there are many opportunities for all people. Every time I talked to my mom, she told me that "I had to get ahead." She would like to meet my children. I always remember her and she will be in my heart. The time went very quickly and I realized I was not ready for this great absence. This country has many opportunities and I have them, too. To write this letter is one of the achievements to learn in my life. Thanks to my mom

for all the love she gave me, and all the time that God allowed me to have her. My achievements are dedicated to her. She always lives in my mind and my heart.

Maria de los Angeles Villafan Cazales is 32 and originally from Mexico.

My Daughter Naimo Shire

AMINA BARRE, WAITE PARK

Naimo Shire is an inspiring person. She is my daughter and my friend. She is a girl who doesn't give up on anything.

Naimo is 17 years old and she is going to be 18 in January. Naimo is 5 feet, 2 inches tall. Her eye color is dark brown and her face is round and oval. My daughter's hair is black and wavy. She loves to put her hair up or sometimes braid it. Naimo's favorite color is violet, so half of her things are violet. For example, her school supplies are different shades of violet. Naimo's clothes are all stylish and cultural, which I really love!

My daughter is witty and sweet; she is one of those women that stop to give money to the homeless. But the thing I love about her is that she has confidence, which makes her indestructible; she goes for what she believes. My daughter wants to get a master's in psychology and child development.

I believe that my daughter is going to become the best psychologist in the next generation. Naimo is my daughter, and my friend. I'm waiting to see what she can accomplish. I'm always on her side, every step of the way.

Untitled

BARWAKO AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

The most important person in my life is my mom. I believe that our mothers are the most important and significant human beings in our lives. From the day I was born she has taken care of me. In my early childhood, when I was tiny and helpless, she gave me everything I needed. When I grew up, she explained to me what is good and what is bad during my school years and in marriage. She was the one who told me how to be persistent and how to progress. My mother understands me in the way no

other person ever could. I am able to share different secrets and opinions with her, and I know for sure that she will never let me down. I consider that I am a lucky person in having such a loving mother. She has given me everything she possibly could and now I will make her happier in her old age.

My Sister

FARDOSA IBRAHIM, WAITE PARK

Ifrah is one of my good friends. She is also my sister! We go to masjid together and we used to even share a bedroom, but right now, I am married. Even though we live in the same home, we have separate bedrooms. Of course, we also share our parents! I think that we are going to be friends for a long time. We will certainly be sisters for a long time!

Ifrah is 28 years old. She is 5 feet, 5 inches tall. Her face is long and narrow. Her eyes are brown. She smiles a lot and usually has a friendly look on her face. She isn't fat and she isn't thin. Her build is average. She works out, so she stays in shape. She doesn't like to dress up. She likes to wear a skirt and scarf.

Ifrah has a pleasant personality. She is fairly outgoing, but she is also very sensitive. She worries about our parents because she is young. She is my younger sister, but her English is better than mine. She always encourages me to speak English and to learn new vocabulary. Ifrah is crazy about mango juice and chocolate.

Ifrah's future plans are very definite. First, she is going to improve her English. Then, she will graduate with an associate degree in liberal arts and general studies. Right now she works as an interpreter. After that, she would like to marry. I don't know, but I hope so. I want her to be happy. She is a good person and has a true life. I hope she has a good marriage, if Allah says so to this sister of mine.

My Friend, Nawal

HANAN ADDOW, SAINT CLOUD

Nawal is one of my good friends. She is also my sister. We live together. We share our parents. I think that we are going to be friends for a long time. We will certainly be sisters for a long time.

Nawal is 18 years old. She is about 5 feet 2 inches tall. Her face is long and narrow. Her eyes are dark brown, and her hair is black. She doesn't look very Somalian. She smiles a lot and usually has a friendly look on her face. She is skinny. She plays volleyball. She likes to dress up. She wears different outfits every day.

Nawal has a pleasant personality. She is a humble person. She worries about our parents because they work so hard. She also helps old people because they are like her grandparents. She is my youngest sister, but her English is better than mine. She likes to eat chips and ice cream.

Nawal's future is very clear. First, she is going to study pre-medicine. She wants to be a doctor. After that, she wants to travel to United Arab Emirates. I want her to be happy. She is my little sister and I love her.

My Friend Seynab

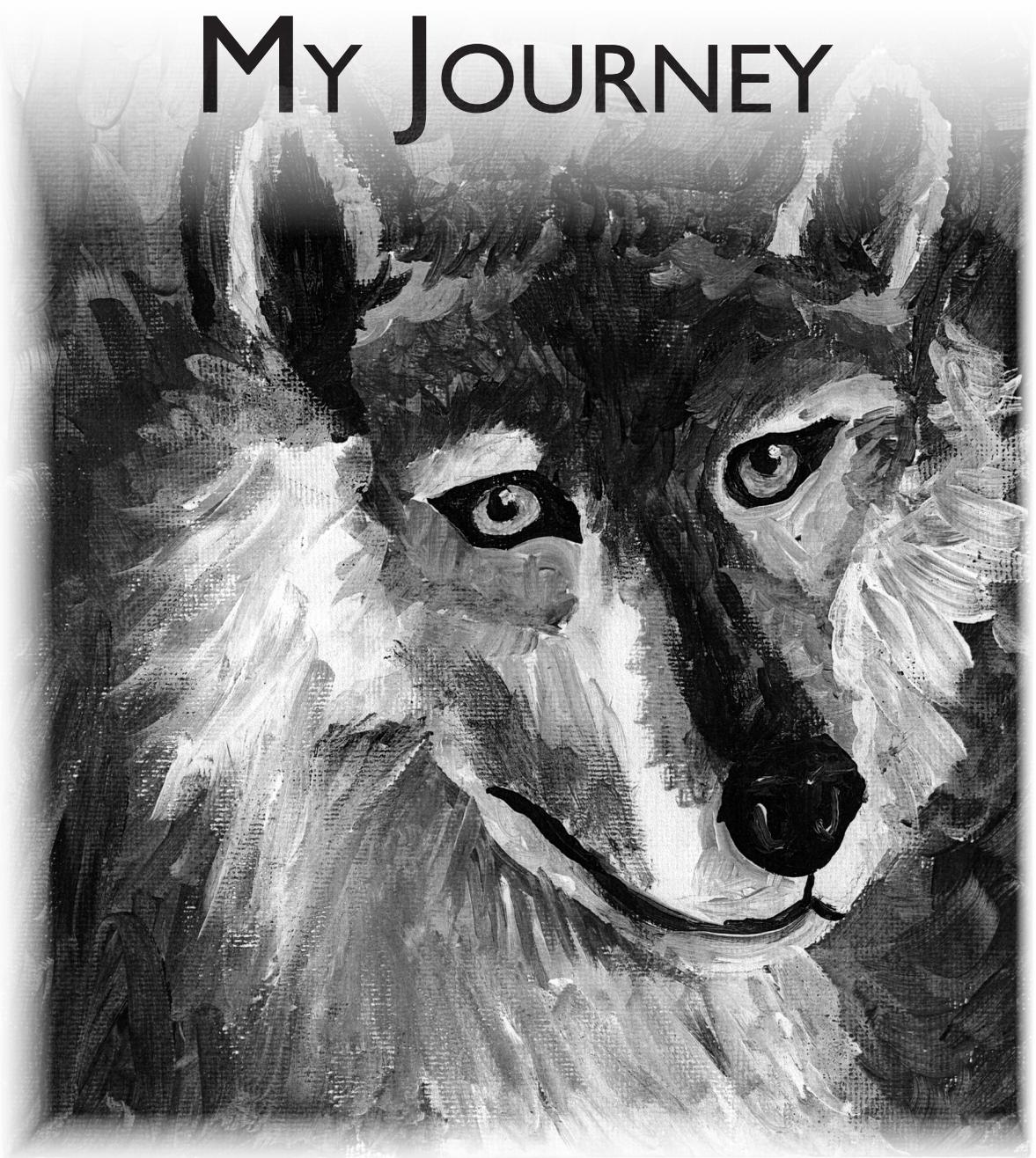
NASRO ASHUR, WAITE PARK

Seynab is one of my good friends. She is also my sister. We go shopping together. We live together. We also share our parents. I think that we are going to be friends for a long time.

Seynab is 23 years old. She is about 5 feet, 6 inches tall. Her face is long and narrow. Her eyes are black. Her hair is dark black. She isn't fat or thin. Her build is average. She likes to wear dresses and a hijab. Seynab has a pleasant personality. She is fairly outgoing, but she is also very sensitive. She worries about our parents because she is young. She is my younger sister, but her English is better than mine. She always encourages me to speak English and to learn new vocabulary. Seynab is crazy about vanilla ice cream.

Seynab's future plans are very definite. First, she is going to improve her English. Then she is going to college. After that she would like to marry. I want her to be happy. She is a good person and has happy life. I hope she has a good marriage. I love my sister.

MY JOURNEY



Nimo Ali was born in Mogadishu, Somalia. She lived in Kenya for 16 years before coming to Minnesota in November 2014. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and three children. She is currently working, but hopes to return to school to continue studying for her GED, and maybe one day go to college. It can be difficult to stay in school while carrying the responsibility to not only raise three small children but also support family back home. However, she says it is a blessing to be in Minnesota as it is much easier to support her family here than when she was living in Kenya. She will hopefully have her drivers' license this spring, making it easier to find a job!

Exile

NIMO ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Nimo. I was born and raised in Somalia. My story is no different from my fellow people, but this is how I feel every day. Home is where my heart is. I left my country 16 years ago to seek a better life for me and my family. When the war broke out, I was eight years old. I was in the third grade. My childhood was hard. No matter where I went I felt alienated. Everyday I used to tell myself I'd go back home.

After a while, I realized there is no home to go back to. The country I used to know is no longer. It has become a war zone, a country once beautiful. A country that has the longest coast in Africa. A place that has the most beautiful landscapes. A place that is known for its thriving livestock. It has become a battleground. Somalia, my sweet homeland, I feel your pain. I know every day you ask yourself, "Where are my people? Why am I divided into pieces? I used to be one star. Now I am bleeding, bleeding for 26 years." My Somalia says, "Lift me up." I feel your pain. Wait for a while. Change is coming. Your next generation will pull you up. They will pick up your pieces and will build you. In order to build my country we need to educate our young. If we make money or accomplish everything, nothing will fill the void without peace in our country.

I live in a great country where I can be anything I desire if I work hard. My message here is not to take for granted what we have. Nothing lasts forever. In today's world people lack love. Peace and love are connected. Life is short, let us not spend the little time we have in this planet hating each other. It is made to fit all mankind. To all those who don't have peace in their homes, I hope you find peace and tranquility. For those who have it, keep it and nurture it. Spread the peace and love.

Almost Anonymous

ANONYMOUS, BAYPORT

I have an opportunity to write and possibly have it published, anonymously, that's the catch. This concept bothers me for a brief moment before I embrace it. I have an idea, but I don't know where to start, somewhere beside the broken bones and broken hearts.

The whistle of a freight train in the distance, got closer and closer as I ran to greet it. There was a thin veil of trees between the trailer park and an old abandoned factory we called "the milk plant." Whether or not this place ever had anything to do with milk, I don't know. There was nothing inside but an old school desk and four steel 55 gallon drums, one laid on its side, lidless, leaking out a pink cotton candy-like goo. A large mural of a demonic face leered behind them.

On the other side was the train track. Between the track and the plant was an old pile of railroad ties that I liked to sit on top of to watch and listen to the trains come and go. It was dangerously close to the tracks, yet I felt safe. The trains screamed louder than Mom and Dad did back at home. The labyrinths of bright letters painted on the sides of those rusty box cars captivated me. Something so small and senseless to some, even ugly, was and still is something beautiful to me. They were something bigger to me and are a big part of how I live my life now, almost anonymously. I have grown into more than just a graffiti writer, but a creator.

I am 26 years old and I feel smaller than I did when I was seven. I have never had more questions of who I am or who I want to be than I do now. If something I create finds that one boy who was in the place that I was, and that boy can find a way to leave for a moment—even if just in their hearts to somewhere better—then that's who it's about inspiring. That's who I hope this finds, not the world.

This Is My Story

AMINA HUSSEIN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Amina Mohammed Hussein. I am married and I have four children. I came here on August 3, 2016. I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Cedar Avenue. I live with my son, Alrifiy. After I came to the United States I decided to attend Volunteers of America Adult High School to learn English. After I improve my English language, I want to work any place to help out my family members. Therefore, please teacher, I need your help by teaching English. After all, I love to live in America. Thank you for asking me to get help and I am happy to introduce myself.

Translation assistance provided by Madina Hussein

Amina Hussein is originally from Oromia.

About Me

KHADAR FURE, MINNEAPOLIS

I am a good person. I am a hard worker. When I come home I do something—not sleeping. I care for my children. I like work. I am happy. Sometimes I take my kids to the playground if the weather is good. I am satisfied with my life and my learning English. I am committed to it. I am thankful.

Khadar Fure is originally from Somalia.

My Journey

NOOR MOALIM, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1983. After the fall of the Somali government, I went to Kenya. I stayed in Kenya for 5 years. Later I could not stay in Kenya longer simply because life was not easy. For example, the security: I could not get free movement to live my daily life. So, I decided to change where I was living. I moved to a third country, Uganda. I took my last decision to go to Uganda.

When I came to Kampala, Uganda, I surrendered myself to the police and later to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and I was given

asylum in Uganda. In this country life was better than before, though travel was not easy and comfortable. It can also break your heart. This journey left a lot of bad memories in my mind.

After I stayed in Uganda almost three years, I received resettlement from immigration to go to the USA. I stayed for one more year during the immigration process.

Finally, after the long process of four years, I was told the good news of my flight to the USA. When I received my flight ticket I started to prepare, and I left for the USA in for my final journey. That was the first time I flew. I stepped my first step in the USA 2015. All in all, as the saying goes, a thousand miles begins with one step.

I married my wife in 2004. Our marriage was based on Islamic Sharia. At first my wife and I agreed upon our marriage, then I went to her father to ask for her. I was given my wife by her parents. We were engaged to each other based on our religion.

We started our life being two spouses to make a great relationship. To improve our marriage and avoid weakness and failures, we had to understand and respect one another. For this we have accomplished our goal: our genuine connection, and being honest, and expressing ourselves with open hearts, and having a long-lasting marriage.

Today we have four children, one boy and three girls. This long-lasting life made us happy and joyful. My first-born is 12 years old and my youngest is two years old. I thank God, despite all my problems, for all the good days I have spent sharing with my wife and my children.

Noor Moalim is originally from Somalia.

Roda

RODA ADAM, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Roda Adam. I'm from Somalia. Now I live in the United States for 11 years. I have three kids. They go to school. I have a great life. I'm working at Second Shelf. I go to school in the morning. I live in a big apartment. My dream is to get my diploma in

the United States. Before I feel it's difficult when I speak English. I told everybody that languages are important when you go to another country.

Roda Adam is originally from Somalia.

My Languages

ABAYI WALI, MINNEAPOLIS

I speak two languages: Somali and English. I speak the languages with my family and friends. I learned Somali when I was young. I am going to school now to learn English.

Abayi Wali is originally from Somalia



Untitled

SHUAYB ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My family is good because they respect me and they are happy. They live and work in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Sometimes I enjoy cooking a meal and eating together in one place all day. That time is in the summer, and not winter. I don't like winter because many times I fall down in the snow. My favorite season is summer because I like to walk and visit my friends. I also like to walk to school in the summertime and back to my home. I say thank you for all my teachers and the office staff at school. I say God bless them.

Shuayb Ali is originally from Somalia.

About Me

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I am shy and gentle. I feel happy, special and crazy. It is funny. I like babies. I am a caring babysitter. I want to go to travel with family or my friends. I want to climb. I am strong, but sometimes I feel soft. I always feel anxious about everything. I am quiet anytime I

don't like noisy.

I am a student, but I want to study and make jewelry, because it is pretty for people. I hope I will make it. Today, I am happy because I am meeting people. It's fun, and I am learning English.

Growing up, my family had five people. My parents had three children. The first is my brother, the second is me, and the third is my sister. My family is very lovely, sometimes silent. My sister is 16 years old. She is studying in high school. She studied at the same school as I did. The school is close to our house. My sister has an excited personality. She never stops. She makes my head ache.

In my family, I like my brother because he looks like me and he is funny. Sometimes he is quiet. I am proud of my brother; he's smart and strong. In 2010, on a special day, he got married. I felt so happy because I have one sister-in-law. About two years after, my family has one baby girl. So my parents are grandfather and grandmother. My sister and I are aunts. In 2014 my family has another baby girl. In total my family is eight people. I am happy.

I was born in Vietnam. I did not move from Vietnam in my childhood. I lived in Vietnam for 18 years until I came to the U.S. I came to the US about four years ago. The reason I came to the U.S. is because my aunt lived here a long time. She had become a citizen. She encouraged my family to come to the US.

When we were first living here, it felt so hard. We missed Vietnam so much. For myself, I missed my friends. I especially missed my nieces. They are cute. My brother has two girls, one about four years old and one about two years old. My nieces are very naughty.

This is all of my story for now. I feel happy because I am here.

My Life

PATRICIA CORTES, ST. PAUL

Hello, my name is Patricia Cortes. I am 28 years old. I was born in Mexico, in the state of Morelos, in the village of Atlacahualoya. There are many trees

and plants there. My dad harvests figs and plants fruit trees. I have five brothers and two sisters. My brothers work with my father in the field. My mother is dedicated to our home. My dad has a dog and chickens. I started working when I was 13 years old, helping my father in the field. I did not like working in the field because it was hard and I got bad sunburns from the sun. When I was 19 years old I went to live in the city with my Aunt Gabriela. There I got a job at a shoe store. I liked living in the city.

My dream was to come to the United States. When I was 25 years old, my sister helped me come to the US. The road was difficult. I had to walk five days and four nights to get to Texas. Then they brought me to Minnesota. I have spent three years in Minnesota. I am married to a man who is also from Mexico. We have a baby girl. I go to school with her. I am studying English. I hope to learn enough English to get my GED.

Patricia Cortes is originally from Mexico.

A Little of Myself

JOSE L. PLIEGO-SANCHEZ, BROOKLYN CENTER

My name is Jose Pliego, and I'm a person who likes to work a lot. When I was 14 years old, I started working with my uncle. He owns a bakery. I learned how to work as a baker. Everyday at 6 a.m. I was at the bakery helping my uncle by preparing the dough and preheating the oven. Then we started to make the bread.

Two years later, my friend called me from the U.S. to offer me a job at his brother's bakery. I accepted and I came to the U.S. I was 16 years old when I worked with my friend. I was a little frustrated because I couldn't speak English, so I went to high school. But I couldn't finish high school because my mother got very sick, so I found a second job. Now I'm working at a restaurant as a cook. And now here I'm back in school catching up on learning English, so that I can get a better job.

Jose L. Pliego-Sanchez is 34 and originally from Mexico.

About Myself

MI MI, WORTHINGTON

My name is Mi Mi and I was born in Thailand. I have four sisters and a brother. My brother passed away when he was 10 years old. My mom was so sad about him. She had a heart attack and fainted for a long time after. After he died my mom and my dad moved to a refugee camp in Thailand. They lived in the camp until I grew up. Then they left me and my sister in the refugee camp after I became 18 years old. I got married and had my first daughter. The U.S. government gave me an opportunity to come to America.

My husband at that time came first. I was pregnant with my second daughter and my other daughter was six months old. After one year and six months I came to the U.S., too. It was hard for me to come with my two daughters. It was a long two-day ride. My little girl got sick, too. When I arrived at the airport I saw my sister and my cousin, and I cried because I was happy to see them. I lived with my sister for three months in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. My husband came to pick me up there and I followed him to Texas. I lived in Texas for a year. Then I moved to Worthington, Minnesota to live with my sister again.

I had another baby boy and when my baby boy was one year old, I got a divorce from my husband because he was drunk a lot and I couldn't stand it anymore. I'm remarried to a guy who speaks English. He's from El Salvador. He's a good man and he loves me and my kids, too. He works so hard for us. I had another baby girl with him. We are so happy and we live together in Worthington, Minnesota. I also became a citizen. I am so happy to be a citizen of the United States. I am proud of myself. I love my family! And I love America!

Mi Mi is 38 and originally from Myanmar.

Asli's Day

ASLI ADAN, WAITE PARK

My name is Asli. I live in St Cloud, Minnesota, on the first floor of an old building. I live with my children. I'm a student at Discovery. I'm studying English. I work part-time at Goodwill, a thrift store.

I get up early every morning. I usually take a shower and get dressed before I have breakfast. I don't usually have much time for breakfast, so I have only a piece of bread and a cup of tea. After breakfast, I quickly clean up the kitchen. Then I go to school. I take my car to school.

I go to school at 10:30 A.M. I study English. After school, sometimes I type on the computer for 15 minutes. After class I go home. I go to work. I come back from work at 6:30 P.M.

Now it is evening, I cook dinner and we eat all together. I wash dishes and clean house again. I help my kids do their homework. We brush our teeth. Then, we go to sleep.

All in all, I am a very busy person. I work hard and study hard. I miss my family in Somalia.

Alone

CRYSTAL CRAVEN, SAINT CLOUD

Her life was forfeited from her first breath

She was born without a soul

Neither love nor hate could touch her

She was created to serve others

And when they were through with her

They let her float in the shadows

Alone

A non-entity

Beautiful Dream

DANIEL ZARKO, CHESTER

Are you real or are you a jailhouse dream,
the most beautiful I have had in years?

Are you an angel or a figment of my imagination;
someone I created to soothe the pain?

Do you think you could find the time to listen to
me

while I'm stuck behind these walls, held prisoner
in

this cell?

Do you think you could try to understand or

at least respond to me?

I want us to be able to help each other laugh when our hearts

are crying; help each other when we feel we can't take another step.

We can help one another set new goals in life.

We can be better in life if we stick by each other's side.

I hope one day soon we will share the love we once had,

but until then, tell me first,

Are you real or are you the most beautiful dream I ever had?

My Journey

EBLA AHMED, SAINT CLOUD

E bla is my name.

B ig dreams I have.

L ions don't sleep.

My Story

FATUMO MAHAMUD, ST. PAUL

My name is Fatumo Mahamud. I am from Somalia. I have five children. One son and four daughters. Also, I have four granddaughters. I came to the USA in 1996. I was happy to come to Minnesota. When I was young, my dream was to come to America. When I first came, I used to work at a factory in Eagan. I lived in Eagan, Minnesota for four years and then I moved to Brooklyn Park in 1999.

Moving Around

INNA ZHDAN, BLAINE

My name is Inna, I was born in Moldova. It's a really small country. When I was almost 11, my dad died in a car accident and then my mom started to think about moving to her country (Ukraine) where her family lived at that time. I lived in Ukraine approximately three years after that. In 1993, I went to visit Moscow. I have a friend there, she invited me to celebrate Christmas and New Years together.

There, at the church where we went to celebrate Christmas Eve, I met my husband for the first time. In 1994, I married him in Moscow, and we lived there almost 14 years, where I had my four kids: two girls and two boys. In 2007 we moved to Chicago, USA. My parents-in-law and brother-in-law lived there. When we were traveling to the U.S. I was six months pregnant with my last child, my third daughter. She was born in Chicago, Illinois, and became a US citizen first. Now, we live in Minneapolis and love it very much because it's a big city and similar to Moscow.

New Beginning

JUSTIN RITSCHKE, SAINT CLOUD

Behold, I have a new beginning

I shall not waste my time.

For I have sins to make up for

And dues to pay for my crime.

I know God has forgiven me,

so why not the courts?

There are many worse than me,

we all know the sorts.

The ones who do evil

and prey on the weak.

I sit alone at night praying,

for its forgiveness that I seek.

My Name Is Kaltuma

KALTUMA SHEIK ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Kaltuma. I am from Somalia, a small city near to Muqdisho. I grew up in Nairobi, Kenya. I have three beautiful children. I came to the United States in 2004. We have a wonderful life. Thanks to God who gave us great things!

My Journey

MARYAMO ABDI, SAINT CLOUD

M onday mornings I go to work.

A re you a student? I am going home.

R ead to build my English.

You need your picture taken.
Are you living here in St. Cloud?
Minnesota people like to talk.
On black hands I lay my head.

Something I Like to Do!

MIHAELA LISNIC, COON RAPIDS

My name is Mihaela. I'm from Moldova. I have been here in America for three years. Something I really like to do is cook. Cooking can be really relaxing and fun. I like to cook a meal for my family and friends. I consider cooking to be an art, so I cook to create something new. I started cooking when I was 12 years old. My grandmother taught me how to infuse taste into the food you cook. She had a lot of experience and was a great cook. I love trying new recipes and introducing new produce to everyday meals. I also love teaching others how to cook, especially my friends and kids. But above all, what inspires me to cook the most is that it brings family and friends together in enjoyment around the table.

My Neighborhood

MOHAMED ISMAIL, SAINT CLOUD

My friend is a good man.
Open the door.
House is clean.
Are you a student?
Man goes to the house.
Economy is low.
Dear Abdi, How are you?

Muna's Day

MUNA ABDULE, SAINT CLOUD

I live in a small apartment in St. Cloud. It is on the third floor of a new building.

I live with my family; my husband Sidiq and six children, two boys and four girls. I am a student at Discovery School.

I get up early every morning. I usually take a

shower, then I help my children to get ready for school. I cook breakfast. After that I get dressed and I quickly clean up the kitchen. Then I go to school. I start at 10:30. I study English. Sometimes I type on the computer for 30 minutes. After class I go home.

While I cook dinner, my children work on their homework. When my children finish their homework they brush their teeth and shower. Then they go to bed.

My Background

MUYEHDIN AHMED, SAINT CLOUD

I came from Somalia. In 1991 when I was in Somalia, I liked my father, mom, and my sisters and brother. I liked soccer. I liked work. Somalia has good food. I had a job in Somalia. In America I have to learn English. I like America. I like the food and its hospitals and houses.

My Thoughts

SAFIA ISSAK, SAINT CLOUD

Someone else told me.
Ask me a question.
First night I speak English to myself.
English is first language in the world.
A dan is my father.

Sahra's Day

SAHRA WAIS, WAITE PARK

I live in an apartment on the first floor in Waite Park. I live with my family. I am a student at Discovery School.

I get up early every morning. I pray. After praying, I wake up my kids for school. Then I eat breakfast and get dressed. The kids leave at 7:00 A.M. to go to the bus. After that I clean the kitchen. I give the little kids their food.

I go to school two days a week. I go to the ESL class. My two babies come with me to Family Literacy at 9:00 A.M. I leave with all my children at 2:30 P.M.

They come back and eat snacks and play with their toys and then they do their homework. After that, they eat dinner. The last thing I do is help the little ones brush their teeth and put them to bed. Sometimes I call my mom and dad.

I am a very busy mom, and I have a good life.

Loyalty

ANONYMOUS, BAYPORT

A friend of my friend is my friend, for the enemy of my friend is my enemy. That's loyalty!

If my friend needs help, no matter the situation, it's my duty to aid and assist. That's loyalty!

When my friend stands against the opposition, I will stand on his/her right side through it all. That's loyalty!

A problem of my friend becomes my own, for we are of the same mind. That's loyalty!

If my friend can't stand on his/her own, I will become his/her legs, for I'm his/her support. That's loyalty!

If my friend can't see, I will become his/her eyes, and lead him/her down the right path. That's loyalty!

I do all of this for my friend because I know my LOYALTY!

My Story

SEMEGNESH KASAMO, ST. PAUL

I lived in Hawass, Ethiopia. I came to America on October 19th, 2016.

My husband lives in America. I don't feel comfortable here. I like Minnesota, St. Paul, downtown, the airport, etc.

It is very good. America, I love you. America isn't sick. I want to learn English. My two daughters go to Highland Park schools to learn. One daughter is in 9th grade and the second is in 1st grade.

Thank you teacher.

My Story

SEVIM ALGANTÜRK, ST. PAUL

My name is Sevim Algantürk. I was born in 1942 in Turkey. My husband died in 2012. I have two daughters. Their names are Tujba and Elif. I worked for 31 years as an elementary teacher.

Elif married Andy in 2002. She came to Rochester in 2003. Then she came to St. Paul, Minnesota. Andy's an electrical engineer. Elif's a project manager.

I came to St. Paul in 2014. I have one grandson. His name is Andre and he was born in 2014. I am very happy to be grandmother. I received my green card in 2015.

I want to speak English. I am old but I want to learn English. I am very happy here. Thank you America, thank you Neighborhood House.

My Story

SHUKRI OMER, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Shukri Omer. I am a student at VOA Adult High School. I live in Minneapolis with my family. I have seven children: five boys and two girls. I work on Saturday and Sunday and for four days I go to school. I like languages and different cultures.

Lost In Thought

TYLER JAMES ROERS, MOUNDSVIEW

As I sit awake yet another sleepless night.

As I lose consciousness, I begin to wander

The dark corridors of my mind. I find myself

Standing in a labyrinth. I feel lost, hopeless, and

Terrified. One could never fathom the depths of this

Darkness. As I look for any signs of clairvoyance, Nothing

Is found. As I have no choice but to tread deeper into the darkness,

I wander deeper into this labyrinth of contemplations. As I find myself

Drifting off one final time, my lungs start to

constrict. I begin to panic

As I gasp to catch my breath. As I gain consciousness,
I look for an

Anchor only to find nothing. Not even the walls
remain as I

Finally get a grasp on reality. I take my first breath
as I

Come to the realization I wasn't anywhere.

I never left. I was just Lost In Thought.

Colourful Journey in Life

XIAO JUN WU, SAVAGE

In life there should be no regrets, just living. Far away from the noise. Thinking alone is the best companion. Together with it, pleasant thoughts sauntered through my mind.

In my life, I am sick of cooking. For my first meal, I didn't know that sugar can change a dish's colour. So I made the dish white. Nobody ate it. Finally, I threw it out in the garbage. The second cooking disaster was when I pickled cabbages without water. A week later they were rotten. So I never talk about this topic. I never do these kind of things anymore.

I am proud of my teachers. One of them is Lynne. One day in the restroom, the garbage was full of toilet paper, which was coming out of it. I noticed it... I didn't do anything. In contrast, my teacher Lynne walked in and lifted the bag, and didn't let paper spill out. This scene gave me a great and fresh kind of sensation. Because when I saw this scene I really felt what it is like to have self-esteem. This is my personal feeling about how the words "self-esteem" should be expressed.

Another person I am proud of is my current teacher, Dale. He is witty. He can make us learn happily and comfortably. With each sentence and word he gives us more than two vivid descriptions and patiently, we interact with our teacher. His attractive speaking makes the class full of a learning atmosphere so everyone has their own progress.

We all take pride in our teacher Dale. Dale and Lynne are role models for us. I like both teachers and I like most Americans.

Story of My Life

ANONYMOUS, BAYPORT

Horn of Africa, the place where I was born, has the longest ocean in Africa. You may ask, "Where is this place?" This place is Somalia. Mogadishu is the city where I was born.

The city contained a mixture of rich and poor people. The houses were all types of different designs. Mostly Italian designs because we were colonized by Italy. My house was close to the ocean so I learned to swim very well. In fact, I remember diving to the bottom of a deep ocean at the age of seven years young. Life was good, I enjoyed watching grasshoppers that were huge, that were able to jump and fly high, and that showed off their many colors. Also enjoyable to view were the many exotic birds and other animals that I cannot quote in here.

I came to the United States at 14 years young, to my city San Diego, California. Life there was rough and tough. We moved into the center of the American ghetto, and I started a new chapter of my life. Let me talk about the way I was raised prior to coming to the United States. When a man is ready to build his family, he selects a woman who he likes, who is from a family who raised her right, a woman who knows how to love and live. She has to be good for him, his beliefs, and plans for life. Someone who brings peace, progress, and pleasure, then he's down for her, for real. A man's other half is his woman, and the man is never complete without his woman.

I am 40 years young now, I am currently in prison, and I want to change my life. I am going to learn something new every day and I am going to get all of the degrees I can achieve. I am going to work out mentally and physically. Therefore, family, financial stability, and freedom is what I intend to achieve. I am going to learn, I promise you that.

My Name is Yewubdar

YEWUBDAR TESFAYE, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Yewubdar. I was born in 1990 in the Ethiopian Rift Valley. My father was a farmer and

my mother was a merchant. We had many goats and sheep. Mostly, our daily life depended on the income generated from those. When I was a child, after school, I helped my family to take care of those goats and sheep. After I completed my high school, I went to another city to attend college and after I finished my college, I got a job. After seven years, I moved to the U.S.

My Personal Migration Story

ABDIWALI AWALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Abdiwali. I was born in Somalia in 1994. My country was beautiful and safe before the civil war started in 1991. My family moved to Kenya from 1992 until 1998. My father got the lottery to America in 1998 and he migrated. After a while, some states of my country found peace. That made it easier to go back to my country. In 2013, I migrated again to Ethiopia. I was living in Ethiopia for two years. I started ELL classes. In 2015, I got a visa to come to America, and I was happy to see my father again after a long time.

I took my first flight from Addis Ababa to America, specifically Minnesota, and it took me 17 hours. I was in transit to Miami and I saw beautiful places, beaches, and had nice service in the airport. I stayed in the Miami airport for three hours, I drank coffee there. Now I am living in Minneapolis with my family and I am starting ELL classes again. I am so happy now. Thank you.

Fishing

CHENG THAO, SAINT PAUL

The sport that interests me is fishing. I can fish as an individual and as a team. When I go fishing with a team, we usually try to catch the biggest fish to win. Sometimes I can make friends when I go fishing. I go fishing when I am bored. I had a friend who told me that he can lose his weight when he goes fishing. So I like it. Because I can make friends, I get fish, and I get to relax.

Cheng Thao is originally from Thailand.

MEMORIES



My Life

THAO XIONG, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Thao Xiong. The first time I left my village was in May 1973. I was 11. It was a cloudy, drizzly day. We had to leave the country because the Viet Cong and the Lao government were killing the Hmong people. A huge crowd of people was trying to cross a bridge. We had to turn around because soldiers were shooting us. I smelled the new blood of fresh corpses. We were so close together that the people behind me stepped on the heels of my shoes and pulled them off my feet, so I had to walk barefoot on stones, mud, and streams of blood.

We went back to our village in the countryside, where the rice fields were. In former days we used to have cows, chickens, pigs, and water buffalo. Now we had only one horse. After a few months the Hmong people had to move from place to place because the Viet Cong and the Lao government made life too difficult. Where my people settled was one day's walk away from our original site. We did not have food, so my father and I had to go back to our first village to get rice. It was dangerous because we had to go around the territory of a group of people who had joined the enemy. This area had tunnels and trenches. Their guards had machine guns, handheld cannons, bazookas, flame throwers, and explosives for coal mining.

One morning my dad and I were in the old village. We were getting ready to travel back with the horse, carrying rice. Then we heard guns of the soldiers on the road. My dad told me to put out the fire and be very quiet. We stayed silent all day. The next morning, before dawn, we went back to my family.

By now I was with part of our village that had moved southward in Laos to the mountainous area around Pho Bia Mountain, where we fought often against the Viet Cong south of us to protect our people. They wanted to kill us because we had been fighting for the Americans. Soldiers would tell the children to tell their fathers to come see them. We never knew if they were friendly or enemy soldiers. If a father actually came to meet one, we might not ever see him again.

The rest of my story will have to wait until next year's Journeys book.

Thao Xiong is originally from Laos.

A Memorable Day of My Life

AMINA AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

A memorable day of my life was the last day I saw my mother. It was at a bus station. I said goodbye to my mother. I had seen my mother, and I will never forget that day. It was an important day for me. Sometimes I feel sad because I have not seen my mother in a long time. I will soon see my mother again in Kenya. I am excited to see my mother.

Amina Ahmed is 30 and originally from Somalia.

My Family and My Hope for the Future

JAMES POE LAH, ROSEVILLE

I was born in Karen State in 1986. I have three brothers and one sister. My parents are farmers. I'm the only person who studied in my family. I moved to the USA in 2010. First I lived in Texas. I worked in Texas for four years, and then I moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. After I got married, I had two kids: one boy and one girl. Sometimes I miss my family in Burma a lot. I hope one day I will meet my family in Burma again.

James Poe Lah is originally from Myanmar.

My Life in Burma

PAH TASHU WAH, ST. PAUL

I was born in a village in Burma. I have one brother and one sister. My parents were farmers. We needed to run away because the Burmese soldiers came to shoot people, burn houses, and kill animals. In 1997 my father passed away. My family felt so sad. My mom wouldn't do anything because she had small children. She didn't build a house. In 2001 my family went to a Thailand refugee camp. We stayed there for nine years. I grew up in the refugee camp. I hope God will bless my family.

Pah Tashu Wah is originally from Myanmar.

My Village

POEMEHEARTS PHUKU, ST. PAUL

I would like to write about my beautiful and small village, Daw Karin Flurig, where I was born in Karenni State in Burma. It was given to us by our ancestors. There were about 50 houses made from teak wood and bamboo. The houses were small, lovely, and livable. They were our own houses. We didn't rent them, we didn't buy them. We built them for ourselves. There was about 700 people in our village. It was surrounded by rice farms, rivers, and mountains from the south to the west. It was surrounded by beautiful mountains and forests from the north to the east. It is too bad my village is no longer there. It was burned down by the S.P.D.C. which is the Burmese government.

Poemehearts Phuku is originally from Burma, Karenni.

Memories of My Husband

NANZHENG AN, LAKEVILLE

May 6, 2015, my loved one, my husband Fang Li, after a courageous fight with cancer for two years and seven months, left us forever. He was a very clever, wise, and helpful person.

Twenty-seven years ago he came to the United States and completed a Ph.D. in physics, and then my son and I came to America. We were a very happy family. He had an outstanding performance at his company work. After he joined the company in just two months, he solved the problem the company could not solve for 11 years. He was respected by everyone and got along with everyone. At home, he cared about my son and me. He treated our neighbors very friendly. He shoveled snow in the winter to help them. We are proud of him. Now he left us and we deeply miss him. My son and I continue to live the values and quality of life we built as a family.

Nanzheng An is originally from China.

My First Trip on an Airplane

ALHASSANE BANGOURA, MINNEAPOLIS

When my documents arrived from the United States, I prepared many things. I bought a suitcase, shoes, a backpack, and a wallet. I went to my mom's house to tell her I was leaving, and to say goodbye. We talked and I explained about my trip. First of all I said I have to go to Senegal for my immigrant visa. She prayed for me. I called my sister and she came to accompany me to the taxi station.

On April 7, 2015, I left at 12:00 p.m. We took a taxi from Conakry, Guinea. We were nine people in the taxi and one person from Sierra Leone. When we arrived at the border of Senegal, we took the Ebola test because Guinea borders Sierra Leon and Liberia, and many villages there were attacked by the Ebola epidemic. That test was negative. They also checked my identity card.

I bought one SIM card and called my friend. He lived in a small village called Louga. Senegal is hot like Guinea with a lot of sun all day.

On April 16, 2015, I had my first interview in Dakar and a medical visit. I came back to Louga the same day because all my documents were not complete. After I got all my documents, I went to the embassy for my second interview and I got my visa.

I arrived at the international airport of Dakar, Senegal. I took the 10:30 a.m. flight. I thought I would arrive in New York City in six hours maybe, but it took all day, like nine hours. I met my friend, and we went to the restaurant to eat. We stayed two hours before I changed planes. I arrived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Monday, June 22, 2015, at 1:00.

I met friends and family on that night. We came home. I stayed home for one weekend and then I came to school. When I came to school I thought I would start in level one, but I took the test and started in level two. I speak two languages: Sussu and French, and English is my third language.

Alhassane Bangoura is originally from Conakry, Guinea.

My Funny Story

NADJA NOUR, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was a kid, my younger sister and I were playing hide-n-seek. My sister hid and I couldn't find her. I cried very hard. I looked everywhere and still couldn't find her. She was hiding for a long time. I called for my mom and explained to her that I couldn't find my sister. My mom looked everywhere too. My mom and I were very worried. My sister was crazy and funny, she was hiding for 30 minutes. Finally, my mom found her. She was sleeping in the closet!

Nadja Nour is originally from Djibouti.

A Day of Vacation in Washington, D.C.

BURTUKEN GURMU, MINNEAPOLIS

I went on vacation last week with my friend to D.C. We enjoyed it very much. We swam at Virginia Beach. We had fun and were happy. What a great day for the beach. But when we came back to Minnesota, I was very scared because the airplane was very shaky. I cried and was afraid. They said it was because of the weather. I thought, "I'm dying." But nothing happened, thanks to God.

Burtuken Gurmu is originally from Ethiopia.

The Day My Son Fainted

MADINA HUSSEIN, MINNEAPOLIS

One day my son and I were on the living room couch. I was sitting down and he was laying down right next to me. During that day he had had a bad fever. All of a sudden I turned and looked at him. I noticed his eyes had rolled back. I tried to talk to him and wake him up, but there was no response. I was afraid. I thought he was dead. I decided to call 911 for an ambulance.

During the call, I kept screaming to the operator saying, "I NEED HELP! I NEED HELP!!" I repeated the same thing in my language. The operator said,

“Calm down. What happened?” I wasn’t listening to her because I was nervous and was screaming at the top of my lungs. Finally, I decided to put down the phone, grabbed my son, and ran back and forth in my apartment hallway saying, “Help me!”

In my country, Ethiopia, if someone had heard screaming, they would have rushed out to help. But no one came to me while I was in the hallway.

The good thing is while I was running back and forth, the ambulance arrived. It was a miracle to me when I saw them because I didn’t know they could find me without me giving them my address. After two hours of being treated in the hospital, my son felt better and I said, “God bless the people who helped my son and also the people who created the 911 system.” That was my first time calling 911. Now I know how to communicate with them.

Madina Hussein is originally from Ethiopia.

The Eagle’s Work

NIGUSA KUMSA, WORTHINGTON

In 1972 when I was young, about eight years old, I was living with my family in Ethiopia. Then one day my father sent me to buy meat from the rural farmers. I went to the place to buy meat and there were a lot of people. I took my place in line and finally it was my turn to buy the meat and I went back home.

On my way home an eagle was following me. I was holding the meat on my shoulder and the eagle came over, swooped down, took half of the meat and flew away to find a place to eat it. The eagle scared me!

When I got home my family asked me why only this much meat? What happened? I told my family about the eagle’s work!

Nigusa Kumsa is originally from Ethiopia.

My First Day Driving

MAHAMED OMER, MINNEAPOLIS

One day me and my friends went to Harar city. I drove us there. It is eight miles to Harar city from my house. When we were driving, there were some

donkeys crossing the road. It was my first day driving. When I saw the donkeys, suddenly I forgot about the brake. The donkeys stopped on the road and I crashed into one. The donkey was injured in the leg. I stopped the car and got out. One farmer came and asked, “Why did you crash into my donkey?” I was scared, the farmer came with a stick and he was very angry. He said I had to buy the donkey or pay him money. That day I had no money. The farmer said when I paid I could go home. If I didn’t pay, I could not leave. My friend gave me money to pay the farmer. Then we went to the city.

Mahamed Omer is originally from Harar, Ethiopia.

It Was the Crack of Dawn

ASAD MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

It was the crack of dawn, early in the morning, at 5:00 a.m. The weather was chilling, and as usual the morning dew was slightly rolling down on the window of my room. It wasn’t my habit to wake up so early, but that day I had to catch the morning bus to my hometown, where my family and other folks lived. I took a quick shower, dressed in zero minutes and caught the morning bus.

After a long and tiresome journey, as I entered the main gate of our compound where I used to crawl around, tears of joy started dropping from my eyes. A crowd of people gathered around me, hugging me one by one. Never mind, they are my family. Everybody was helping me, my brothers were carrying my luggage and sisters were helping me to get freshened up. Blood makes you related, but love makes family. I sat beside my elder sister who couldn’t stand up; she was in her ninth month of her pregnancy. In our culture women spend the last few months of pregnancy near their mothers.

Knock! Someone knocked on the door. I woke up with closed eyes and opened the door not knowing the person. “Who is it?” It was my mom! What brought her here at this time? She said, “Come out and get a taxi, your sister is in labor!” Immediately I got a taxi from a nearby garage and we took her

to the hospital. I was told to go back home and eat when the day broke. I reached home and took a nap.

As I was sleeping, I heard an intense noise coming towards my room. It was my young sister. I glimpsed her with one eye closed. She was saying, "Sister is no more... sister is no more!" I helter skelter rose up with the mosquito net I was in, and immediately rushed towards the hospital. I don't remember what happened next, but suddenly I was inside the maternity ward and a nurse was holding my collar. I asked to talk with the head - luckily she was my neighbor. She told me how things happened: "Your sister became unconscious due to the pain, and the nurses gave the wrong information to your mother. But now she is fine." She allowed me to visit my sister and I was relieved. All's well that ends well.

Asad Mohamed is originally from Kenya.

My Brother

ALEE XIAHUE, BROOKLYN CENTER

It was 17 years ago, but I never forgot about my younger brother. We lived in a village called Bouk Khoy, Luang Prabang, Laos. There were about 50 families there. It was a poor village and didn't have a hospital. It was located very far from the city.

One day in 1997 while my mom was still working on the farm and my father was hunting, I was babysitting my brother and sister. Suddenly my brother got very sick again. He had just come back from a local hospital about 20 days before. I didn't know what to do. I just carried him out of the house to ask my neighbor for help. He said, "You should take your brother back home." His face told me that my brother was not going to get better.

I took my brother back home to my parents' bedroom. I held my brother close to my chest with my left arm and cried. He told me that he was thirsty, so I gave him some water and held him closely. After five minutes, I looked at his eyes that were slowly closing down. I saw some bubbles come out of his nose. He had passed away. I ran outside and told the villagers. Some ran to tell my mom at the farm. It was very sad that my parents didn't get to see his

last breath.

If he was here in the U.S., my brother might have had a chance for survival because back in that time we didn't have a hospital and good medicine to treat malaria.

Alee Xiahue is originally from Laos.

Trip Back Home

SEUTH SALY, MINNEAPOLIS

Last summer I visited my family in Laos and Thailand. For 34 years I had never gone back home. It took me so long to go back because I didn't have much money. Everything is very expensive there. I finally got to go visit my family this summer.

It was an experience for me to go back to my childhood memories. Every place that I went was not the same anymore. I didn't know how to get around. Every place changed a lot from what it used to be. My hometown used to be all farms. These days there are many buildings and houses and more development in my country.

When I visited, I met all my relatives. I was so excited to see them again. I hope to one day go back and visit them again.

Seuth Saly is originally from Laos.

Untitled

ANONYMOUS MINNEAPOLIS

When I was a child, I studied at a school very far from my home. Most students did not take showers in the bathroom. We walked on the freeway and went to a little river where the water was very cold, but I liked it. This river came from a big mountain. When we went back to school the food was very good because we were all starving. We had to go to this school because in my little village we did not have schools. My parents made this decision because this was how we could get an education for my first years at the school. My parents were very poor and they couldn't pay for another way to go to school.

Sometimes we had to walk because we didn't have money for a ticket to take the bus. We walked about five hours to arrive at the school. This experience of my life occurred in the 80s. I hope that all has changed for the better future for all children of my country Mexico.

Chihuahua, A Beautiful State in Mexico

ERIKA GODINEZ, EAGAN

I was born in Chihuahua. I always remember my country. I love my country. It is a Mexican state. It is the largest state in Mexico. It is located on the border of the United States.

In Chihuahua there are small towns where people live and speak Spanish. It is a beautiful state because it has the four seasons of the year and the temperature is variable. In my state there are various attractions for the tourists because we have natural things like mountains and the desert. It looks very beautiful. It has an exquisite variety of dishes like flour tortillas, beans, different salsas, chili peppers, and cheeses.

I will miss my home country forever.

Erika Godinez is originally from Mexico.

He Shook His Long Wavy Hair

ERNESTO PEREA, BROOKLYN CENTER

I was in fifth grade when the teacher picked me for a performance. Because it was a Mother's Day event, I couldn't tell my mom any details about the play. Time passed and the performance day had almost arrived. However, the day before, my father told me that my hair looked long. He said that I needed to go to the barbershop for a haircut. At this point, I should say that I needed long hair for the performance because there was an important line in which the storyteller says, "He shook his long wavy hair."

I went to the barbershop and asked for a light cut. When my father saw it, he questioned me about why

I hadn't gone to the barbershop. I swore that I did. He inspected me and said that he would give me a "little fix." My world started moving so fast as he tried to fix my hair, but soon realized that being a barber wasn't his thing. He walked out and I looked in the mirror. I looked terrible. My head looked like a lunar landscape and I started to cry. We went back to the barbershop and, after a few minutes, I ended up completely bald.

After that, my dad became the nicest guy on the face of the earth and bought me a hat. The next day the teacher told me to put the hat away. Once I did, I could see a mix of surprise and disappointment on his face. He asked me what had happened, but the show had to go on. I started to say my lines and then the storyteller said the phrase, "He shook his long wavy hair." The whole audience burst into laughter. I continued with determination and after a few more words, the laughing stopped, as my voice sounded loud and meaningful. I can say that it touched the audience and everyone became silent. When I finished, they gave me the greatest applause of the evening and my mom was happy.

I believe that this experience made me a stronger person. The coincidence with the present time is that the play talks about a man who hadn't seen his mother in a long time. This situation is being seen in my real life because I could have never known that I would go 17 years without seeing my mother.

Ernesto Perea is originally from Mexico.

Lessons - No Regrets

GABRIELA MENDEZ, CRYSTAL

I've lived without regrets, but now I ask myself why I wasted time and left many things for later.

Being in high school was the best learning time in my life. I could find what I wanted to be and what I had to be. I wanted to live more like a teenager than a young adult, but I didn't have a choice.

Suddenly, I became the one who was in charge of all my family while I was caring for my sick mom and my own life. Now I think that maybe I was a little selfish. I didn't know how to be a caregiver and I just wanted

be her daughter. It's not that I didn't care about her, but I wasn't prepared to let her go knowing that I was the only one who had the responsibility for her wellness. This was a lot of weight for just one person. I didn't get it then because I was the youngest in my family and I wasn't aware of what was happening.

So I focused on her illness instead of taking advantage of the time with her to let her know how much I loved her. From the pain that I felt after she had gone, I learned that you must not waste time to show your feelings to those you really care about. No matter what the situation is in your life, you need to show those feelings. Now I will try not to leave things for later because nobody knows what will happen tomorrow and what kind of lessons you will learn.

Gabriela Mendez is originally from Mexico.

My Conversion Story

JOVAN RODRIQUEZ MERCADO, ST. PAUL

I am from Mexico and came to the U.S. in 2003. I started working installing carpet. I thought to myself, I would be the happiest person in the world if I could work for myself. Not too much later, that thought came true. I was working for myself and I was happy, but not for long. I hired people to work for me, but they worked for a few months, some for a year, and then they quit. So, I had to work harder and longer than ever. I often worked 15-20 hours a day, Monday to Saturday and sometimes even on Sunday. One time I worked three days straight, without any sleep.

I wasn't the happy person I dreamed of being, when I first thought of working for myself. I began to drink alcohol, go to the night clubs, and spend most of my money at the casinos. I did many things which I thought would make me happy, but I felt worse and worse.

One time when I was working alone in a house in Burnsville at 1:00 am, I was feeling so bad. I was making a lot of money, but I was feeling empty and without purpose in my life. Additionally, I had no friends. The only people who called me were my mother and my manager. I started crying and said loudly, "Father, forgive me." I didn't know why I said that.

Months later, my helper didn't want to work. He said his bones hurt. My manager called with a big job for me to do. I said I could not because my helper was sick. She said I had to do the job anyway. I picked up the carpet for that job. I thought it would take 30 hours of non-stop work to get the job done. I got a call from a man who said, "Do you have a job for me? I don't have money for rent. I don't have money for food for my two children. I need to work."

I said, "Yes, I have a job for you."

So Javier started working for me. He also preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to me. I refused many times, saying, "I am Catholic, I am not going to change, I am not going to be a Christian." But I saw that Javier was different than other people who had worked for me. He was always happy. He always had peace, no matter what his situation was. I was grateful, he was helping me in a critical time in my life.

One time he invited me to his church and I accepted his invitation. When I was in church, my heart was feeling happy, so I started listening to Javier and continued attending his church. One of my main purposes for going to church was to look for girls, and maybe even find a nice girl to marry.

Months later a man in the street invited us to his church and we accepted the invitation. I began looking for girls and heard a loud voice. I am not sure if that voice was only in my head or outside of my head. The voice said, "Why are you coming to church?" I believe that voice was the voice of God. I said, "Sorry God." I closed my eyes, got on my knees, and prayed to God.

When I started praying, I also started crying. I cried like a baby for 20 to 30 minutes. I think God was cleaning me and counseling me, because my life was sad. I received too much pain when I was a child. I believe I was experiencing the presence of God. It was the most beautiful feeling I have ever received in my life. After praying, I stood up. I wasn't the same person. I never took another drink. I stopped going to clubs and casinos. My life had become different. I received the Holy Spirit and now I have a real purpose in my life.

Jovan Rodriquez Mercado is originally from Mexico.

Winter Memories

OLGA CHAVEZ, APPLE VALLEY

I still remember the first time it snowed when I came to Minnesota. I woke up and a thick layer of snow covered everything outside. It looked beautiful. It was very white and eye catching. My kids and I went outside so they could get to see the snow. They started to jump and to make snow angels. I love to see my kids happy. I was happy as well. When we were done playing in the snow, we went back inside. We drank some hot chocolate with milk. It was a very special day that I will always keep in my memory.

I love my children forever. I like to remember happy moments.

Olga Chavez is originally from Mexico.

A Happy American Dream

GLORIA SEVILLA, MONTICELLO

In the year 2014 I was living in a village in the north of Nicaragua with my mother. My duties were to care for my mother and for the house. In April of the same year I received a call and it was bad news. One of my sisters had been pregnant and entered the hospital with very poor health. Less than an hour afterward, she died. We were suddenly confronted by the loss of my sister! Her exit from this world left us in a huge vacuum difficult to fill.

Eventually my mother and I resigned ourselves to this loss and tried to live a normal life. In 2015, I decided to try my luck to get a visa to visit the United States. I applied and the trip and visa were approved. So in April of 2015 I traveled to visit a relative who met me at the airport in Miami. She took me to her house where we ate and were very happy visiting. Also we went shopping and then toured the city to get to know about it. I could not believe my eyes! I thought that I was dreaming.

Two weeks after I arrived, I received a call from my aunt in the morning. She said that my mother had died of a sudden heart attack. It was so painful that I was so far away when she died and I will always remember that feeling.

At the end of 2015, I prepared for a second trip to the United States, this time to the State of Minnesota. I had met a good man on the internet in November of 2014 and he came to Nicaragua to meet me. We decided I should come to Minnesota to know about snow and where he lived. I liked the idea very much. We fell in love, and we got married in April of 2016, and we are very happy.

I am studying English currently in the school with my teacher and I feel very good in this group. I thank my teacher and classmates.

Gloria Sevilla is originally from Nicaragua.

Saudi Arabia

ABDIRAHMAN JIMALE, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was 19 years old I left Somalia to work in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, I was working for a big company driving a truck. The company worked in concrete. I worked 12 hours a day, sometimes 16 hours a day... too much work. When I finished work, I came to my room with the company housing. I watched TV for two hours then ate my dinner and went to sleep. Saudi Arabia is a big country. It has nine states. People all over the world come to Saudi Arabia to work, as tourists, and to do the Haji and Omra. Some people come to Saudi Arabia to do Omra, like the Haji, but you can do it any month, and get a 30-day visa. After the visa is finished, they stay in Saudi Arabia to find jobs. Some people the police catch and then they go back home.

I had a visa to work in Saudi Arabia. I worked there for about 18 years. I got married there in 1995 and five children were born there. One day the police came to my house and said that my family didn't have a visa so we had to get out and leave. Even if your baby is born there, you don't get Saudi Arabian nationality. So we had to leave Saudi Arabia in 2006. Saudi Arabia is a nice place to live but the visa is a problem.

Abdirahman Jimale is originally from Somalia.

Miss Fresh Food

ASHA HURESE, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember fresh food in my native country. Many people own farms, and we bought fresh food. Many farmers were raising natural food because my country had nice warm sunny weather every time, and that way it grew natural food. I remember walking outside and shopping in the grocery. I liked to eat fruit and vegetables. Every day I saw sunny and clear blue nice sky. We cooked fresh meat and fish. I liked to drink camel milk, but I didn't like cow's milk. But many people like to drink cow's milk. They believe that drinking milk makes you strong. I hope to come back to my native country soon. I miss fresh food, and I miss my parents, so I am feeling homesick. I need fresh air.

Asha Huresse is originally from Somalia.

He Almost Killed My Husband

FARHIYA SIAD, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Farhiya. I came from Somalia. My husband, his brother, and I owned a store in South Africa. In 2008, my husband was in the store. Suddenly, a man attacked his brother with a hammer. My husband started to fight him but the man hit my husband's hand. The owner of the building heard the shouts. He came out and they went to the emergency exit. Alhamdulillah, my husband is safe but his brother is dead. May God have mercy on him.

*translation assistance provided by Fardowso Dini (student)

Farhiya Siad is originally from Somalia.

Life as a Civil War Victim

HAMDI AHMED JAMA, ST. PAUL

I fled my country, Somalia, when I was seven years old, because of the civil war. My family and I went to a refugee camp in Kenya, where we stayed for a few years, until it was closed. Most of the people

were deported to their original country; however, my family refused to go home, where there was a war. We moved to Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. We faced many difficulties there.

In fact, Nairobi was the most difficult situation I have ever been in, in my whole life. This is an example of the difficult circumstances we were in. One night I wanted to go out for a sandwich. My mother said I should not. However, my hunger for a sandwich won. I went out, and just as my mother had warned, I was caught by the police. They wanted money from me. I only had enough for a sandwich. My mother had to borrow money from the neighbor to give to the police, to get me released. As a result, I never went out at night again.

We are so grateful for my brother. He went to America and got a job as a security guard. We survived in Kenya, only because my brother was sending us money.

My life in America is completely different. I am free to go wherever I want. I have a job and enough money for everything my family and I need. I am studying at the Hubbs Center and planning to go to college to study nursing. This is a dream I couldn't even think of in Kenya. Now it is really possible. I am so happy that my family and I are living in the United States of America.

Hamdi Ahmed Jama is originally from Somalia.

My Favorite Cow

HAMDIYAH AL YOUSEFI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Hamdiah Al Yousefi. I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, but I grew up in Afgoye.

Afgoye is a farming town and a beautiful green place. We had a big farm there with many trees and we grew fruits and vegetables. We had many cows, goats, and sheep. I wasn't scared of our animals, I loved them. I drank their milk and I ate their meat.

Bani was my favorite cow. I liked to drink her milk and I played with her little, beautiful calf. When my brothers wanted to make me angry, they would tell me that a lion had eaten Bani. Then I would cry until

Bani came back home at night. Bani was friendly and close to my heart. She had more milk than other cows. She was harmless and I liked her calf, too.

Bani's calf was quite curious. One day she put her head inside a drum. She probably thought there was some food inside the drum. Then she couldn't get her head out! It wasn't until my mother helped her that she got free again.

Hamdiyah Al Yousefi is originally from Somalia.

When I Was Young

HASSAN ISMAIL, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was young I lived in Somalia, especially in Abudwaaq. I lived with my parents. I had six siblings: three brothers and three sisters. We had 50 camels, 100 sheep, and 60 cows. I will never forget that fresh milk and meat, and I hope that time will come back so I can enjoy it again. Still, I like living in America.

Hassan Ismail is originally from Somalia.

Trouble in Virginia

MILGO MUSE, MINNEAPOLIS

When I first came to the United States, I was alone and I left my children back in Africa. In Virginia, the place I first came, I was living with relatives, a husband and wife. The first morning there, when I woke up, I saw that I was alone in the house. The family with whom I was living left for work. Alas! I heard a fire alarm in my neighbor's house! I had been told when I was in the visa process that I should run out of the house if the fire alarm goes off. Immediately I ran out of the house. Bad luck! In Virginia houses have automatic locks, if you go out of the door, you cannot get in unless you have the key. I had nothing... I was even barefoot! My cell phone was inside the house. I thought of screaming but I thought to myself, "If I scream and people gather, what will I say, I couldn't talk back to them." Of course I could not speak in English! As I was waiting, I saw a chair but

still I couldn't use it because I didn't know who it belonged to. I continued waiting around until the family came back home.

*story told by Milgo Muse and translated into English with the help of fellow student Asad Mohamed.

Milgo Muse is originally from Somalia.

My Bad Day

NIMO ABDULQADIR, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to the United States I had a lot of problems. I was lost. I didn't know where my home was. I took a bus, and then got off at the wrong place. I didn't know how to speak English. Outside was very cold. I was so upset, and my children were very tired. They didn't walk. I asked help from someone else. I tried hand language, but they didn't understand me. I called my friend. She helped me, and she said I should give my phone to someone who spoke English so they could tell her the address. I did that. Then my friend came to pick me up. Now I understand English so I will not get lost.

Nimo Abdulqadir is originally from Somalia.

My First Halloween

RUQIA GULED, MINNEAPOLIS

When I had lived for a few months in the U.S. I remember one night children knocked on the door. I opened the door and I saw their faces were different. I yelled at them because I was afraid. My family ran to the door and also felt afraid. The children were wearing masks. After a few minutes, I checked outside again. I saw one of my neighbors give candy to the children. I asked her why she gave the children candy. She said it was a tradition. She said, "You have two choices. If you open the door, give candy. Or don't open the door."

Ruqia Guled is originally from Somalia.

What Happened to Me When I Was Young

SADIA DIRIYE, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was young my mom left me at my grandmother's house for about a year. One day, my grandmother became sick so my aunt came to take my grandmother to the hospital in another state. They left me at my uncle's house. My uncle's wife was so rude and unkind. She whipped me all the time. One day she told me to cook food, but I didn't know how to cook because I was so young. I couldn't tell her that I didn't know how to cook because I was afraid she would whip me, but when she saw that I hadn't cooked the food she whipped me anyway.

Finally my mom came back to get me and my life became better.

Sadia Diriye is originally from Somalia.

Going Back to My Country

FALILATOU TAGBA, MINNEAPOLIS

On April 23, 2016, I planned to go back to my country with all of my family. A week before the day came, I took a break from my school to start packing my stuff. After four years in America, I was so excited to go back and see all my family and friends who I had been missing. My kids were excited to go and meet the siblings of their parents, too.

Finally the day came. We went to the airport. Everything was easy for me this time. When I traveled to America the first time, it was difficult for me. I couldn't understand any words in English, and I couldn't read any signs either. My husband did everything for us.

It took almost three days to fly to our country. When we finally got to the airport, my family and my husband's family were there to meet us. It was a big day. We hugged each other and went together with my husband's family to have a big party with members of both families and some friends. After

the party that night everybody went back to their homes, but early in the morning people started to come over and welcome us. They kept coming all week. Then it was our turn to go visit them. We did our best, but we couldn't see everyone because we had a lot of family and friends.

After two weeks my husband went back to America and I stayed there with my kids for the next four months. We had to do some ceremonies, go to our villages, and visit some special places. We were so busy with all of the traveling around the country. It was so nice and fun to see all the changes since I had left my country. There were new roads, nice buildings, and nice tourist places.

I was sad, though, because some members of my family and some of my friends had passed away before I had a chance to see them. All too soon it was time for us to return. On August 21, we were back on a plane, going home to America.

Falilatou Tagba is originally from Togo.

Market in Africa

REBECCA THERA, EAGAN

It was Saturday morning in a small town called Notse. I saw a lot of people running up and down like crazy. "What's going on?" I asked. A lady next to me told me that it is market day when people come from all over the villages to sell their agriculture and purchase accessories, utensils, and cooking supplies for a week. "Oh," I said, "Now I understand."

There were some people carrying heavy loads on their heads and some on their shoulders. I thought to myself, "How can these people carry this much of a load on their heads and shoulders and still be standing? Perhaps they are the generation of Goliath!"

Some women were sitting down nursing their babies in public! In the presence of men and children! These people don't have shame? Kids were walking around filthy, hair uncombed, half naked, and bare feet. "These kids have no parents?" I asked myself.

Here comes the evening, everyone got ready to go

back home, and there comes the taxi. One taxi filled with 15 people, how strange! Fifteen people are sitting in one car? I decided to ride this taxi with the villagers. In the taxi, alcohol predominated from the people in the car. Some were so drunk and talked nonsense. This was not a pleasant experience. I will never try it again in my life! However, I have a story to tell, and I also enjoy their food and population. I thank God for this opportunity

Rebecca Thera is originally from Togo.

My Story

HLA YEE, ST. PAUL

I was born in Burma, now called Myanmar. I grew up in a small village. My father was a farmer. I remember when I was a child, my father built a farm on the mountain and he planted rice, chilis, and many vegetables. He built a small hut on his farm. Sometimes he worked on the farm and stayed in the hut for a week and only came home on the weekends, because the farm was 40 miles from our house. Sometimes my sister and I went with our father to the farm to help him. My sister could help him very well because she is older than me. Sometimes my father went to the village to get food and left us home alone. My sister and I slept all night in the hut and we were not afraid. In the early morning before we got up our father arrived. It was very fun and enjoyable for me at that time. When I was 11 years old the Burmese military came to live in my village and they treated the villagers very bad. Some of the villagers were killed by them and some were raped. We didn't feel safe. My parents worried about us, so they found a way to get out of the village. In 2011, we arrived at a refugee camp in Thailand, and in 2009 we registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to come to America. In 2010, I got the chance to come to live in the U.S. Now I am happy living in the United States, but sometimes I miss my village.

Hla Yee is 29 and originally from Myanmar.

My Hospital Visit

PEH GREE, ST. PAUL

Life in America was so hard for me because I couldn't speak English. When I tried to say something, people didn't understand my words. When I arrived in America, I got nervous every time when I went shopping or to the clinic, but I felt better at the clinic because they had interpreters.

After a month in America, I was pregnant. The doctor told me that if I wanted to know if my baby was a girl or boy, I needed to take an ultrasound at St. Joseph's Hospital. I asked for an interpreter and transportation. She arranged it for me. I thought that the hospital would look like the clinic. I thought we had to get in line and see the interpreter in the lobby. But everything was different.

When I got to St. Joseph's Hospital, it was a big building. When I went inside I didn't see any people in line to check in. I didn't know where I had to go, so I sat on the couch and looked at the people coming and going this way and that way. Some went upstairs. I saw two men sitting there, and they had a phone on the desk. I sat for a while and then I went to them and asked for help. They said, "You have to ask another person."

I told them, "I have an appointment."

They asked, "What appointment?"

I just said "Baby" and touched my stomach.

He told me to go straight and turn right. I went straight, and I saw many rooms. I didn't know which room, so I came back again to them. They helped me find my room.

After I came home I talked to my friends. My friends told me those men were security guards in the hospital.

Peh Gree is 35 and originally from Myanmar.

Schools and Me

AMANDA LI, SAINT LOUIS PARK

When I was born in China, my family lived in a school that my parents worked in. After three years, I went to a kindergarten. Then I went to elementary school, middle school, and high school. When I was 22 years old, I graduated from a university and immediately got my first job in a school. I worked in four different schools for 33 years. I taught biology in high school and middle school. I loved my jobs very much. In 2015, I retired from teaching.

In 2016, I came to the US and now I go to an adult school learning English four days a week. I am excited to become a student again.

Amanda Li is 56 and originally from China.

The Best Christmas I Ever Had

JEAN FRENCH, DULUTH

The best Christmas I ever had was three years ago, and I was living in the foster home that I am still living at. It was Christmas morning, and staff made all of us a big breakfast, and after we ate the meal, we all cleaned up. We got to open our Christmas presents. When I opened one of my presents, it was a Coca-Cola jacket, and it was one that you could get only if you worked at the company. I really didn't expect to get something so nice because when I was growing up I only got clothes pins, and I would draw faces on them, and I pretended they were dolls. I played with them while my brothers and sister played with their real toys. The person who gave me the jacket was Kim Hanson who works at the RSI office, and I didn't believe somebody would give me such a nice gift like that because I felt like I didn't deserve a gift like that, for I am just garbage—at least that's what I was told almost my whole life. So when I got that jacket from Kim, I knew I was more than garbage and that there are people who do care, and love me, who think I am worth a present like that. I couldn't thank her enough for it. I also got a Vikings blanket, and she knows I love the Vikings, and so my whole room is full of Viking stuff. I have Vikings sheets, blanket, curtains, posters Christmas ornaments, jacket,

hoodies, t-shirts, and a few hats and glasses.

Jean French is 55 and originally from Duluth, Minnesota.

Day at the Beach

FRANCISCO VELASCO, WORTHINGTON

Ten years ago was one of the most beautiful years of my life. My father, Manuel, took me and my family to the beach for the first time. We were all anxious to see the waves of the sea. After swimming a little, we went to buy something to eat. We ate seafood at a restaurant on the beach. I like to eat seafood because it is nutritious for the body. Then we bought some beach souvenirs made out of shells and sea snails. That day we had a great time with family. Finally, we came home very happy to have discovered new things, telling our friends and family what we saw.

Francisco Velasco is 21 and originally from El Salvador.

Soccer Game

JUAN SEBASTIAN GONZALEZ, WORTHINGTON

One day when I was in school in Guatemala, I played soccer with my classmates. Suddenly, I stumbled upon a rock and then fell. I hurt my knee. Then my friends came and they took me to my house. In my house was my dad and my mom and they were very scared because they thought it was very serious. They took me to the hospital. When I arrived at the hospital, the doctors put ice on my knee and other things. After two days, the doctors said to Dad, "You can go, but your son has to be home for one month because this is something serious." After two months, I returned to play soccer.

Juan Sebastian Gonzalez is 20 and originally from Guatemala.

My Mount Rushmore Visit

SYED AHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

Mount Rushmore is a splendid site, a great National Memorial. It is located in the Black Hills, South Dakota, surrounded by the beautiful scenic views of the mountain range.

The monument is built in honor of our eminent late presidents, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln, who stood for hope, determination, and the spirit of the nation. There are four sculpted 60-foot faces of the said presidents at the height of 5,725 feet on the mountain. It is an amazing sight when the flashing lights produce the beauty of the glowing faces.

There are many places for tourist attractions: the special events at the site, museums, Custer State Park, the stunning Badlands, and wildlife of different species.

My visit to Mount Rushmore was a memorable journey, which I enjoyed immensely.

Syed Ahamed is 74 and originally from India.

My Grandmom

YING THAO, ST. PAUL

In Laos, my family lived close to our grandparents' house in a small village. They did not know how to speak Lao, but my sister and I went to school and learned how to speak Lao well. Whenever my grandmom wanted to buy something at the Lao market, she always needed my sister or me to go with her to translate.

One time, my grandmom went to buy a chicken by herself. When she got there, she said, "I want to buy a chick." In Lao, the word kai means chicken, but my grandmom said quack which means banana. They gave her a banana, but she said no. Again and again she asked for a banana even though she meant a chicken. Finally, she took my sister and me with her. We told the Lao people that she wanted a chicken, but they said, "She wanted a banana. That's why we gave her a banana."

Ying Thao is 30 and originally from Laos.

Paying It Back

MATHEW YANG, MINNEAPOLIS

Every year I go hunting with my cousin around Lanesboro, Minnesota. I like bow hunting because it is more challenging than other sports. In 2010 I went hunting alone. That night I saw a little fawn, and it stayed far away from my tree stand. I waited and waited, hoping to see a big buck coming.

At 6:30 p.m., I got down from my tree stand. It took about 30 minutes to get to the car. When I arrived, it was 7:00 p.m. and dark already. That night I had borrowed my younger brother's car for hunting. When I arrived at the car, I had to hurry up. I used his remote control to open the door and the back trunk. I put everything including my keys into the trunk. I thought the door wasn't locked, but the doors had locked automatically. I didn't have any extra keys. I was in the forest by myself, so I just sat down and prayed. I hoped someone would come my way and pick me up. While I was waiting in the forest, the sounds of owls and coyotes scared me. I sat down beside the road. An hour later I saw the lights of a car coming toward me. I said to myself, "Thank you, God, you saved my life!" I was so lucky this man was a very kind person. He took me to our camp where I felt safe. His name was John. I still remember it. He saved my life. I never will forget his name.

In 2011 I went hunting at the same spot again. When I came back from hunting, I saw a woman standing beside the road close to our camp. I stopped and talked a little while with her. She said her name was Maria, and she was an author. She wrote and drew cartoons for children's books. She couldn't get into the house because she locked her keys inside. She didn't have an extra key. She said she needed help, so it was my turn to pay back. I took her to Lanesboro. She said thank you many times, just like I did to John. I felt so happy and proud of myself because I had the opportunity to save another person's life.

Mathew Yang is 36 and originally from Laos.

My Favorite Memory

ABDISA WAKO, HAM LAKE

When I was 11 years old, back home in Ethiopia, there were three boys in our compound. They played together and drove cardboard cars. But when I wanted to play with them they didn't accept me to play because I didn't have a car like they did. One day I asked my father to buy me what my friends had. When they played together, I was separate. My father told me that his budget was done for that month. He said he would think about it next month because he didn't have money then. When my father told me that I felt sad. I was not happy with my dad because he refused to buy what I needed. I started thinking about how to make a car and how to get the materials. I tried to collect wires from different dumping places. After I got everything, I started to create. I started with the body, tires, wires, and lamps. I was feeling happy because I wanted to show it to my friends. Actually, I was feeling very comfortable to play with them, when I had a car like my friends had. After I got my own car, they became my best friends. We played together in our compound and around the area which was not far from our houses. Some of them played soccer with me and my friends. We could drive cars and make different kinds of cars.

My Favorite Memory

ADULA NYIGUCO, BROOKLYN PARK

Five years ago, when I was in Ethiopia, my friend Arite and I went to Addis Ababa to play a game of volleyball. We drove for two days. After two days we arrived, and we started to play against the other team, three times. We won all three times! Finally, we played again and we won again. We took pictures with my friends, and the other team too. We were so happy. The organizers gave us some money, clothes, and shoes. At night time they had a big party for us. We drank some beer and wine. The next day, we went back to my state. After two days we got to our hometown and we had another party with my team and other people. It was a nice day. I will always remember those days.

My Mom Felt Her Prayer Was Heard

ALDO CARILLO, MELROSE

It was at midnight when my seven-year-old sister, Paty, started to get sick. We lived in a small town in Mexico where there was no hospital. The hospital was about 30 minutes away from our town. My mom had to take the bus to get to the hospital. It was too dangerous to take the bus at that time of night because people didn't trust the bus driver, but my sister was sick and my mom had to do it. I was about five years old when this happened. My mom told me that when they took the bus there were only two men on the bus, the driver, and the person who charges the passengers. My mom was scared that something bad would happen to her and my sister so she started to pray. After five minutes a woman dressed in all black got on the bus in the middle of nowhere. My mom told me that she tried seeing if there were some houses around but she did not see any. This mysterious woman had her head covered with a shawl. She could not see her face but my mom felt more comfortable. Five minutes before getting to the town where the hospital was the woman got off the bus again in the middle of nowhere. The driver and the other person looked surprised because it was all dark and there were no houses around. My mom finally got to the hospital. Still today, my mom remembers the woman who was on the bus.

My Crazy Uber Story

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

Imagine you are driving down a street, which is really dark, quiet, and late at night. Then you see someone you do not know sitting behind you!

I picked up four young and drunk guys from Uptown at 3:00 a.m. on Saturday. They were very nice and funny, but at the end of the trip they gave me a hard time. When I dropped them off in Edina, they said, "Thanks for the ride and have a good one," and they went into their home. I was tired, and about to go home and sleep. When I drove one mile from their house, I saw someone through my

rear view mirror sitting on the back seat of my car. I totally freaked out, stopped my car and ran out of it without knowing. I was scared because there was nobody around. I started watching him through the window to make sure that I was not dreaming or imagining, and I was not! He was sleeping, and he had no idea where he was.

I tried to figure out how he got into my car. Right away I remembered my last trip with those four guys. I told myself that maybe he could be one of them, but I was not quite sure. I got back into my car, and the guy was still sleeping really soundly. I did not wake him up, because I did not know how he was going to react. He might say, "You kidnapped me!" or totally freak out, just like I did. Finally, I made a decision to take him back to his place. When I got there, I saw a lot of people shouting outside because they lost their friend, I guess. Right away they saw my car coming toward them. They waved their hands to tell me to stop. "Hey stop, stop!" said one of them loudly, and I stopped the car. He said, "Did you see our friend?" I replied madly, "Yes, he is sleeping in my car." They said they were very sorry about what happened. I said, "It is okay, but how can someone forget a friend in someone's car?" A friend is not just a key or phone.

At the end, I felt it was a really funny and scary experience, even though I was mad at them. And then I started laughing, and they did the same, too.

My Favorite Memory

ANA GONZALEZ, BLAINE

My favorite memory is from July 9, 2016, when my friends and I traveled to Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo in Mexico for four days. I loved this experience because we visited the sea for the first time. It is very beautiful. I bought many souvenirs for my family. I took many photos and videos, and we laughed a lot.

One day, all my friends and I played volleyball on the beach. My friend rented a Combi so that we could travel around. My friends and I rented a banana float, and we rode it on the sea. This memory is very important for me, because all my friends were with me.

Ixtapa is a beautiful place. I loved being there. I saw many things. I enjoyed this experience and I want to go to back, but with my family. I feel very emotional.

Paris: City of Love and Light

BARBIE BURNS, WAYZATA

Paris is one of the most exquisite cities in the world! It is a cosmopolitan metropolis filled with architecture, art, culture, history and museums. It is truly the city of love and lights! On majestic boat rides down the river, you can spot the Eiffel Tower lights sparkling in the night sky. You can see all that Paris has to offer you, day or night: coffee and pastries in the morning; leisurely dinners with wine starters, main courses, and desserts with family, friends, and loved ones. After dinner, stroll down the river for romantic moonlight walks. You will see people on beautiful starry nights having picnics, enjoying wine, food, music, and dancing. If you stop, pause, and listen, you will hear all kinds of things like boats, people, music, and church bells ringing. You will smell the aroma of food, flowers and old buildings in the air. While you're in Paris, go to the Lover Lock Bridge. You will feel the radiance all around you. Purchase a lock and write your own personal message. Put the lock on the bridge, take a deep breath, close your eyes, and make a wish. I took that risk, and I believe my dreams will come true! Paris is one of the most magical places in the world.

A Stormy Day in Minnesota

DIAHANN DAVIS, ST. PAUL

As the storm is coming, the clouds start forming this dark shade of darkness. The wind has picked up in great speed, moving the trees and debris from left to right. Walking these dark roads is kind of creepy. Out of nowhere, I see this bright lightning come down. I try to keep calm, but that's until I hear a big boom. It appears to be thunder. I start to run home, and as I am running faster and faster, my heart is beating rapidly. With every single step it's nothing but puddles of water.

Finally I make it home, all soaking wet, slipping and sliding across the floors as I try to turn on my lights. Not one single light will come on. So I check the circuit breaker, but still no light. Apparently the storm blew out my power. I go back to the basement, and I find my candles and flashlight. From all the miles running home soaking wet, my clothes are very heavy. I am exhausted. All I want to do at this point is get out of my wet clothes, relax, and take a bubble bath.

The moment I am done, I walk into my room, grab some covers and make a pallet for myself. I turn on my fireplace, plug in my picture that plays the sound of the water waves. I lay in front of the fireplace, slowly start feeling my eyes closing, as I'm trying to stay awake. However, after just a few minutes, I fall right to sleep, and sleep like a newborn baby.

Ending of the Garden

DOL ABDULAH, WAITE PARK

When I went outside last week, I saw a small beautiful garden was near my school. Discovery school.

It was oval-shaped and looked like an egg. In the garden were various flowers, rocks, and very small insects.

The flowers were different colors. Some were pink, purple, and yellow.

The rocks surrounded the garden, and they made for nice shapes. Though the garden was pretty, I saw signs like dry sticks and leaves of flowers turning brown. It had signs of summer at an end. I look forward to a beautiful garden next summer.

My First Baby

HANA HASSAN, BURNSVILLE

The day I had my first baby, my life became totally different. When I saw my baby in my hands I felt like a different person. Even now, I can't explain how it felt that time.

It was Friday evening, my baby was in my hands, and she was crying. The nurses asked me to breastfeed! I didn't have any idea how to feed a baby. The nurses helped me. When my husband held the baby and

he said the word "daddy," I looked at him, and said, "What did you say?" He repeated "dad." That was not easy for me to believe. Finally, I said the word "mom." It took the baby more than a week to say that. Then, I came home. It was amazing to have her at home.

When I was in my country, I saw my friends having babies and their families and friends helping them. But here, I have no family, so it was hard for me to experience that.

How I Met Two Deer on the Road

HEDA KLOBUSNIKOVA, HOPKINS

One night, when my husband and I came home from our winter vacation, two deer stood in the middle of the narrow road. I was very surprised when I went around a curve and I saw four nice brown big eyes that looked to the lights. My spouse slept. He was tired, because he had a belly-ache in the afternoon. I was tired too, because I drove 11 hours with little break. We were half an hour from our house. It was 1:00 at night. We were late. My first reaction was, "What can I do?" I was shocked by the two pairs of sparkling eyes. What does it mean that there are two deer, not just one? My mind flew past two thoughts, possibilities, how can I solve this situation?

I had just a few seconds to make a decision. I didn't want to go into the opposite driving direction, that could be very risky in the deep, dark, night. So I reduced my speed and I tried to avoid them. I knew that deer jump ahead, because they are frightened from long-distance lights. I felt an impact to the door on my side and I was shocked. My husband slept, he was ill, he was sleepy and quietly asked me: "What was it?" I said, "Deer," but he didn't hear me. I remember that I was shell-shocked, and again I reduced my speed to just 20 km per hour, and I drove slowly for about 20 minutes. Then, I began thinking about the deer. Should I pull over and call the police and help them? All the time I still saw four nice brown eyes before me. In about ten minutes we would be in front of our house. I didn't return. I stopped at home and only then I noticed that the left side of the car (door, front hood, front light, front

fender, and side mirror) was broken. My husband was overtaken with surprise.

The next day, we had to go to the mall to return an item. We didn't plan to look for a jumper for our grandson, but my husband randomly picked up a jumper with a picture of two Bambis, a deer and a doe. One was gold and the second one was white. My husband smiled and said, "Maybe all of us survived this collision after all!"

My First Solo Flight

LEON HOLLINS, MINNEAPOLIS

Learning to fly taught me a lot about myself and life. After many hours of learning basic flight, I asked my instructor if I could fly solo. He looked at me like I was crazy, and said, "No, not yet." I went out to the airport the next week for another boring lesson. We flew around the traffic pattern for a few times, then he told me to taxi back to the parking area. After I turned the airplane off, he looked at me and said, "I think you are ready to fly solo." Okay, I thought reluctantly. He gave me some last minute advice and slammed the door. I paused for a minute before picking up the check list. Fear was running through my body, thinking, oops! I changed my mind. I don't want to do this. I quickly pulled myself together, placed my feet on the brakes, and turned the key.

As the plane started, it felt like a big explosion watching all the instruments come alive. I radioed the tower to say I was ready to taxi to the runway. I lined up the airplane with the runway, then a voice came over the radio, "Cessna 45 kilo, clear for takeoff." I scanned all of the instruments, paying close attention to the airspeed indicator. The needle pointed to 60. I pulled back gently on the yoke, and the airplane lifted off the ground. The whole gamut of emotion ran through me. Enough, I thought, focus on what you need to do now. All you have to do is fly once around the traffic pattern and land safely. I climbed 1700 ft. As I got midway down the pattern, that same voice came over the radio again, "45 kilo, clear to land." Fear was running through me as I turned to the final approach. Flaps down, power back, and the needle at 60 knots. As the airplane got lower, all I had to do was hold everything in place. Then I heard

the tires squeal as the airplane gently settled on the ground. Wow, I thought, good landing! The first thing I learned from that experience is to face my fear and walk through it. The meaning of "F.E.A.R." is "false evidence appears real." Always show up. You don't want to miss the miracle. Because I almost cancelled my lesson that day.

Favorite Childhood Place to Visit

MA ELENA GUIITERREZ, SAINT CLOUD

My favorite place to live was near the Pacific Ocean. When I was a child, the place I just loved to visit a lot with my mother's family was Playa Jardín. This place was peaceful because there were no buildings. It was green everywhere. There was a puddle that was created when the tide was high. There were two places to swim. The water in the puddle was warm, and the water in the ocean was fresh. One day, I remember we were swimming with my cousins in the ocean and we could not touch the sand. The waves moved us into a hole in the ocean. Then after the wave went away we could step on the sand. That was scary, but even then I loved Playa Jardín.

The thing I liked most was when my mother sent us to find firewood. All my brothers and cousins volunteered to get the wood. We would go off to explore and climb trees and later we would start to look for the firewood. My mom was waiting for the firewood. We took a long time because we were having fun. My mom cooked delicious grilled fish called huachinango. It is also called red snapper. While my mom and aunts were cooking, my uncles climbed the palm trees for coconuts. Then we cut the coconuts. Then we ate delicious fish, coconut, and drank coconut juice. Then all the family played, swam, and built sand castles. The day went fast. After we saw the sunset we went home.

My Wish and Dream

MANUEL QUICHIMBO, MINNEAPOLIS

I came from Ecuador and have been living in

Minneapolis for many years. I remember when I was in my country, I liked to plant my own vegetable garden. I worked in construction five days a week, so on the weekends I plowed the soil to plant the vegetable garden and I worked out in my garden. Every day I watered plants two times, in the morning before I got to work and after I got back from work.

The vegetable garden I had was of many kinds of vegetables and after the vegetables grew up, they were ready to sell and eat. Also, I shared the vegetables with my neighbors and sometimes shared with the community as well. I liked to cultivate the garden to grow good and healthy vegetables to make the people healthier. In the future I wish to have my own vegetable garden in Minneapolis. That will remind me of what I had in Ecuador.

My Favorite Memory

ANONYMOUS, BLAINE

I remember when I was a child, I lived with my parents and sisters and brothers together. We had a big garden next to our house. When I lived with my parents, I went to school every day. After school I worked in the garden. Usually I collected grass and picked some fruit. My brothers, sisters, and I brought all of them to the market for sale. In summer my parents and we visited another city. When I grew up and got married, I didn't live together with my parents any longer. Then I had a small family of my own. We had four kids. We had a small store and a café, until we came to America.

When we came here on January 23, 2006 I was surprised the weather was very cold, but my children liked it. My parents-in-law got a one-bedroom apartment ready for our family. We had six people living together in one room and one bathroom.

When we got jobs, we moved to a two-bedroom apartment. We lived in that apartment for three and a half years. After this we bought a house. We have been living there until now. My family has a stable life. We don't know what to say. We are just grateful and happy to live in the U.S.

A Summer Day of 1989

MICHELLE LAMARDO, BROOKLYN PARK

I met my husband during a summer day in 1989. Just like a good love story, we were enjoying a Christmas break close to the sea. Even in December we have summer days in Venezuela. He was with one of my college friends and when I saw him something clicked in me. The romantic part of those days was that I couldn't forget that trendy song, "Right Here Waiting" by Richard Marx. The realistic side of those days was that my husband did not record in his memory either the song or the singer.

After a few weeks, we saw each other again on my college friend's birthday. An important detail in this story is that my friend liked my sister, so he and I agreed to help each other. He did not have much luck in the end. At that time my husband was my boyfriend for eight months. During that time I had the opportunity to meet his mother, my mother-in-law. She is an incredible person. She is kind and she has an enviable sense of humor. We were always in contact after those eight months, and there was always a call for Christmas, Mother's Day, birthday, etc.

In 1994, my husband came to study in Minnesota, until then we had not had more contact. We were working in our lives. On December 24, 1996, I called, like every year, to wish Merry Christmas to my husband's mom and—Oh surprise! My husband was there. He had gone to Venezuela to spend Christmas with his mother and again: destiny had played in my favor. During that phone call we talked and laughed like we had always done. Of course, we had our new first date and from there came the second and third and all the others until the day of his return to Minnesota. By that time we had decided to continue together at a distance, he in Minnesota and I in Venezuela. It was a hard and intense year with frequent calls, letters, and emails that I still keep.

In December 1997, my husband returned to Venezuela to spend Christmas with his family and with me. The big day arrived, even though there was an engagement ring there was also a one way ticket to Minnesota. On January 12, 1998, I embarked for

Minnesota from the hand of the person with whom I dreamed, one summer day of in 1989, to share the rest of my life, my triumphs and my failures, my joys and my sorrows. My companion of adventures, my accomplice, my balance, who with his eyes and his smile illuminates my life and gives meaning to every day, making me live the most beautiful and crazy love story.

My Amazing Childhood

NAJLA SHARIF,APPLEVALLEY

I have a big family. I have five brothers. My mother was working with the government in Mogadishu, Somalia, and my dad was a businessman. We had a good life. While my mother and father were at work we had a babysitter.

Early in the morning, we woke up by the sound of the rooster. It was a beautiful sound. When we came home from school, we liked to go to the beach. The beach was one minute away from my house. After that we ate dinner then I went to my room to take a nap. When my window was open, I could smell the beautiful breeze of the beach. I will never forget that moment.

My Favorite Memory

NATTHAMON BONA-PAPHASITPHONG, HAM LAKE

In November 2015, I celebrated my wedding. About one week before that day, I flew from the USA to Thailand. When I got there I had a lot of work to do. I talked to my parents and my sisters about that. My sister went to order cards to invite people and she also ordered food. I thought I wanted Chinese food because it's tasty. I went to a shop to rent a wedding dress. But they didn't have many dresses for me to choose from. That day was a day when many people got married. The owner of the shop said I should come back later. I chose my dress in a soft pink color and for my husband I picked a white suit. Everything was setup. We celebrated my wedding at my house. That day I had a lot of relatives and friends. They came from another state. I didn't see them for a long time. I was so happy to see them again. At 8:00 a.m. we started the ceremony. The whole family and all the people were there. They took my husband to walk around the community with music. Many

people danced around him. He had never visited Thailand before. He was excited and they came back home. The first words he said when he saw me was he thought he would die because it was a long walk and it was too hot for him. That day my mom was very happy. She thought I would never get married.

Our Family Tradition

ROSA RUIZ, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

When I was little, I used to live in a place named Huntington Beach, California. I lived there with my parents, brothers, and sisters in a small apartment near the beach. I remember my dad driving to the beach. I can see lots of palm trees, people riding their bikes, skateboarding, and just having fun. When we finally got there, I used to run with my brothers, and just stand there and look at the ocean, and the waves, and wondered, where did it end? We were so curious. Parents forgot about work, children forgot about school. It was a peaceful day. We used to swim at the beach, make sand castles, and when the sun started to go down you could see the most beautiful colors in the sky. I loved that my parents always liked to walk on the pier. I remember seeing all the lights that brighten the pier, and the ocean, giving the seagulls crumbs to eat along the way while we were walking. But, the best part for me was on the edge of the pier, standing, just closing my eyes and feeling the breeze. That wet breeze on my face. The wind felt like I was just flying.

My Favorite Memory

TETIANA DIMOVA, COON RAPIDS

I met my husband at the sea. The sea was the beginning of my happy life. Every year in the summer my family traveled to the sea.

In July of 2014, it was time for rest. We decided to go to the Black Sea. The distance from home to the sea is 40 miles. We packed our bags with clothes and food and went by car. We stopped at the hotel by the beach. The hotel was really close to the sea. My husband and I left our bags in the room and took the kids to the beach. My sons began to swim and play in the water. My husband and I sat on the sand. The weather was beautiful and the sun was shining.

We were thinking about our future life and enjoying the light wind blowing. Sea sounds were calming me.

My family always waited for those vacations. Those vacations gave us really strong positive energy for the whole year.

My Memories

THU NGO, ST. PAUL

I am from Vietnam. My hometown is My Tho city. My husband and I were best friends since we were kids. By the end of the Vietnam War, my husband went to the USA and stayed in the USA for more than 30 years. I stayed in Vietnam up until 2006. In 2006, my husband went back to Vietnam to visit. He found me and we fell back in love. We got married in Vietnam, and he took me to the United States.

Since I came to the U.S., I have lived in Minnesota. I really like this state because there are four distinct seasons. Many flowers bloom in the spring. It is really warm in the summer. In the autumn, the leaves change colors. In the winter, it snows a lot, but I like the cold.

I go to school VSS for English. I met Anne, the manager of VSS school. She was very kind to me. My first teacher here was Lisa. My current teacher is called Holly. She helps me a lot. I have learned many things that will be helpful in my everyday life, like what to say when I go to the bank, to restaurants, or to the supermarket. I did not learn English when I was young, so learning English is really difficult for me. I will try my best to improve my English skills.

My Favorite Memory

YOUNG LEE, COON RAPIDS

My husband, grandson, and I went overseas to my native country, South Korea. We took the airplane. It took us 16 hours to get there. We took a vacation for about one month. The time went very fast like the wind.

There are a lot of mountains, about 70% of the entire land. Everywhere we went, it was so beautiful. We went to many towns and good places. We walked around and did some sightseeing. It was so

good. We had a heavenly good time with my family. We stopped at a restaurant to order some food. We ate so much and it tasted so delicious. We built good memories every moment. Wherever we went, we took photographs for memories during our travels. When we were at the National Park, everybody laughed and looked very happy.

It was time for us to go home. We made memories each day. Now we can keep them for a long time. It was a wonderful time with my loved ones together. These are my favorite memories of my life.

Memory

ZHANNA GOLTER, ST. PAUL

After World War II in 1949, our family moved often because my father was a military surgeon. I remember that once we were traveling from Moscow to Vladivostok for two weeks, four years after the war. It was a hot summer day. Our train stopped and stood for a long time in the middle of a blossoming field. All the people got off the train and began to pick flowers, to cook, to wash and even dry the clothes on the grass, but suddenly our train started to move slowly. Everybody left their flowers, linen, food and ran to the carriages. My dad grabbed me with one hand and a bucket of soup with another hand and also ran. Mom ran after him with a soapy head, but it turned out that the train driver was joking and the train stopped in a few minutes. Maybe it is strange, but I don't remember that anyone was angry. Everybody was fun and were laughing.

My First Day in the USA

ZINHAD BEGIC, COON RAPIDS

My name is Zinhad. I am from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I came to the USA 10 months ago. Now I live in Minnesota. Minnesota is very beautiful. My country is also beautiful. The first day I arrived in the U.S. I will remember all my life. That day was very cold, and when I came out of the airport I wanted to go back. After a few days, it was better. The first few months here were unusual, but after a while it got better. I

got to know the city, where I live, and met a lot of people. My life here is good and I am happy now. I work here and go to school. So for the first 10 months of my life here I can say I am happy.

My Childhood Village

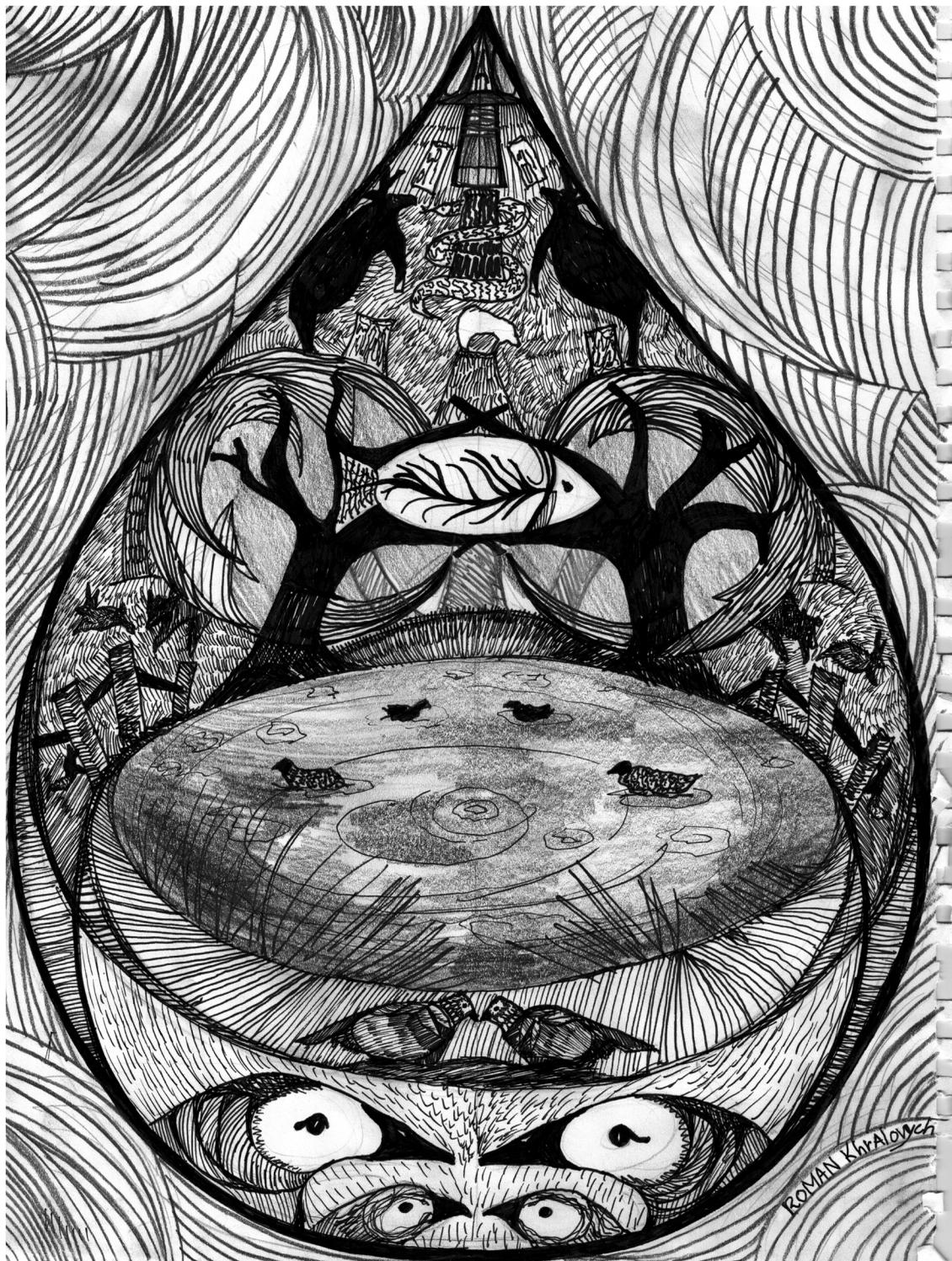
THWEHSAY HU, SAINT PAUL

When I was a child, I lived in a Thailand refugee camp and attended school there. At the summer break, all my cousins, my sister, and I went back to our village in our home country. My village was on a stream and my house was between big trees. My father raised goats, pigs, and chickens. Every morning, I had to take all the goats to the jungle to feed them. After I got home, I had to feed all the chickens again. When I was done with those jobs I could play with my sister or sometimes with my neighbor friends. I miss the times when we took the net down to the stream to catch fish and tadpoles. If I got a fish, I kept it, but if I got a tadpole, I gave it to my friend. Sometimes we climbed up a mountain to get branches. We used to light the branches for the goats at night. Every morning when we woke up, we could hear the birds singing. When I sat in front of my house, I could feel the wind blow and smell the air. My house was made of bamboo, wood, and tree leaves. Everywhere was green.

My father and mother also had a little garden at the base of the mountain. They planted many kinds of fruit and vegetables. We didn't have a grocery store for shopping. We got fresh meat at our small ranch. Everything we ate was fresh and healthy. I was so happy when I was there that I didn't want to go back to the camp when school opened. Even though I'm now in a big country and free, I still miss my home country. Sometimes I dream about my small village, and I hope one day I will have a chance to go back and visit the relatives that are left there.

Thwehsay Hu is originally from Burma.

CULTURE, TRADITION, & FICTION



Gold Bars

WILL DENZER, ROCHESTER

A bird in a cage can still sing its song,
And eat all the seed that it's given.
But in its heart it still knows something's wrong;
It's not how a bird should be living.

The cage may be modern and made out of gold,
Decked out with perches and swings.
But the bird knows that it is bound to grow old
Without ever stretching its wings.

Other birds feel that this life is the best,
Fresh newspaper floor every day.

No need to labor maintaining a nest,
And seeds overflowing their tray.

The bars of the cage even keep out the cat,
And indoors it stays warm and dry.
But this bird would gladly give up all that
If given just one chance to fly.

Will Denzer is 29 and originally from Minnesota.

A Broken Child

ANONYMOUS, BAYPORT

Am I a manifestation of a mutual situation?
Or am I product of whom my father was?
If I dare to respond not knowing where I'm
From, it would lead me to believe there was
So many things left undone.
Should I take heritage to the Jewish Creed?
And feel that I'm the seed of a dying breed?
Well, to the Hebrew, that's imbedded in me too,
This long awaited letter from my mother,
I dare not read to you.
My eyes have been exposed to the real story
untold,
That causes hatred abroad to anyone who knows.
I need to be lifted, as someone who's gifted,
springing
From the ground in the expression of a rose.
I take no concern to what people may view me as,
With the weight of the world on my shoulders
while
Deciphering my past.
My soul knows no boundaries while I press to
move on,
Being heavenly guided with innocence, as though
the day I was born.
To my mother and father, I would not despise, and
to their
Existence, I would never hide.
Most importantly, I'm alive, and clearly I strive, and
as
Maya Angelou so diligently put it, "I too shall rise."

I See God

ROBERT POWELL, SAINT CLOUD

I See God
When I need a friend
I found God

When I need assurance and faith
I found God!
When I need shelter from life's storms
I found God
When I need peace of mind
I found God
When I look at Jesus
I can see God!

Russian Samovars

JULIANNA IM, MAPLE GROVE

Samovars and tea-drinking are necessary elements of Russian culture. Only in Russia do they drink tea from a samovar. A samovar is the symbol of national Russian life. It is designed to heat water. The first samovar was made in the city of Tula.

The word samovar in Russian is derived from "samo" meaning self and "var" meaning to cook or boil. The name can be loosely translated into English as "self-boiler."

To boil the water inside a samovar, the pipe is filled with solid fuel, such as pine cones, charcoal, and wood chips, which are then set on fire. The small tea pot is used to brew a tea concentrate. The tea pot is often placed on top of a samovar to keep it heated with the passing hot air.

Samovars are widely distributed. They are made to be circular, cylindrical, and conical and are used as materials for the manufacture of silver, copper, and iron. Thus, the handles and legs of the samovar crane could be in the form of fish, lions, chickens, etc. A samovar has long been a thing of luxury. We treat it very carefully and have inherited it from our parents as a valuable asset. The samovar is not put in the kitchen but placed in the living room on the table as a decoration when guests are there. Only when guests are over do we use the festive samovar. In the past, family and guests would sit at a large dinner table to have a leisurely talk and discuss the latest events while drinking hot tea.

The tradition to drink tea from a samovar remains

to this day. If you are going to buy a samovar made in Russia to bring back to your country, it will always make a great souvenir or piece of home décor.

Julianna Im is 39 and originally from Russia.

How to Compare Life in Summer and Winter

MARYAN ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

When winter was coming, it was changing.
Everything like a car not moving quickly.
Trees have no color, leaves fell down.
My children are not playing outside.
It was slippery ice, cold outside.
The time of winter life is very difficult.
Hard to scrape a car, hard to go outside.
Hard to go shopping. All of it is hard.
In the summer, no snowing, no cold.
No scraping a car. The children are playing outside.
I am working, playing, growing.
Everything is easier. Life is so easy.
I like it best in the summer.

Maryan Ali is 32 and originally from Somalia.

Friday

RUKIYO ABDI, MINNEAPOLIS

My favorite day of the week is Friday. I like Friday for many reasons. I like Friday because it is the last day of school, and I take dictation. Also I go to the Mosque to pray because I'm Muslim. And this is the day I go to work. I work at a daycare center. I like to work with the kids. My work is fun for me and I'm happy with my work. My job is amazing. These are the reasons I like Friday.

Rukiyo Abdi is 32 and originally from Somalia.

Season and Celebration

ZAHIRUL ISLAM, WHITE BEAR LAKE

Celebration always brings happiness to our daily life. Season gives excitement to the celebration. We always anticipate our friends and family to come together for celebration.

As I writing these passages, it reminds me my country Bangladesh. It is a very small country on Earth but has lots of cultural celebrations. Bangladesh has six seasons. Every season is two months long. During these two months, one of our religions has a celebration. We all participate regardless of our own religious belief. The most common celebration is New Year celebration. The fun part of this celebration is that we all wake up early in the morning and get together a particular area under a huge tree, that is over hundreds of years old. We eat fish fry and rice early in the morning. Our calendar begins at middle of summer, women dress up on that day is all color full red and man are all in yellow.

After eating our food, Celebration starts with a cultural function, performed by hundreds of children and adults. Children's competition starts first, whoever did a good performance will get a prizes. Adults perform sing a song dance and poem throughout the day. Thousands of audience enjoys their performance. Concurrently the fairground starts to collect visitors. We enjoy the rides; every year is different than the previous years.

Season and celebration goes hand and hand in our culture. In our culture people like to get married during the winter season. Harvest season before the winter is also a big celebration to us. They make cake, different than the other part of the country. Every celebration within the season in our culture is very profound and has a historic background.

Zahirul Islam is originally from Bangladesh.

A Happy Day

SHER NAY, ST. PAUL

I like Sunday because I go to the church.

We sing songs.
We pray.
We listen to the sermon.
Everyone sings together.

Sher Nay is originally from Burma.

My Culture

AYANTU TERFASSA, ST. PAUL

I would like to share my country and my culture with you. My name is Ayantu Terfassa. I am from Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a large country with nice cities. There are 88 individual languages and ethnic groups. Ethiopia has 13 months per year. We follow the Julian Calendar. We have 12 months of 30 days, and one month of five or six days. Now, I am in the USA and use a different calendar. Now it is 2016 in the U.S. and 2009 in my country, which is about eight years and nine months different. The holy days in the U.S. are on a different day than my country, so I will celebrate each holy day two times.

Ayantu Terfassa is originally from Ethiopia.

Traditions from Mexico

CELIA RAMIREZ, ST. PAUL

People around the world celebrate many different traditions. As a member of a Mexican family, we have many traditions. One of them is Christmas time. For Mexican people, Christmas is the most important cultural and religious celebration. It is the time when families join to celebrate the posadas. Posadas is a call for the time when the Virgin Maria and Jose were asking for shelter in Bethlehem. It starts in December 16 each year, and ends with the nativity of Jesus.

My family and neighbors join at my mother's house, she makes a huge representation of the nativity with many statues. It contains animals, ornaments, and a little barn with Jose, Maria and baby Jesus. We start the posada in the evening around 6:00pm by praying around the representation of nativity. At the end all

sing Christmas carols. The children break a piñatas. A family offers the traditional tamales and a drink called "ponche." Ponche is a beverage made with fruits as apple, sugar cane, prunes and cinnamon. You can add tequila to the drink if you want to. Young people play music and dance. Adults like to have conversations about life and current events.

My relatives that live in other places, such as Chicago, Florida, and my family from Minnesota; get together every year in Mexico. My mother's house is full with children, and she is very happy. Each year a new member is added to the family. This year my relatives will get to meet my first grandson, who is 14 months old. In this country full of diversity, from people around the world, my family try to preserve our traditions and culture.

Celia Ramirez is originally from Mexico.

Special Mexican Traditions

LAURA MARTINEZ, BROOKLYN CENTER

I am from Mexico City. We have many traditions that are celebrated. One of them is on January 6th. This is the day that the Three Kings came with toys for the kids. This tradition is similar to the tradition in the United States when Santa Claus comes to each house.

Our families buy a big loaf of bread especially for this day. The name of the bread is "Rosca De Reyes." The funny part of this day is that the bread has a little plastic baby baked inside. No one wants to get the baby. If a person finds it, he or she needs to prepare tamales on February 2nd. We enjoy eating the bread with my family. It's a great day to celebrate with family and friends.

Laura Martinez is originally from Mexico.

Cultural Differences

MARISOL TUXPAN, LITTLE CANADA

There are cultural differences between the U.S. and Mexico in food, sports and holidays.

In Mexico, it's easy to find my favorite foods such as barbacoa (lamb). People prepare barbacoa with cactus (maguey), banana leaves, and dry chilies, and then cook it all in a hand-made oven which is made out of mud bricks that is hardened and shaped like an igloo. This oven is called the outdoor earth oven. Another oven that is used is called the underground oven. It is a hole that is dug into the ground. Then they make a fire on the bottom, and they place the lamb in the ground oven.

On the other hand, the U.S. has different foods like sandwiches, different kinds of salads like potato salad and egg salad, and many good delis, burgers, and hot dogs which are popular in United States. Besides, people buy the ingredients at grocery stores, some in cans, so then all they have to do chop and mix. Thus, cooking is easier than Mexican traditional cooking.

Another cultural difference is sports, which are one way to entertain and exercise. In the United States the sports played the most are football, baseball, and hockey. All of these sports need expensive equipment and take a long time to travel from place to place. In Mexico soccer and basketball are the sports that are most played. It is easier to hang out with friends to play in a league. Always there is someone suggesting something fun to do for the group of friends.

The most important holiday for Mexicans is Independence Day, September 16th. The celebration takes place on the Zocalo, or main square in Mexico City. From the palace balcony, the president steps out, rings the bell and cries out the names of the important people who led the battles of different states in Mexico. Afterwards he hollers out the words "Viva Mexico." Then the crowd repeats it after him in a loud roar.

The United States also celebrates their Independence Day, but it is on the fourth of July. It is associated with fireworks, barbecues, parades, and private events that take place in every county and neighborhood.

Marisol Tuxpan is originally from Mexico.

Mother's Day in Panama

BRUNILDA LOPEZ DE LUNA, ST. PAUL

Mothers' Day in my country is December 8. I remember this unique celebration in my country. The day before Mother's Day at midnight, the young people go to the different houses singing at the window songs related to mothers. I wake up, and say thanks, and bring hot cocoa and special bread called rosca to the singers. In the morning, I go to my sisters' houses bringing presents and food. We make a big party because it is a holiday and no one has to go to work. Everybody is in the house, playing cards and bingo with my sisters and brothers. All day I feel happy because I am with my family. I look forward to next year.

Brunilda Lopez de Luna is originally from Panama.

Puerto Rico Traditions and Celebrations

XIOMARA ESTEVES, WOODBURY

In my home country Puerto Rico, we have too many celebrations all season long. In particular we have holidays that are more important and special than others. For example, Christmas is the longest holiday of the season in Puerto Rico. We start by putting up the Christmas tree after Thanksgiving Day, but some people put the tree up before Thanksgiving Day because they are so excited for the upcoming holiday that they cannot wait. On December 24th, all of us gather to share delicious food, presents and we do lots of fun things together like singing and playing *Plena* music (a folkloric music) like Christmas carols. *Plena* music is a tradition that we usually play on Christmas. We use hand drums called *panderetas* (a tambourines but without the jingles), and we use three of them but in three different sizes, a scrape gourd called *güiro* and two *maracas*. Next day because we are tired from the day before, we stay in the house with our pajamas drinking coffee or hot cocoa, and enjoying watching the kids open presents and play with them.

After Christmas passes by we get so anxious for January to come because we celebrate a special day that is similar to Christmas - The Three Kings Day!

On January 5 at night, the kids are getting ready by gathering grass for the camels. They put the grass in a shoe box and place the box under the Christmas tree or next to the children's bed. We believe that if we left them grass and water for the king's camels they will be pleased and content and for gratitude they will leave some presents. So when the children get up on January 6, they find presents. So that's when we know that, after January 6 the, Christmas is finished until the next year.

The other special holiday in Puerto Rico is on November 19. On at that time, we celebrate the Discovery of Puerto Rico Day. That day is very significant for all Puertorriqueños because is when Christopher Columbus discovered Puerto Rico. I remember that when I was at school, we practiced for weeks to perform dances, a poem, or a song with our classmates. Our teachers helped the group decide what to do. The other part is how we dress that day. We dress up like the people in that period of time for example: a Taíno (Puerto Rican Indian), Españoles (explorers and conquistador) or Jíbaro (mountain people). When that day came, each grade group performed in front of our parents. So that is how we celebrate El Día Del Descubrimiento De Puerto Rico.

This is some of the many others holidays that we celebrate in Puerto Rico. I believe that in my country we have more holidays then others places. Not only do we have the same holidays that America has, we also have created our carnivals and other new ones to represent what we think is important. We have holidays all year long and in every month. That's why I always say that we are more happy and more friendly because for every occasion we want to make a party.

Xiomara Esteves is originally from Puerto Rico.

Ramadan in Somalia

KADIJO MAALIN ABDI, ST. PAUL

My home country is Somalia. In Somalia we are Muslims. In the month of Ramadan we are fasting. We didn't eat food during these holy days. We eat food only after sunset.

There are many different kinds of foods and drinks, sumbusa, rice, meat, mandase, juice, tea, salad and fruits. After ending the month of Ramadan we celebrate Eid. At that time we are going to the mosque to pray. After prayer we go home and spend time together as a family.

Kadijo Maalin Abdi is originally from Somalia.

I Love God, I Love to Go to Church

MAWOULAWOE ELISE FOLI, ST. PAUL

I am going to tell you about two churches that are important to me.

First, a Westerners church in the U.S. Westerner is Presbyterian Church in 13 Nicollet, at Minneapolis. It is a huge building with three floors across the street. First, in front of the church you will see their worship schedule. The church has two parking lots; one is at the back of the church and the second in the basement. Next, the church has many rooms: six entrances and two ramps of handicap. The worship room is very large and full of many nice benches include second floor. This church has two worship schedules on Sundays; the first is at 9 to 10 and second 10:30 to 11:30. I never go to 9:30 worship.

In addition, at 10:30, you will see many choirs in their black and white robes with the Pastor behind them, singing a beautiful song; in four lines in the aisles to enter in the room to start worship. You will continue to hear the choir sing, also along from the Hymns book of church until Pastor will pray to preach the Gospel. Imagine my friend, how pleasant will it be to be in the church on Sunday. Finally, every Sunday you will smell the good odor of coffee and lunch, because after church is time for them. My friend, do you want to go one Sunday to see what I write to you? Is that church I went, when I lived in Minneapolis. I love it because I remember it.

I moved from Minneapolis to St. Paul. When I moved I found a new church. Let me tell you about my new church. Since my country, I was Presbyterian, I am still that today. Some changed their churches when they came to the U.S. but not me. Today my

church is Central Presbyterian church at 500 Cedar in St. Paul. This church is a real church to worship God. The Pastor and congregation are nice people. If you are thinking where to go to worship come to Central Presbyterian. There you will see me singing in the choir. This church has many activities to make people happy; concert bakaret and many information and songs from vocal point. On Sunday, at 9:30 we have Bible class to 10:15 before service at 10:30 to 11:30. After this we go to coffee and cookies room where people have conversation. On the third Sunday of the month we have lunch in the dining room downstairs. My friend, please come to worship and rejoice in this church every Sunday.

Thank you very much. Please come Sunday is for God not for us. Thank you.

Mawoulawoe Elise Foli is originally from Togo.

The Phoenix and the Raven

LINDA TRAN, ST. PAUL

Long, Long time ago, in the countryside, there was the Phoenix and the Raven. They were friends. They played and ate together. Many other friends praised their friendship and desired such a life.

One spring morning, how bright the sunrise was! Many flowers poured out their perfume. They were beautiful. On a branch the nightingale twittered a shrill voice. Both Phoenix and Raven were very interested to hear the nightingale's song. They thought the creator was really unjust. Why did he not give us a pretty yellow feather like the nightingale's?

They decided to decorate each other to make their feathers more beautiful. They gathered some leaves, beets, and flowers... turned into the essential colors such as leaf-green, red, violet. They carefully put them into several small pots. When they were ready, the Phoenix hesitated. He asked "Who goes first?" The Raven went first. She carefully chose harmonic colors for painting the Phoenix. The colors were distinguished in the Phoenix's feathers. Especially, two wings and a graceful long tail were

very beautiful. The Phoenix looked at herself in a mirrors, she was really satisfied with the way she looked. She stretched out two wings, and a tail, with song and dance:

"Phoenix liked dancing,

How did she dance, now?

She slipped her neck next to her head

She stretches her wings out in the air.

How beautiful she was! What excellence!"

Raven perfectly finished her responsibility.

Next it was the Phoenix's turn to paint the Raven's feathers. But, Raven heard many friends call her, "come to eat this corpse!" Raven did not want to wait. Raven was greedy. Raven said "Get out of the way! I need to eat meat right now! I am very hungry!" Raven quickly mixed all the colors together to make one black color. She poured it over her head to her feet. The black colors covered all Raven's body. That was it! What a surprise.

Since that time, the Phoenix is very beautiful and the Raven is very ugly. Raven met an unhappy fate because of greed and impatience.

This story teaches us everyone needs to have patience to make a job a success.

Linda Tran is originally from Vietnam.

Where I Am From

NAWHTOI HPAUYAM, ST. PAUL

I came from Kachin State in Myanmar, previously called Burma. Our country is divided into 14 states. My hometown is in upper Myanmar, between India and China, so we can go to China and India easily. My hometown is near the Ayeyarwady River. It has some of the best weather in my country. If you go 28 miles from my hometown, you can see snow on the mountains. There are many settlers from many places including Kachin, Burmese, Chinese, Indian, and Shan. I am happy to be in the U.S., but I really miss my hometown.

Nawhtoi Hpauyam is 37 and originally from Burma.

Christmas in America

SAW LOANE, ST. PAUL

I am enjoying my life in America. I celebrate Christmas with my family and friends. On Christmas Eve we go to church, eat a dinner of noodles, and at midnight we go to friend's houses. On Christmas Day, again we go to friend's houses, where we exchange presents. Second, I invite church members to my house. We sing Christmas songs together. Third, we have fun by playing games with our children. We give Santa Claus presents to all the children. Though life in America is very busy, I really enjoy my life here.

Saw Loane is 41 and originally from Burma.

What I Like To Do in the Fall

Fozia Nabil, Brooklyn Park

In the fall I like to do a lot of things. First, I am going to go visit my father. My father will come from a different state. After that I would like to study and practice my English grammar. Fall is the month that has a lot of work with cleaning if you live in a house. The tree leaves are already starting to fall down. The back yard and front are all getting messy. That is why I have to start cleaning. I have two children who like to play with leaves a lot. Because of that when I keep raking, they like to stay there for a while. I will also pack my summer clothes and organize my house. I will change the curtains and wait for winter.

Fozia Nabil is 36 and originally from Ethiopia.

Comparison of France and the USA

BERNARD NICO, BROOKLYN PARK

The two countries have had a similar culture because in the 18th century, France had colonies in

the US. The revolution occurred before the French Revolution, but not for the same reasons. American people revolted against English expensive taxes, but for French people it was the spending of the kingdom and the exaggerations of the aristocracy. A revolt against abuses is a French tradition!

It is not easy for me to compare both countries because I have not spent enough time in the USA, as I moved here in 2014. The principal difficulties that I have had were with the US Embassy when it was very complicated to obtain a visa. After that it was complications to pass airport customs as if I was suspected of a crime of murder.

In my country life is cooler than in the US. It is more festive and when people would like to debate something, it is easier to have lunch in a restaurant enjoying a good dish and a glass of wine. Eating and drinking in restaurants for business to discuss different subjects or for a special occasion with friends or family, that is very traditional.

In France we have a simple system for social security, but it is expensive for people because 25% of the income is taken by the government for healthcare and for retirement.

America is a large country with different weather in all regions and you can choose the climate you'd like to live in. Some parts of the territories are green, some parts are dry. If you would like to change states, it is easier.

Most American traditions originated from England, France and Spain. However, Thanksgiving originated from Native Americans who helped pilgrims with food for winter time.

The school facilities to learn English are good. The prices of houses are not expensive in comparison to France, but the construction is different. The construction in France is stronger, but you spend a lot to buy a home in a big city like Paris, less in suburban areas.

The US gas is 70% cheaper than in France and a lot of people drive big cars which consume too much without considering pollution.

To conclude, you have good things in the USA and in France, life is a little bit different in both countries,

sometimes good sometimes bad.

Bernard Nico is 68 and originally from France.

My Country and the U.S.

NAZLY MOKARYAN, BROOKLYN PARK

In my country, Iran, we love to be with our relatives most of our time. It is really important to my country, because we want to teach children that relatives are important and they are part of how we are. We help each other with everything we need, such as finding a home and a job and if they are sick we take them to the hospital. And sometimes grand moms take care of grandchildren if their parents are working. But I think in the U.S. it is a little different.

However, in the U.S., I have heard that when children reach their teens, they get a part-time job to save their money for college or anything else they want to buy. It is very good for their future because they learn to get independent, but in my country it's really different. People go to work after school or University.

In the U.S. people also have freedom with their religion in all of their daily life at their job and everywhere. But, in Iran religion and law are combined. The government interferes in every aspect of our lives. It means that if you are not Muslim, you can't easily find a job, you can't easily go to a University, and if you become Christian, you are deprived of inheritance, and even maybe rejected from your family. The main idea in Iran is that religion is not just your own business, it is everybody's business.

Nazly Mokaryan is 37 and originally from Iran.

Mexico

GUILLERMO BUENO, ST. PAUL

Tacos, tequila, and cheerful, loving people are symbols of Mexico. We feel great passion for music, dance, food and drink. The calendar in Mexico is filled with many regional and local festivals. Every state has their own festivals and fairs.

When the Spanish arrived the Aztecs were most powerful in Mexico. The Spanish made many changes in Mexico: no more sacrifices, a new religion, new fruits, food and much more. Mexicans were not happy because Spain took a lot of gold from Mexico. They exchanged the gold for pieces of mirror. The Aztecs had never seen mirrors before.

There were many languages, but many of them disappeared because they had to learn to speak Spanish. They lived on what they grew. Sometimes the weather was not good for planting and they didn't get enough rain. When they had a bad crop year, they moved to another state or immigrated to the USA. They risked survival. The dialects are disappearing. Those who don't speak Spanish experience discrimination. This is what I observed, when I lived in Mexico ten years ago.

Guillermo Bueno is 33 and originally from Mexico.

A Visit with My Family for a Chinese New Year's Eve

AMY KUO, HOPKINS

In February 2016, I went back to Taiwan to visit my family for a month. Everybody in our family was very happy to set up a celebration for the Chinese New Year's Eve party. During that time, we had two big dinners with my family to celebrate the Chinese new year, 2016!

One of the parties was with my husband's family and two sisters-in-law, for a total of 12 people around a round table. My oldest sister-in-law made some home-made Mandarin pork and Hotpot soup. Some of the dishes we bought from a restaurant: Kung-Pao Chicken, Fried Noodles, and rice, and my favorite dish - green onion bean curd. We all ate and talked about the past year and what we did, till midnight, after the new year came. The specific time was after 12:00 am. We all had a good time at the family annual party.

The Smell of Christmas

ANA AROSHIDZE, ANOKA

My name is Ana. I'm from Georgia, in Eastern Europe. It is a Christian country. This religion came to Georgia in the 4th century and we celebrate all Christian holidays. The biggest holiday is Christmas. We celebrate it on the eve of December 24. In each home you can see glowing lights on the Christmas tree and, of course, mandarins on the table.

When I was a kid, my country wasn't rich. People couldn't give each other expensive gifts. Mandarins grow in Georgia and are very cheap, delicious, and have a fragrant smell. So it was very common present. To this day, mandarins still remind me of Christmas.

My Culture of Food

BICH TRAN, BLOOMINGTON

The world has different cultures of food and Vietnam's culture of food is rice. Rice is my main food. We often eat rice with meals, and vegetables every day. Sometimes we eat pasta or make some cake on Sunday. Many people cook in the kitchen, seldom they cook outside. They cook all their food inside. We eat three meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There are different ways to eat but we often eat with chopsticks and spoon. Many people in the world can't use chopsticks but everybody can use chopsticks in Vietnam. My country has its own culture of food.

Thanksgiving

BRUCE HSU, APPLE VALLEY

I come from Taiwan. I had my first Thanksgiving in the USA. Before that, I had no idea about Thanksgiving. I am thankful for my nice English teacher and great volunteers. I am first thankful for our English teacher in the ESL class. He always makes it easy to let everyone know the new word meanings. His explanations and actions make it so everyone can easily follow him. He is the best teacher and I haven't seen one like

him before! The other thankfulness I have is for the volunteers in our class. They help us know how to make a sentence with the correct grammar. They help us to improve our reading. They help us with writing essays and correcting our grammar and they help us follow the teaching instruction of writing and reading. It's very important to have a special holiday like this. All people are celebrating Thanksgiving. All people have a chance to think about the whole year who they need to be thankful for and to give thanks.

Virgin Mary-Three Kings Marathon

ESMERALDA TORRES SANCHEZ, FRIDLEY

In my country Mexico, there is a big celebration from December through January. We get so excited because we start on December 1st and finish on January 6th. We start with "Peregrinaciones" every day from Dec-1st through the 11th. We go to the houses of friends and family and bring pictures of the "Virgin Mary", and we sing and pray to the "Virgin Mary" (Jesus' mother Mary). We also make decorations and food for the people who come to the big celebration on December 11st, and we do this to honor her.

On December 16th we start the "Posadas". Every day we go to different houses to sing and pray for the "Virgin Mary", Joseph, and the most important "Jesus". This lasts until December 24th, on Christmas Eve, because we celebrate when Jesus was born. All these activities are very beautiful, we go out at night and all the people go with candles and sing and are happy!

On January 6th, early in the morning, the "The Three Kings" go to houses to give toys to the kids. These three kings are Melchor, Gaspar and Baltazar - the same kings who came to the birth of Jesus. In the morning when the kids wake up, they can see their new toys.

We call all these celebrations, from December through January, "Virgin Mary-Three Kings Marathon."

Vengeance

ISRAEL LENOW, SAINT CLOUD

The good book states, vengeance is mine.

Not his, nor hers, but we have all found ourselves spiteful,

Because it's human error to be vengeful.

Our emotions run amuck at times, so we tend to cross the line.

We've become vindictive beings, who'll do anything to demolish our enemies. Our hearts have become tainted along the way,

And our minds tend to minimize our atrocious ways.

Which only leads us farther astray and that comes with a million guarantees.

We find ourselves acting holier than others.

When tragedies occurs and innocent peoples lose their lives,

We seek vengeance against assailants, who everybody hopes never survive.

It took time to realize that this world is full of hypocritical people.

We're supposed to remain compassionate, remorseful, and un-biased,

But yet, we are swift to judge each other's flaws.

So in all truth, everybody's guilty for disobeying God's laws,

And until we learn not to be so vengeful and biased, the cycle of inadequacy will forever run rampant in our society?

So until we're all able to look our foes in the face,

And say to them wholeheartedly, I love you with all grace.

That's when we can heal ourselves and become a stronger society.

I know God's vision is far and above any man's insights.

So vengeance is the Lord's,

And we have to trust him in order to reap greater rewards,

Because he's the father of life, death, longevity, and light.

My Favorite Holiday

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

Christmas is my favorite holiday. First, I get to spend it with family. We love watching Christmas movies and shows together. Second, we always decorate our Christmas tree together. Early in the morning, we wake up and head to the tree farm to pick out the perfect one. After we are all done decorating the tree, I boost up my daughter so that she can put the star on top. Last, my favorite part is waking up Christmas morning and watching my daughter open up all of her presents that she has gotten. It makes me feel good seeing her so happy and excited about all her new gifts. These are the reasons why Christmas is my favorite holiday.

What if Winter Wasn't White?

KENYA FELLS-MORRIS, MINNEAPOLIS

Dear Love,

What if you and I could sail away, with snowy piles to the wind unfurled, across the waters of unknown shores, and find some igloo on an island far from all the world?

If we could dwell there over and over, forever alone while unrecorded years pass us by; forgetting and forgotten about the unknown? But by the grace of our God we stand in the mist of the snow fall.

What if winter never visited the earth and summer was filled with warmth, fruit and flowers, and tropical trees that bore shade on every land? What would winter be without love, joy, and peaceful white? What would winter be without snow white?

Now it's mid-winter and the sunrise knows it. But

it wakes me with a shudder. WOW! What a dream that was. I'm wishing that it was true for us.

For six cold mornings in a row the beautiful pheasant has come to our patio to steal some of our goods, sometimes right before our eyes. The house is lit so I enjoy a Sunday newspaper with a cup of Folgers coffee. The smell of coffee...mmmm...it lights up my morning. They say the best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup. That's me!!!

But again I say, what if winter wasn't white?

Egal Shidad

KHALIF EGAL, MINNEAPOLIS

Egal is an icon in Somali folklore and tales. The assumption is always that he was a coward. He was the best known character in Somali stories. He was a coward who never liked wild animals. He never took a risk, anyway. In fact, I have two stories about him. First, about his fear of his own son who was teething. The son had four teeth and went toward his father, but the father yelled in fear and told the mother to keep him safe by taking the baby away.

Second, Egal loved his camel and one day a lion killed the camel. He worried that he wouldn't at that time take a risk. He took a gun with him and went to the bush in the evening, searching for the lion. Suddenly, he saw something in the road. He waited for a movement. Finally, the day came and he saw that it was a tree that he was hunting all night. He spoke three phrases:

"What I thought, what you are, what I will never do."

1. "What I thought": I thought you were a lion.

2. "What you are": You are a tree which cannot harm me.

3. "What I will never do": I will never go to bush again at night even if my camel is missing because he was killed by a lion. Looking at the above story, Egal was an icon in Somalian folklore and tales. His assumption was always as a coward. Egal was a famous person for making stories about fear.

Realize

MATTHEW LUNDQUIST, SAINT CLOUD

Take time
and you
will make
time to
find
somebody,
somebody.
Come along
with me
and get
lost in
the woods.
Two days
from
yesterday
is
tomorrow.

In This Cell

NICHOLAS JENNINGS, SAINT CLOUD

In this cell on the wall
Is the shape of a lizard, tail and all.
All night I can't help but notice...
He seems alive, though he doesn't crawl.
Like the men beside him, he is the same.
Frozen in time with someone else to blame.
The only difference that I see;
Is in his eyes, he shows no shame.
We share this space until we must go.
His time here may be a little longer though
Many men will pass through
Some may even stop to say hello.
Like an image on a wall we are
A uniquely shaped piece of dirt or tar.
It doesn't matter if we're peasant or Caesar

Bass or tenor...

In the end we must remember.

Cadejo

ROSAURA ALVAREZ, ST. PAUL

This story comes in the form of two huge dogs.

One dog has black fur and one has white. One represents good while the other represents evil. The black Cadejo is an evil spirit who appears to those who wander alone late at night, using his red-hot, coal eyes to hypnotize his victims in an attempt to steal their souls. The white Cadejo is there to provide protection for his faithful believers, especially children. Some have seen a brawl break out between the two in a fight for the soul and others say that the white Cadejo has appeared to help a drunk wanderer get home safely.

Thanksgiving Day Thanks

TAO SONG, EDEN PRAIRIE

Thanksgiving is a big holiday in the U.S. Thanksgiving makes me think of many things which I'd like to express my thanks for, including:

English and More

In 2015 I landed in Minnesota. I enrolled in the Metro South ABE. We have a really great teacher, Dale Lanning. He is very engaging and holds our attention. He has good management skills and can ensure good student behavior, effective study, work habits, and an overall sense of respect. He has high expectations of us, and encourages us to work our best. He has an incredible knowledge of the subject matter and is always prepared to answer questions and keep the material interesting. He is passionate about teaching and working with us. He develops a strong rapport and establishes trusting relationships. I have learned proper pronunciation, idioms, and reading comprehension, etc. I really really like him. He teaches English in a professional way, and makes a good role model in life. Besides English, I learned a lot of good things from him. He is really the one I want to express my thanks to in 2016.

Chorus Leader

I entered an acappella female chorus in 2016. We have a wonderful chorus liaison ambassador, Val, who is kind, pretty, and multi-talented. She invites us to keep anyone who suffers difficulties in our thoughts and reach out to them with prayers, cards or hugs. Val guided us to give Lois, a veteran singer, our great courage and strength on her way to battle cancer. A quote from Lois: "I've been battling cancer for just short of nine years. These years of survival are, I believe, directly the result of your love, support, and prayers. I also want to thank our team leader for giving me the opportunity to direct you." What an honor! Thank you for all the hugs, cards, and good wishes. I love you guys!" I really like Val and want to thank her for all her kindness and generosity.

Thanksgiving is a really good way to draw from the heart the wonderful people out, to think about them and consider what the others could learn from them. They are good role models in society. A healthy life needs them. I want to express my thanks to all who gave me nice feelings, made me happy and helped me improve in all ways!

Starke and the Skunk Band

JOANN SERGER, OSAKIS

here once was a skunk name Starke. Who lived in a swamp down in Louisiana, near New Orleans. One time at Mardi Gras he met a girl skunk named Cassie, and fell head over heels in love with her. , Cassie's heart belong to a fellow name Pepi le Pew. She broke Starke's heart when she married her Pepi.

It was then that Starke met and married a gal skunk name Flower arranged by forces unknown to Starke. He agreed to the arrangement, no matter what.

As he played on his banjo, Flower played both a bow and pluck palmistry. She liked to go to the Renaissance festivals and perform in a medieval court, her love songs.

They had two daughters named Honey Bear and Hidee, who learned to play drums and piano.

Meanwhile, Cassie and her Pepi had two sons, Pepi Jr. and Micro Pepi, who was very tiny. This made her in-laws, Grandpa Pepi and Grandma Kitty Le Pew very happy.

They also played music. Pepi Sr. had his harmonica. Cassie had her pipe organ. Pepi Jr. and Micro Pepi both played guitar. Grandpa Pepi played the bagpipes and Grandma Kitty the accordion.

Then, Cassie's cousin Sawyer showed up. This guy played the saxophone, fiddle, banjo and harmonica.

They all met up with Starke and his family one day. Grandpa Pepi took a liking to Starke and adopted him and his family. So they also became Le Pews.

Together they formed a Skunk Band, and went on to perform to cheering crowds.

Joann Serger is 59 and originally from Osakis, Minnesota.

Peace

HAGOS FREWOHINI, MINNEAPOLIS

Peace is like a garden.

Peace looks like my family.

Peace sounds like many leaves.

Peace is sometimes happy.

Peace is a long walk.

Peace is work.

Hagos Frewohini is originally from Ethiopia.

The Historia of the Sleeping Woman and Popocatepetl

NADIA CARRENO, CRYSTAL

I am going to write about an old legend that my grandfather told me. This happened years ago, when the Aztecas Empire dominated the México Valley because of the war between the Tlaxcaltecas and the Aztecas. The Cacique Azteca had a daughter named Iztaccihuatl. She was a pretty princess and she was in love with Popocatepetl. He responded in the same way.

Before the war started, Popocatepetl asked for

hand of the Princess. The dad accepted and promised to have a big party to give his daughter's hand "if he returned victorious from the battle." Popocatepetl accepted and kept in his heart the promise that the Princess would wait to consummate his great love.

However, a rival of Popocatepetl told the Princess that her lover had died in the war. The Princess was very sad and without knowing the truth, she died!

In time, Popocatepetl returned victorious in the hope of seeing his beloved. Upon his arrival, he learned the news that his beloved had died. He was very sad and bereaved. He wondered the streets and tried to think of what to do.

Finally, he made the decision to build a big tomb before the sun. He piled up 10 mountains. He then took her in his arms and rested next to her. He gave her a kiss, made a smoke torch, and knelt in front of his princess to watch over his eternal dream. Since then, they have been together. As time passes, their bodies have been covered with snow. There are also two big volcanos and they will continue to be there until the end of the world.

Nadia Carreno is originally from Mexico.

Elmi Boder and Hodhan

NAJMA FARAH, MINNEAPOLIS

A long time ago, there were two lovers who loved each other. Because of their love they died and were buried together in the same grave. Around the grave grew beautiful flowers. People go there to see the beautiful flowers, especially people who love each other and to make a picnic there.

After that, a couple proposed there in front of the grave and they set the date of their wedding. When they reached the wedding date, they celebrated and enjoyed meals at the gravesite.

Najma Farah is originally from Somalia.

Road Trip

GERALDINE VAUGHAN, MINNEAPOLIS

You and your friends are traveling down the road suddenly you have a flat. To top it all off you've run out of gas, so you get out the car. And you start to walk but you don't know where you are. You must have taken a wrong turn somewhere. So, you start to walk, when suddenly you hear footsteps off in the distance and then you all start to run but you don't know where to run to or where to hide. You see a old shack and you all get in, close the door then you look out of the window, and all you see is a dingo.

Geraldine Vaughan is originally from USA.

A Girl Who Got Eaten by the Earth

LA MAY PAW, WORTHINGTON

Once upon a time there lived two people. The mother loved her daughter with all her heart but her daughter didn't love her back. One day the mother was thinking. She was thinking about her daughter who was going on 18 years of age. When the daughter turned 18, she did not listen to her mother anymore. She did the things she loved and did what her heart wanted. Her mother told her how she should not do any of those things but she did not listen to her mother.

The day her daughter went to a Buddhist temple, her mother told her not to go. At that time she got angry and she took out one of her slippers and slapped her mother with it. Afterward, she ran to the Buddhist temple. When she ran, she saw she was almost close to the temple.

At the same time, the earth opened up and surrounded her. When the earth floor spun around her, no one could go near her because of too much heat. She saw a lot of people. She told them to help her. The people said, "We can't help you. We can't take you out." The heat around her was too hot. People wanted to help her but they couldn't.

When the mother came she wanted to help her daughter but she couldn't because she was scared. She told her daughter it was too hot. "I can't go near

you" her mother said. The same time the mother's tears fell. At that time, she told her mother, "Mom, because I didn't listen to you, now I have to go back to the underground." At that time the ground didn't wait for her. It ate her up to her neck and then her whole body.

This story, if we think about it and see it through, it toughens us and gives us strength. This story shows us because the daughter didn't love her mother back she fell through the dark. Thanks to this story, may God bless those that read and know about it. Bless you and Thank you. This story was told by La May. This is a true story.

La May Paw is 26 and originally from Burma.

A Story from My Culture

EH WAH MOOLAY, ST. PAUL

Once upon a time in a small village in Kaw Lah - a land people now call Myanmar and used to be called Burma - there was a man named Ph Thu Nigel. He was the biggest, strongest man in the world. He had supernatural power. He was helpful to people in his life.

First, when he was born he could speak right away and he ate a lot of food. His parents thought he was a bad, evil monster, so they planned to kill him because they were afraid of him. One day his father took him to the forest and tried to kill him. The father had his son sit under a tree, then he cut the tree down. When the tree fell, the father thought his son was dead, so he went home. However, Pah Thu Ngel was not dead, so he went back to his house and put a big tree in front of it. His parents tried to kill him many times, but were never successful because of his supernatural powers.

After many years, his parents made Pah Thu Ngel move out and they disowned him. Consequently, he went away to the big mountain and lived there. He helped a lot of people who were escaping from evil monsters. At that time, people were scared of monsters because they ate them. Pah Thu Ngel was

not a bad monster, as his parents believed, but was a good, big man. He defeated a lot of bad monsters and people were living in peace during his life time. He helped many people, so they loved him a lot because they were living in peace and they weren't scared of monsters anymore.

Pah Thu Hgel was a good person with supernatural powers and helped a lot of people escape from the evil monsters. Though his parents tried to kill him, they could not, because God created him to protect and help people.

Eh Wah Moolay is 33 and originally from Burma.

A Good Dog

NAY MOO, WORTHINGTON

A long time ago a family had a dog. The dog was a good dog. He was a hunting dog. He hunted pigs and other animals. When he caught an animal, the family would cook it and give him the head to eat. Every time. Because if they gave him the head, he would catch an animal next time. And he did. Every time he caught a bigger and better animal. Until one day he was trying to catch a tiger and the tiger bit his leg. So the family brought him home and gave him medicine. For three months he couldn't hunt and was very sick. Then after three months his leg was better and he was happy. And he hunted again. He was a good dog for helping the family.

Nay Moo is 35 and originally from Burma.

The White Horse

BERTHA LOPEZ, ST. PAUL

A long time ago, when I was five years old, my dad told me this story.

He went hunting in the mountain. He walked three days and two nights. When the night fell, he started to feel weird. Then he noticed he was getting goosebumps. It was hard for him to see the way out of the forest. He walked for a long time but could not find his way out. Then, he noticed it was already 12 o'clock at night. He started to hear a strange noise getting closer and closer to him. It sounded

like a horse, with a voice screaming "I am here" He got scared and he feared for his life. He walked more and finally sat right next to a tree and thought about the situation. He decided to find out what the noise was and where it was coming from. He started to walk towards the noise and luckily he found a street that went through the forest. With fear in his mind he decided to walk with his rifle in his hand. Then, he noticed something walking toward him. The thing sounded like a horse. He decided to fire his rifle as a warning if it was a person. But when he fired the rifle he saw it was a white horse with a man without a head mounted on it. He was able to see this all with the light that his rifle produced. He was so scared that he could not move. He thought that he was going to die that day. But the horse just kept on walking right in front of him leaving him alone. When the morning came, my father made it home with a high fever. The next day he told everybody in the neighborhood to not walk in the forest at night alone. There was a man with no head on a white horse. This is my father's story. His name is Santiago Lopez

When I was 22 years old I had a similar encounter as my father did. It started when my husband and I were coming back from work. We were walking back home in the dark. It was a night like no other. I felt a cold breeze coming towards me. I started to get scared and asked my husband what was going on. I started to feel heavy. My feet could not move anymore. Then I heard a horse from far way coming toward us. I started to pray in fear of my life. I told my husband something weird was happening. I held him closer to me. Then I noticed my husband grabbing his pistol. He fired his pistol behind me and when I looked there was a white horse standing on his two hind legs neighing. The horse turned around and ran back to where it came from. My husband and I got scared. We hid in the bushes and waited out the night. When we got home we both had a fever. This is the end of the story.

Fox and Bird

BWAY MOO, ST. PAUL

This story happened a long time ago, in the forest in Burma. Fox and Bird were friendly. Bird was small and black color. Bird usually stayed in the grass, he had made a nest on the lower branches of a tree. Fox had a grey and black color. Also Fox ate meat. Bird told Fox he shouldn't eat meat anymore but Fox didn't listen to Bird. He should have pity for his friends in the forest.

One day, Fox had a pain in his throat because he swallowed a bone. Fox couldn't eat anything, so Fox said to Bird, "Help me." Bird came to Fox and said, "Open your mouth wide," and he opened his mouth wide and then Bird flew into his throat and picked out the bone with his beak. Fox was happy because he was healed.

Fox told Bird he was so hungry, and that he was going to eat him now. Bird said to wait and he would find a judge. Bird went to Rabbit and told him what happened because Rabbit was a judge. Bird and Rabbit returned to Fox. Rabbit said, "Before you eat Bird, show me again what happened." Bird said to Fox, "Open your mouth wide" and then Bird flew into his throat and put a bone in his throat again. Rabbit said Fox will die because he didn't thank Bird. Bird and Rabbit went away to another forest and later, Fox died.

Cat and Mouse and Dog

MI GOUL CHAI, ST. PAUL

A long time ago, this story happened in a house. It was a big old house.

A cat, mouse, and dog talked to one another.

The cat was watching the mouse. The mouse wanted to eat rice and food.

A family of five people lived in the house.

The family was sleeping in the middle of the night.

A bad man came to the house and stole some money.

The dog barked at the bad man and he ran away.

The cat, the mouse, and the dog ate some food in the house.

Rabbit and Turtle

MICHELLE PYA, ST. PAUL

This story happened a long time ago in the forest. The people

could talk with Rabbit and Turtle. They could play together.

One day Rabbit told Turtle she wanted to race. Rabbit was very confident

that she would win the race. Rabbit was very boastful. Rabbit and Turtle

ran together. Rabbit ran very fast and Turtle ran very slowly. Rabbit ran so

fast she got very tired and needed to sleep. Turtle ran very slowly and

didn't need to stop and sleep. Turtle ran by Rabbit who was still sleeping.

Rabbit woke up and started running but couldn't catch up to Turtle and

Turtle won the race.

Rabbit and Turtle Race

PAW YUU, ST. PAUL

A long time ago, there was a forest. In the forest rabbit and turtle were friends. One day rabbit was boasting about how fast he could run. He was laughing at the turtle for being so slow. Much to the rabbit's surprise, the turtle challenged him to a race. The rabbit thought this was a good joke and accepted the challenge.

The fox was to be the umpire of the race. As the race began, the rabbit raced way ahead of the turtle just like everyone thought.

The rabbit got to the halfway point and could not see the turtle anywhere. He was hot and tired and decided to stop and take a short nap.

Even if the turtle passed him he would be able to race to the finish line ahead of him.

All this time the turtle kept walking, step by step by step. He never quit, no matter how hot or tired

he got. He just kept going. However, the rabbit slept longer than he had thought and when he woke up he could not see the turtle anywhere. He went to the finish line but found the turtle there waiting for him.

Rabbit and Turtle Race

SAN SAN MYINT, ST. PAUL

A long time ago, in the forest, grandparents told the children about the rabbit and turtle race. The rabbit and the turtle were friends. One day, the rabbit bragged to the turtle about "how fast he could run."

The turtle challenged the rabbit to race. The rabbit accepted the challenge and let the turtle run first so the turtle started to run. The rabbit thought the turtle didn't run fast, so he ran slowly and decided to take a short nap. The turtle didn't stop running, and when the rabbit woke up, he didn't see the turtle, so he started to run and run. Then, the rabbit saw the turtle at the end of the race. The turtle won the race and the rabbit was very sad. The grandparent told the children to persevere like the turtle.

Elephant and Ant Family

VUE HER, ST. PAUL

A long time ago, many elephants lived with the herd in the forest. One day, the elephant went to the forest to find fruit in the tree for his family. Finally, he saw many fruits in the tree, but he also saw the ant family lived in the tree. When he reached for the fruit, he stepped on and broke the ant house. The ant said, "Stop! why did you destroy my family?" The elephant saw the ant and he said, "I don't know what you can do to me. You are very small." The ant got angry and he told his family to make a big nest between two fruit trees. When the elephant came to look for fruit, he wouldn't see the nest and would run into it. Finally, the ant saw the elephant and he told his family to leap and crawl to the elephant. Many ants crawled into the elephant's ear and bit the Elephant, and he died. Now, when the elephants see the ants, they run away from the ants. Because they are very scared.

Rabbit and Turtle Race

YEYE SAN, ST. PAUL

A long time ago, in the forest, some grandparents told the children about the rabbit and the turtle race. The rabbit and the turtle were friends.

One day, the rabbit bragged to the turtle about how fast he could run. Then, the turtle challenged the rabbit to a race. The rabbit accepted the challenge and let the turtle run first, so the turtle started to run. The rabbit thought the turtle didn't run fast so he ran slowly and during the race the rabbit decided to take a short nap. The turtle didn't stop running and when the rabbit woke up he didn't see the turtle. So he started to run, and run, and run. Then the rabbit saw the turtle at the end of the race.

Finally, the turtle won the race and the rabbit was very sad. The grandparents told the children to persevere like the turtle.

The Crying Woman

BLANCA NAVA, SAINT PAUL

Long year ago, little village, there lived a fine looking girl

Her name is Maria, some say she was the most a beautiful

Woman. She was better than everyone else, Maria wanted a lot.

She had a man to love and she had three childrens with him, so she

Was a poor lady. She doesn't goe to school. Maria thought

Their relationship stable, so, Maria asked her boyfriend:

"Want to get married," but he pretended he was not listening. He is a

Soldier, but his parent are a rich Family. So they never

Gave permission to him to marry with Maria. The parents

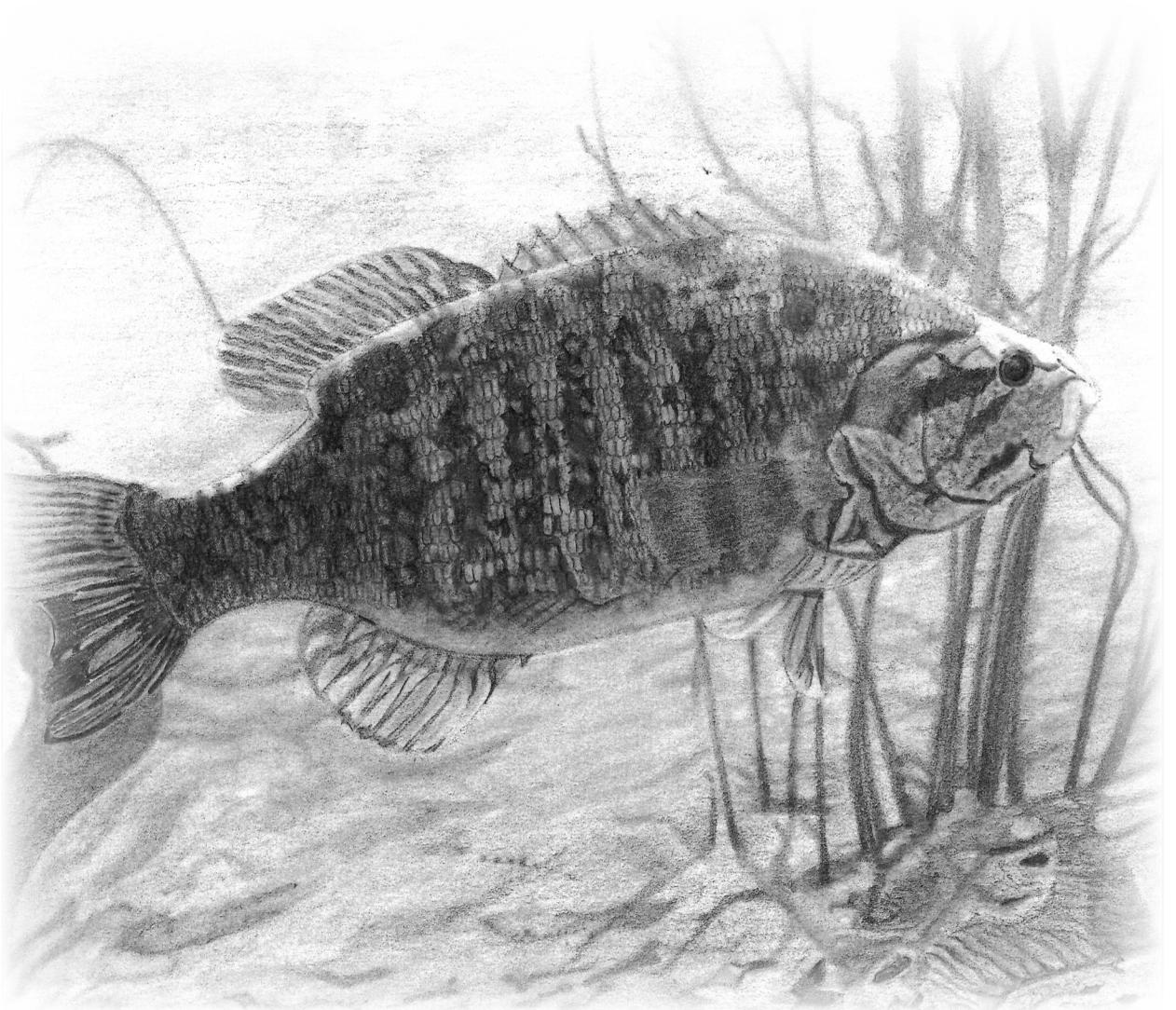
Send him to other countries and he marries with another

Lady, because she is a rich woman. Somebody tells Maria he married and she cries. She is sad and angry.

Maria goes crazy and she kills all her children

The people say Maria appeared every night at 12:00am. She screamed, "where are my children."

LEARNING LANGUAGES





Born in Ethiopia, **Kefaya Hassan** moved to Yemen with her family when she was four years old. She and some members of her family came to Minneapolis eight years ago as a refugee. Besides English, Kefaya also speaks Arabic, Somali, and Oromo; she often writes her diary in Arabic. She currently works as a patient access representative while studying at Volunteers of America Adult High School and St. Paul Technical College. Kefaya hopes to become a social worker.

First Time to Speak

KEFAYA HASSAN HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to the United States, I was afraid to speak with others. In my home country they taught us basic English when we got to 7th grade. It wasn't helpful because most of the subjects were in Arabic and we took the English class only twice a week. Another thing that prevented me from speaking in English was I felt a little shy and confused. I thought people were not going to understand my pronunciation or what I was talking about.

The first time I spoke English in front of my classmates in America will always remain with me. The teacher asked us to introduce ourselves in front of other students in the class. It was not really hard because all we had to do was tell a little bit about ourselves. The problem was how could I talk about myself if I were not a good speaker and I didn't know how to speak clearly in English or put long sentences together. I asked the teacher to let me be the last one to do that so that may help me to listen to other students and see if I can say the same thing or maybe be better.

When all the students were done with introducing themselves, the teacher looked at me. That moment I realized it was my turn and I didn't want to say no because the teacher was so friendly. She looked at me with confidence as if to say, "I know, Kefaya, you can do it."

I stood up and walked slowly to the front of the class. Everyone was looking at me. My heart started to beat so fast and the minute I started to talk I felt my voice trembling. I was so nervous at the beginning, but after that I took a deep breath. I decided to speak whatever I knew. In fact, it was a good experience that helped me to get rid of feeling afraid to stand in front of others and speak. When all the students and the teacher clapped their hands and looked at me with a peaceful smile, that made me feel happy and believe in myself and that I can speak in English and others can understand what I was saying.

Kefaya Hassan Hassan is originally from Yemen.

The Embarrassment

JIANREN LIN, APPLE VALLEY

A few days ago, I drove to work. I parked my car on level five of the parking ramp and went down the stairs. Suddenly, I found an iPhone on floor. I looked around and nobody was there. So, I picked up the iPhone. It was time for me to work, and I didn't know how to contact the owner. I just handed it over to the airport information station. Then, the clerk of the information station asked me where I worked and where I picked it up. Suddenly, the iPhone started ringing. I heard the anxiety in the caller's voice. He spoke fast so I didn't quite understand what he said. I felt embarrassed about that, but I knew that the guy was anxious to get back his iPhone. Then, I gave the iPhone to the airport clerk to give information where to get his phone. After one minute, he hung up the iPhone. The clerk said the iPhone owner said, "Thank you very much!" He also told the clerk he was very lucky that a good person had found it and returned it to him. I heard that and I was I happy too.

Jianren Lin is originally from China.

Believe in Myself

HERLINDA P., ST. PAUL

I am from Mexico, I am living in the USA, and now I am learning a new language. It's complicated. I am not young enough to learn fast. I tried to get back the time lost and put more attention on everything I hear in English, like when I am watching TV, I use subtitles. I hope I advance and soon have fluent conversation with anybody. And to demonstrate to myself it wasn't too difficult, it just was a question of time and dedication. I can make it easy, less complicated, and launch a new life.

My new world just started. I have American friends who make me feel more confident today. They have tolerance, and try to help my pronunciation. I am grateful to meet with friendly people who help.

I always asked for an interpreter for my children's conference at school, but this year, I preferred to do it alone. The dentist appointment was also more clear.

I heard and understood what the dentist said mostly. I know I'll have a long path to follow, but the key is NEVER QUIT AGAIN.

Herlinda P. is originally from Mexico.

Education

JOSE RAMIREZ, NORTHFIELD

I'm from Mexico. I left home when I was 15 years old. It took me a couple months before I arrived here in Minnesota. I work in construction. It is a hard job. The other day I stop working for few minutes and I started thinking about my education. I would like to learn more English so I can have more opportunities. I started night school last week!

Jose Ramirez is originally from Mexico.

Born in Somalia

ALI SALAH, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Ali. I was born in Somalia, and I lived and grew up in Mogadishu City. I completed my studies in Mogadishu. After that I ran away to Kenya Kakuma refugee camp. Then I came to the USA because my home country was not at peace.

I lived in Minneapolis. I have a good neighborhood. The U.S. is good, but the first time was difficult because I did not know how to speak the English language. I decided to go to school and started to learn English, because language is key.

The first day in my school it was summer. I took six weeks, then it closed. I needed another school. Luckily I found Open Door Northside Learning Center, so I started August 13, 2014. I got better teachers and more hours and many subjects, but English was difficult. Sometimes I confuse pronunciations. Usually I understand but I cannot repeat very well. It's hard because one word has more meanings and similar words.

I participated in Journeys book last year.

Ali Salah is originally from Somalia.

Zam Zam Hassan is originally from Somalia.

Learn English

ASHA ABDULLAHI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Asha Abdullahi and I'm from Mogadishu, Somalia. I have been here for five years. Minnesota is beautiful and wonderful. In Minnesota we have many opportunities for learning. English is very important because you can't get many jobs and people can't understand you without it. Learning takes place inside and outside the classroom. The English language is difficult when it is your next language. However if you try, you will learn it.

Asha Abdullahi is originally from Somalia.

Happy

ASHO SAMATAR, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was in Somalia I lived with my family. I felt happy. When I came to America I had to speak English, but I didn't know how. Right now I feel better speaking English.

Asho Samatar is originally from Somalia.

The First Day I Decided to Learn English

ZAM ZAM HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

It was one early morning when I went to ESL school. It was my first time. I met with a very kind teacher and he asked me if I went to school before. He asked me if I knew how to read and write. My answer was no. Then he told me that I will do a test to see my skills in English. I did the test and after checking he told me I would be starting in level one.

The next morning he showed me my class and he introduced me to the rest of the students. They were from different backgrounds and also countries. They spoke different languages and it was so good to know different cultures. That made me so happy.

English is the Language

IGNACIO MORRONDO, CRYSTAL

To learn a new language is important, and if that new language is English, it is probably the best choice. I have been trying to learn English since I was a child. After more than 30 years, it was impossible for me. The best (and for me the last) way to learn a language is to live in a country where that language is the official one. Recently, I had the opportunity to learn and improve my English because I am living in the U.S.

All around my new life is plenty of English words. There are many ways that my everyday life is immersed in English: shopping, business, and trips. I have American friends and I want to know more about them, and, of course, the only way is to listen and learn with them.

My daughters are also a good influence too because they are learning English quicker than me in elementary school. They have good teachers who are interested in my daughters' education. My daughters and I exchange a lot of information about our new knowledge and about what we are learning. We read a lot of new books that we have located in libraries or purchased in stores.

My biggest improvement in English language learning has come from the Adult Academic Program where I go every morning. I have come back to school! It's something that I had forgotten. The teachers, rooms, schedules, and classmates are all there again. It is a new world in which I have been immersed in for the last months. I am so grateful for this and I am trying to do my best. Here I have found the best English education I have ever received. My English is widely improving because of these experiences. However, the most important thing is that I am learning English because I am living in English.

Ignacio Morrondo is originally from Spain.

Language

YES TELILA, APPLE VALLEY

When I came to the US I understood how important it was to learn the language. When I needed to go somewhere I needed someone to translate for immigration, driver's license, job application, and to register for school. I was nervous. I was driving back home but when I took the test I failed three times because of language. I was scared to start a job too. My families are very kind. They gave me advice. They told me most people are nervous for first time when you start school, a job, or take a test. To communicate with co-workers, you will need to improve your language and you will be happy too.

Yes Telila is 29 and originally from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Education is Our Future

PAW WAH, ST. PAUL

My name is Pay May Wah. I was born in Burma in 1993. I have one brother and two sisters. In 2010 my family arrived in the USA, but my brother stayed in the camp because he got married and wanted to stay with his wife there. When I arrived in the U.S. I was 16 years old. My first state was Georgia. I went to school through the tenth grade, then I got married. I moved to Minnesota because my husband lived there. I gave birth to our daughter, Paw Moo Ku. In 2014 I gave birth to our son, La Moo Kaw Ku. They are my heart and my everything. I have a plan for my children's future. I don't want them to be like me, because I got married too early and lost my chance for an education. I don't want them to lose their chance for education, like their mother did. My children are my future and my hope. When they grow up they have to improve their education and have a plan for their future. I am so happy to tell my story. God Bless you with a long, happy life.

Paw Wah is 23 and originally from Burma.

Going to School

MUETAH, WORTHINGTON

I like to go to school. My name is Mue Tah and I'm 44 years old. I go to school with my daughter because the

school has childcare. My daughter stays at childcare while I study.

Going to school is the best way for us to learn to read and write English. The first time when we learned English, it was too hard for us. But when we continued to go to school it got easier. It's not too hard anymore. And now we can read, write, and speak English a little.

We only go to school three days a week. It is on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. The class starts at 10:15 to 11:45. We study one and a half hours a day. It's long to study but our English is improving because the teachers are nice and teaching very well.

So if we continue to go to school to pass and get a diploma, then we can read, write, and speak English well.

Mue Tah is 44 and originally from Burma.

A Very Different Life

ELMER VELASCO MENDOZA, WORTHINGTON

It's a very different life in this country. My name is Elmer. I'm 22 years old. I came to the USA on April 7, 2016 and started to study English in July. Now I attend school three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Living in the U.S. is exciting. I like the parks and lakes of Worthington, Minnesota.

It is very nice in the United States but the difficult thing is I don't always understand the language. English is very difficult.

Elmer Velasco Mendoza is 22 and originally from El

Salvador.

The Second Time

PEDRO GIL, MINNEAPOLIS

Today is the second time that I will write my story in the Journeys book. I am really happy because I think I am improving my English. I spent many years trying to

learn how to speak other languages like English. My family is proud of me because I speak English, and I enjoy this part of my life. Now I can develop in my job in a better way because I understand when people talk to me and when they need something from me. In addition, I bless God because he permits that I live in this country. "Everything is in your hands." I hope to go back to my country. I don't know when, but I hope to do this soon. Thanks for listening to me and again thanks to my teachers for teaching me how to speak English.

Pedro Gil is 38 and originally from Mexico.

English is Hard

MOHAMED WEHLIYE, LAKEVILLE

I don't have enough time to study because I have family. They need me, so I don't know what to do. I know English is not easy to learn, but I will try it. I like to speak everyday when I have time. I am better after 15 weeks in school. My teacher helps me a lot. Also I know it is an important thing to do. One day i will finish learning to writing and speaking English.

Mohamed Wehliye is 35 and originally from Moqadushu, Wardhiigley, Somalia.

My First Step in Minnesota

ELIZABETH HTOO, WORTHINGTON

I was born in Burma in a small village. When I was ten years old I moved to a Thailand refugee camp with my parents. I went to school in the refugee camp a few years and then I got married early when I was in middle school. In 2010 my family had the opportunity to move to the United States. My husband and I decided to move to St. Paul, Minnesota. Everything was new for my family, and it was difficult to do anything. I was very upset and wanted to move back to Thailand. One month later, I started going to school four hours a day, five days a week. Childcare took care of my kids every day when I was in school. At that time I studied hard and went to school everyday to improve my English, how to speak, read, write, and listen in English. I had a problem memorizing the English I was learning

during class. I want to speak English fluently and help my family and my neighbors by translating the English to the Karen language. Now I've moved to southern Minnesota and I continue to study English.

Elizabeth Htoo is 31 and originally from Myanmar (Burma).

My Country

ABDIRAHMAN ADEN, BURNSVILLE

What language do you speak? I can speak English, Arabic, and Somali perfectly. I learned English when I was a child. I started when I was 15 years old.

Challenge and Change

ANONYMOUS, BROOKLYN PARK

When I came to the USA I did not speak well. It was hard for me to work. My uncle put me in English class for three months. Then, I started to learn some words. I began to work as a baby-sitter. The baby I sat for told me to "give me wet towel." I didn't know what that meant. I only know "wait for me" she kept telling me I need "wait" towel. After that, she went to the bathroom to put the towel on the sink. She made it and showed me what wet meant. After that, I began to learn more words and change my life. Reading and writing is a key for knowledge.

English in America

ALFREDO CASTELLANOS, EAGAN

I'm proud to live in this country. One day I decided to move to USA. In my county it is not really hard to find a job, but it is a little difficult. I came here many years ago, without any idea about the language. My cousin was supposed to help me to find a job, but he never did because he doesn't speak English. I was too tired asking everyone to help me. Some people are very rude to you. They discriminate against you. They think people without English shouldn't live here. One day I dream if I spoke English I could get a better job and I could help others in the same situation.

I've been in English program for few years now and my life is a complete change. I can now communicate in English and I can help others. I found a better job

too.

I hope my dreams come true, because I extend my capacity to learn new things every day as well. Maybe some day I could be a teacher. Who knows?

My Languages

ANISA OSMAN, BLOOMINGTON

I speak three languages: Somali, Arabic, and English. I speak Somali with my parents and Somali people. I speak Arabic with my Arabic friends. I also speak a mix of Somali and Arabic with my sisters and brothers. I speak English with my classmates. I learned Somali from my parents when I was young. I learned Arabic and English at school. Learning and speaking three languages is more helpful.

This Is My History About the U.S.

ASLI DAYUR, MINNETONKA

I would like to learn or to speak English and pronounce. When I came to the USA, I didn't know how to understand people. When I came to the USA, I was scared and cold. And I was so hungry, that I ate quickly. I came with my big brother. We went to my father's house in Eden Prairie. I started going to an adult school. Then, I moved to St. Paul. After that, I started a new job. I bought a new car. Now I live in Minneapolis, I learn in an English class at Adult Options in Education in Hopkins. I would like to say thanks to my teacher. And I want to learn more in class, English reading and writing.

Coming From

AZIEB REDDA, ST. PAUL

My name is Azieb. I came from Eritrea with my husband on June 7th, 2016. It is East Africa. I started English class in Neighborhood House four months ago. I am continuing English class, sometimes computer class. I appreciate my teacher, Kristen, because I know how to speak English. My mother's language is Tigrigna. The first time I saw snow was in Minnesota. I was amazed at that time. I like Minnesota.

My English

EDGAR CASTANON, RICHFIELD

Hello, I live in Minneapolis for eight years. I like this state, it's very nice. I like snow and the cold a little, and the lakes are beautiful. I like the seasons of the year, they are very beautiful. I speak Spanish because I from for Mexico. I like to learn English, it's complicated but I like it. I like going to study, a lot.

Language

ILYAS HADDAD, BLOOMINGTON

I speak one language. I have spoken Arabic since I was born. I learned this language from my parents and at school. This language become the common language we spoke all the time. At school, we learned another language. It was English. We studied it one hour every week. So we didn't learn it very well. I have continued to speak Arabic until this time. I think learning a language isn't easy for adults. Learning a language early will be easier to stick in one's mind and it does not forget easily. So, learning at a young age is easier than learning at an old age. It's easier for children to learn a new language.

My Language

KAFIYO MOHAMED, BURNSVILLE

I speak two languages. My first languages is Somali. My second language is English. My first language I started when I was young. My mom taught me and I took classes when I was young. My second language is English. I started English when I came to the United States. I watched TV to learn English. Now I take a class to learn English. I want to improve my English. That is why I take the English class.

Two Languages

MULKI MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I learned Somali and a little English, but I only learned a little English when I was child. I learned English when I came to America. I like to speak more English, English and many other languages. I think learning a language isn't easy for adults. For kids it is easier because they are young and fresh.

Untitled

OLGA VELASQUEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Olga. I came to the United States in 2001. I didn't know any English so it was hard for me to communicate with other people. In 2003 I began going to English school. Now I understand and speak English. I love this country because they have a lot of opportunities.

My English Class

PRASANTHI BARLA, EDEN PRAIRIE

I remember the first time I rode a bicycle to find the address of HTC college to learn English. I met students from many countries in my class. Every Tuesday we have a quiz that helps me to learn new words. I spoke little English, but I wanted to learn more.

We had a Thanksgiving party in my class and we had foods from many countries. Every student came to school with a food dish from their country. I enjoyed that party! I am thankful for my teachers. I am happy to be in the English class because now I can speak English better. My teacher is so funny and nice to every student. He makes us comfortable, relaxed and he talks with everyone in class

My Education

SENAIT BERHANE, HOPKINS

My name is Senait Berhane. I was born in Eritrea. I went to school in Eritrea for the most of the time, while learning in Tigrinya. In my home town, I went to school in my language three hours a day. When I came home, no one checked my work or encouraged me in my studies. My parents asked me to do cooking and cleaning, but did not ask me to do my homework, so I did not learn very much. I got married and my husband brought me here to the United States. I started school in 2008. I stopped because it was too hard for me. Then I came back in 2016 because I wanted to improve. Now I feel very good because I know a little bit more thanks to my teachers.

Language

SUADO IBRAHIM, BLOOMINGTON

I speak Somali and English languages. I speak Somali at home with my family and I speak English at work with my coworkers. I started learning English when I was 16 years old in a private school for two years. Then I came to America and I continued to learn English and communicate with all the people and my family. Learning English helps me a lot and I like it.

About My Languages

UBAH MOHAMED, BURNSVILLE

I speak three languages: Somali, Kiswahili, and English. I speak Somali with Somali people. I learned Somali because I grew up with it when I was young. I speak English. I learned it at school and work. I speak Kiswahili. I learned it with friends and the people I that live in Kenya. Learning a language is not easy for adult because it is hard to learn languages. In my opinion, it is good to learn a language when you are young.

English Second Language

VITALII FARTUSHNYI, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Every day, I go to class for studying English as a second language. I remember my first time at school. I was nervous because I didn't understand what they wanted from me. When someone said to me, "You will be testing," my heart began to beat faster and my hands started to shake, this is the first time in the U.S. I was testing, but it's not as scary as I thought.

Knowledge of language helps me to communicate with other people: when I go to the store to buy food, to gas station for buying gas, and to help my kids with homework.

I like my school. Teachers help me learn new words, understand meanings, pronunciation, and spelling. They help me improve my English and achieve my goal. My aim is to go to college. I like working with computers and I hope, after college, to find a good job in this industry.

English in America

WALTER ALVARADO, APPLE VALLEY

My name is Walter and I'm from Ecuador. It was almost six years ago in February when my dad decided to bring me to United States of America. That was a big step for me. We knew that it would be a different life, different culture and most of all, a different language. The language was the biggest challenge for me.

I learned English in my country, but I didn't use it all the time because we speak Spanish.

I remember the first day here in the U.S. that the first person who talked to me in English was the border officer. American English is very different from the English that I learned. I asked him to talk to me a little slowly to understand what he said. Everyone had told me that the English in the U.S is different than what you learn in school.

Now I understand more than I did the first day. I attribute it to my teacher in the Adult Education Center in Apple Valley. Thank you all from deep in my heart.

My Languages

YAHYA ADAM, BLOOMINGTON

I speak five different languages and I understand them perfectly. I have lived in different countries so I speak Oromo, (my mother tongue) Swahili, Amharic, Arabic, and English. I learned two of them when I was born in my country of Ethiopia. I learned the Arabic language in madrasa (Islamic school), I learned Swahili in Kenya when I was 18 years old. I learned English at metro south Adult school in the United States of America. I like all those languages.

School is Important

FADUMO ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

I like my school and my teacher Katy. I like to learn English. It will help me and my child. I want to learn more grammar. Also I like to study and learn new things. I like my school.

Fadumo Ali is 23 and originally from Somalia.

About My School

FATMA HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

School is important. I was always interested in coming to School to learn English very well. My future goal is to become a Teacher some day. School is important and the best place to be. My School is very good.

Fatma Hassan is 48 and originally from Somalia.

School

ABDIKANI GURE, MINNEAPOLIS

It's very important to go to school everyday. It is important because the school helps you understand and communicate better with other people. If you don't go to school you may never reach your goal and you will always need to get help from other people. I like it when people who have education give me some advice or ideas, I like to be independent, so I go to school every day to improve my English.

Abdikani Gure is 40 and originally from Somalia Hargeisa.

My Languages

HIDAYA ALI, BLOOMINGTON

I speak three languages. My first language is Somali and a little Arabic. When I was 12 years old, I learned Arabic. I understand some Arabic, so that I speak three languages.

Spanish and English

JORGE AMARO, RICHFIELD

I speak Spanish and a little English. I speak Spanish with my friend that speak Spanish and my family from Mexico. I speak English in school and with my family in the United States and other people in this country. I learned Spanish when I was a child; my mom and dad taught me. Now, I'm learning English in this country. I studied English in my country, but I didn't learn much. It is hard for me to learn languages and

maybe for other adults it is the same. For children I think it is easy to learn other languages. I think that it is more difficult for adults to learn languages because we are accustomed to speaking our language. When the people live in different country and people speak other language is very important to learn your language. To learn languages is good for us.

Two Languages

ELIZABETH CORTEZ, BLOOMINGTON

I speak Spanish and English. When I was a child, I went to school to learn Spanish. My family spoke Spanish at home. When I came to the United States, I learned English. I started school, but it is difficult for adults to learn English. For kids it is easier. I think for me it is very difficult to learn English, but I try to speak English in the school.

Learning While Teaching

MON CHAN, SAINT PAUL

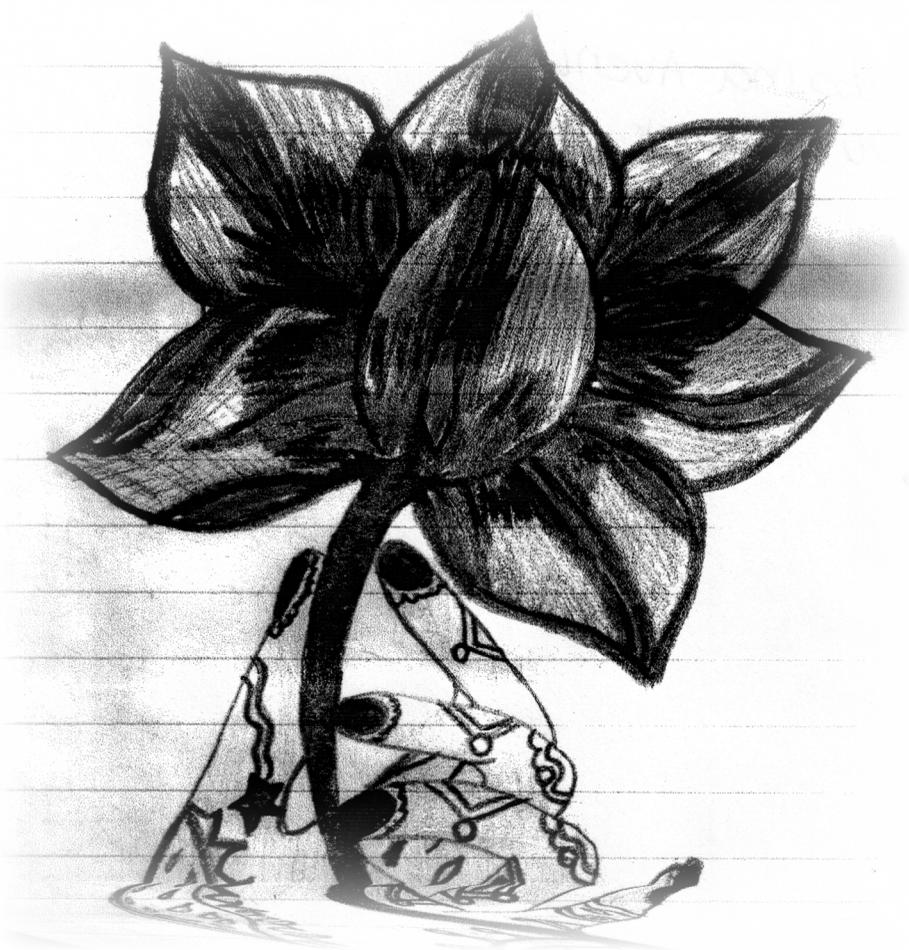
I was teaching Mon, which is my native language, 12 years ago in my village. We had about ten teachers for the children. We were teaching our first language. We taught only one month. We learned from the kids and they learned from us: how to respect, smile, and honor, in addition to learning the language. At night we described to each other what we had learned that day.

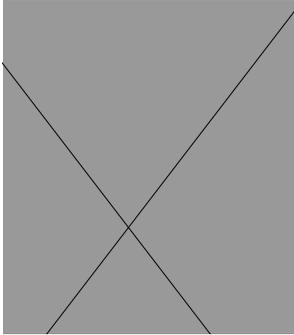
About Languages

MARIA MAGALI PEREZ GARCIA, BLOOMINGTON

I am Maria. I speak Spanish. I speak with my family. I learned my language in Mexico. At school, for me, it was easier to learn to speak Spanish, because all people speak Spanish. There are not different languages in my country. Now I learn English at school in Metro South for one year

SACRIFICE & CHANGE





Born in Ethiopia, **Kefaya Hassan** moved to Yemen with her family when she was four years old. She and some members of her family came to Minneapolis eight years ago as a refugee. Besides English, Kefaya also speaks Arabic, Somali, and Oromo; she often writes her diary in Arabic. She currently works as a patient access representative while studying at Volunteers of America Adult High School and St. Paul Technical College. Kefaya hopes to become a social worker.

A New Start

MELANIE DHAMAR, BLAINE

I'm a perfectionist, and I'm competitive. Growing up my mom worked all day, and I was responsible for myself. Before my mom and I came to the United States, my mom married. A month after that she and I arrived in the United States. I saw it every day, but I had never looked at my mom as this woman that cooked, cleaned the house, and made lunch for her husband. Life with my mom was difficult. The synchronization and adaptation to a new life created a lot of discussion between us.

But, with the passing of time, we both adapted to and accepted each other. The other challenge was my stepfather. For 15 years it was just my mom and I vs. the world. The first time I saw him was strange, but he is a good person, and I think he is the best person for my mother. He helped my mom and I when my grandfather died. That time was very difficult because my grandfather had stayed in Mexico when I came to the United States. I had the idea that I would return to Mexico and see him again. I believe my mom thought the same thing during those difficult times when she was pregnant. She went through a depression after the death of my grandfather. Both of us could not return to Mexico because of our immigration status. We were not allowed to, so we missed the funeral of my grandfather. I don't think we will forget that, yet we will live with it. In conclusion, living in the USA has been the worst and the best decision that I have made.

Melanie Dhamar is 17 and originally from Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico.

My Personal History

BURHAN FARAH, SHAKOPEE

My name is Burhan, living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was born and grew up in Mogadishu Somalia. Our family is eight. My father died when I was little. My mother took responsibility at that time. I have three sisters and three brothers, and my family had a good life. Then the Somali government collapsed in 1991. After that, the civil war started and caused us to flee our beautiful country. That was a push factor, and we decided to get a better life than staying there. My mother helped us throughout all our journey, I and my brothers and sisters travelled to Kenya Nairobi. We had a difficult life to live in Nairobi: the weather and the languages that they spoke and also a different culture to adopt in this new place. We haven't had a good life like we had when we were in our country. My mother tried to get a visa to reunite in the United States of America. Unfortunately, they separated us. I'm the only one who got the visa. When I came to the United States of America, I got a good education and worked to earn money, so that was the pull factor to come to the U.S.

Burhan Farah is 23 and originally from Somalia.

My Plan

DOVIETHOLL, SAUK RAPIDS

My plan

To run away and never come back

To run away and start new

To live alone

To never love again

My plan

To be where no one cares

To be in a place of independence

To be anywhere but here

My plan

To not be controlled

To not rely on another

To be that one person no one knows

My plan

To make money and run

To leave behind everything and anyone

I once loved or cared for

To one day die and no one knows

Dovie Tholl is 18 and originally from USA

Cambodians' Lives in Khmer Rouge Regime

SOPHEAP KEO, FARMINGTON

Cambodia is a small country in Asia. It is close to Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. Four decades ago, Cambodia was in a civil war between the Khmer Rouge party and the Khmer Republican party.

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge party won the war. It controlled the whole country. One day after that, the Khmer Rouge regime became a small country that was in darkness and a prison that had no walls. The Khmer Rouge leader declared that all people living in the city must get out of the town in only three days. Then they could come back home later. The announcements were lies. No one could come to the city again. From those days, Cambodians' lives began to be difficult and very sad. The country had no schools, money, markets, hospitals, and transportation, etc.

Men, women, youth, and children (minimum age of seven) were forced to work harder and harder. They didn't have enough food, clothes (they wore only black color), no medicines. Some people died, some were killed, and some were sick.

On January 7, 1979, the Khmer Rouge regime fell down. Cambodians died—almost 4 million, and left was about 1 million. Of those people, most were sick, some women (no husbands, no kids), and some children (no parents). They were very poor and sad, and that included my family.

Cambodians felt very much suffering and hated that situation. We suggest Cambodian leaders and the world leaders don't lead countries like the

Khmer Rouge did. If we have good leaders, laws, and rules, the countries will grow up and be peaceful for all lives.

Sopheap Keo is originally from Cambodia.

What I Brought

AH THAO, ST. PAUL

I came to Minnesota on September 25, 2004. I packed three suitcases and one carry-on. I came with my family. I packed clothes, many CDs, statues, jewelry, pictures, and summer clothes. I left behind my father.

My parents' pictures were important. My jewelry was important because my husband made the necklace for me. I missed my home country. It was important because in my home country I played, I did not think. When I went to Minnesota, it was difficult to find places the first time there. I felt happy and felt sad. I went to the Neighborhood House. It was the first time I was in a class. It was my first time to speak English.

I will be happy.

Ah Thao is originally from Hmong.

My Children

LUCIA SCOTT, MINNEAPOLIS

My children are very cheerful. For example, they like people. They like going to school and learning too. They like playing, cooking, and reading. My girls do not live in America. I miss cooking with my girls. They miss me too. We miss each other's foods, and I miss having fun cooking with my girls.

Lucia Scott is originally from Liberia.

My Life in Minneapolis

MARIA GONZALEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Maria Gonzalez. I was born in Mexico City. I came to Minnesota in 2001 with my sister. We

got low pay in my country. It was very hard for me to leave my family, but I could get more money in Minneapolis. My first job was screen-printing t-shirts and other clothing. The pay was much better than in my country, so I could help my family. My sister still works in customer service. I worked 13 years in this factory, where I met my husband.

We have lived together for eight years. My husband has a new job. He now works in a factory painting wooden doors. He is a perfect husband. We have a son who is two years old. His name is Alexander. He was born in Minneapolis, and he is adorable.

I like Minneapolis. Life is good here, but I still miss my family in Mexico. My mother lives in Mexico City. My parents were born in San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato. My father died in 2015, only one year ago. My mother is lucky because she has three sons and six daughters to help her. Some day I would love to take my husband and Alexander back home to visit all of them.

Maria Gonzalez is originally from Mexico.

Moving to Minnesota

PRASANNA LAKKOJU, EDEN PRAIRIE

Before moving to Minnesota, we lived in San Antonio. We came from India to San Antonio through TCS in February 2009. My husband worked through TCS in San Antonio he had H1 visa and I have a H4 visa. In 2011 TCS extended the H1 visa 2013. At that time my husband moved to another company but I stopped him because I was worried that moving to another company was not safe. Because at TCS he had full-time but if he moved to another company he would be a contractor. A contractor job wouldn't be permanent, the projects would be only three months or six months or one year if they weren't extended. Or if a contract was not available we would have to search for another job. If the job wasn't in same place we would have to move to another town. I thought moving here and there would be difficult for us. Also San Antonio climate was good, and I didn't want to miss that climate, so I told my husband not to move.

He listened to me and stayed at TCS until 2015. In 2015 TCS had layoffs so he needed to move to another company. He started searching for a job and found one in Minnesota. We broke the lease, sold the things, and moved from San Antonio to Minnesota. I like that in Minnesota education is better than in San Antonio. And I like the beauty of nature when fall colors come in Minnesota. However, I don't like the weather in winter because it's too cold and we can't go out frequently.

Prasanna Lakkoju is originally from Minneapolis.

My Story

NURIYA TUCHA, MINNEAPOLIS

Ethiopia was not safe, so I went to Nairobi with my three children and my husband as a refugee. I am crying. Three years in Nairobi. Now my husband, I miss very much. He is still in Nairobi. My three children and I are in Minneapolis. We came in December 2015. I don't know if my husband can come here.

Nuriya Tucha is originally from Oromia.

My Personal Migration Story

AMINA W., MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Amina and I was born in Somalia in 1982. I was living with my family. We had a good life. My father was working. I and my siblings went school. My mother stayed home to take care of the children and house.

Our life suddenly changed when the civil war started. There was no safe place to live. There were no jobs and there was no school. The people fighting destroyed the city. The people that lived in the city fled. My family became separated. I ended up in Kenya with relatives. We went to the refugee camp. The life in a refugee camp was terrible. We couldn't find enough food or water. In the refugee, we lived in tent that was made out of wool sticks and leaflets. Each year tents would catch on fire three or two

times a year.

After living a couple years in the refugee camp, we moved to Nairobi, Kenya. We were able to find work. The life was better than before but the biggest problem we had was the police. The police would stop us because we didn't have the documents. They asked us for money and if didn't have it they sent us to jail. After many years living in Nairobi, we moved to America with my relatives. We still struggle with life in America, but we are hoping to reach our goals.

Amina W. is originally from Somalia.

History About My Home Country

FATUMA SALAD, MINNEAPOLIS

I am a 30-year-old Somali lady. I was born in Somalia, but when I was seven years old, we fled from our country. I was with my parents, my brothers, and sisters. We were seven people. My elder brother was killed in 1992. Two people shot him and he died. At that time, the civil war was going on in Somalia. We all felt bad, and we cried a lot.

Then we came to the border of Kenya. The UNHCR really assisted us. They gave us shelter, food, support, and medical assistance. We really appreciated them.

I started school and learned up to the eighth grade. Then in 2002, I married, and in 2003, I had my first baby. Then I got a job at Hagadera Hospital and was working as an assistant nurse.

In the year 2008, I got resettlement to the United States of America. It took a long time. We waited almost six years. In 2014, I got my flight to the U.S. That day, I was very excited, but when I came here, things were a little bit hard for me because of a new country, new weather, and the snow. But now, I'm okay.

When I remember my home country, I think it's the best and most beautiful country. My dream is to one day go back and visit my parents, my brothers and sisters. Insha Allah.

Fatuma Salad is originally from Somalia.

The Days in Africa

FAWZIA OSMAN, APPLE VALLEY

I was born in Mogadishu. The civil war started in 1991. On that day I was in the school. I remember I heard bombing and gunfire. All the children in school ran out. Everybody goes where they can run. The teachers were all from Egypt. When they heard the bombing they didn't know where to go. They ran to where they lived at the time.

My sister and I were at the same school. We ran and ran. There were no buses. At that time we were scared and crying. Finally we had walked home. My mom and uncle were just leaving to go find us when we got home. Everybody was scared. We got no sleep and it was a long night.

Early the next morning my family and I walked together outside the city. We traveled for three weeks. After that we were in Kenya, and then nine years later we came to the United States.

Fawzia Osman is originally from Somalia.

My Story

RODA AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Roda. I am Somali but I came from Ethiopia. October 17, 2016, I came into America. My parents live in Ethiopia. I am happy but I miss my parents.

Roda Ahmed is originally from Somalia.

My Childhood

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was a child, four years old, my mother died. It was too sad. I have three brothers, the youngest was only 9 days old when my mother died. When I was six years old my father died too. It was very sad. I was a little child, but I had no family. Now, I am

a mom. I have five children. I have a big family. Still, I miss my brothers. One day I will see my brothers again.

Sadiyo Hassan is originally from Somalia.

My Journey

SOFIA SAHAL, MINNEAPOLIS

I came to the USA in 1996. It took a long time to get to the USA. I left my family in Africa. I came to the USA with my auntie. I left my mom, my father, and my brother in Somalia. I was so young during that time. When I came to the USA it was difficult to do everything because the country I came from and the USA are different. After that, I went to school to learn English. Then I got a job. I was making good money during that time. I started to send money to support my family. Finally, my mom arrived in the USA. I was so happy because I missed her.

My dad passed away in 2007. That was the saddest moment of my life. When my brother called me and said that dad has passed away, my heart dropped a little because I wasn't expecting to hear that. I tried to avoid crying because of my pregnancy, but I couldn't stop because I was filled with pain. I still remember my dad. He was the best father I know.

Finally, I got married to my husband. We have three lovely boys. Right now I feel happy because I live with my family.

In 2002, my mom came to the USA. She was healthy and I was 9 months pregnant. Two weeks later, my baby boy was born on April 13. We were happy. In 2012, my mom was diagnosed with lung cancer. I was again devastated.

Sofia Sahal is originally from Somalia.

My Childhood

KOKOU GBADEGBENYO, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was a child, I was a boy who liked to play soccer with friends, and I had school friends. It was very nice for me all the time. But now it is very different because when I became an adult everything

changed. Also coming to the U.S. immediately changed my life. I didn't have friends here. I had to go every day to my job and to school. So my life changed.

Kokou Gbadegbenyo is originally from Togo.

Dream Come True

PHUOC TA, ST. PAUL

My name is Phuoc. I am Vietnamese. I was born and grew up in an area far from the city. This is a deserted countryside and dull. There are bamboo village and winding river makes a beautiful picture. Life there is too hard because it is always causing flood and devastated by war. My family had to move so many place to hide. Life there was very difficult. We don't have enough food to eat and not enough cloths to wear. Especially about education and healthcare.

My father died because my family did not have enough money for treatment for him. I was very frustration about my country. Perhaps I would never forgotten the images my childhood memories. Since then, I always dreamed that if my family was living in a country with a developed economy, the health insurance system better is so happy for everyone.

And today, I am so grateful that I'm here in United States of America. A country that has always focused on education and health care. Here I have the help of everyone, especially the Vietnamese Social Services of Minnesota: the teachers are very friendly and enthusiastic. They teach me every word, every sentence in English and always concerned about the health of the people. I will try to learn and realize the dream of me. I will be the good citizens of society.

Phuoc Ta is originally from Vietnam.

No More Tears

IBIOLOLA KOUGBLENOU, ST. PAUL

My name is Ibilola, which means joyful in my language. I am from Benin in West Africa. I had some family problems, so I decided to come to the U.S. for a few months. I was pregnant and my lovely brother

thought this trip to America would be the safest place for me. He had some friends in Minnesota. Three days after I arrived in Minnesota on April 4, 2016, my brother died. I had a terrible depression while pregnant. Four months later, my daughter was born. Her birth made me hopeful.

I have two masters degrees, one in Nutrition and the other in Food Science. However, in the U.S. I have not been able to work. I have been waiting for one year for my work permit. I think everything will be right for me soon. I have had some awful moments since being here, because the U.S. is not like Africa. Here, everyone is so busy and they don't have time to help you for a long time. I just stay at home most of the time and I am very sad because in my country I was very active. I want to study further, but cannot because I don't have childcare for my daughter. Therefore, I attend a family literacy class at the Hubbs Center, where both my daughter and I can be in school. I believe in God and trust all will be well soon. My goals now are to learn more English, pass the GRE, get a PhD and get a very good job.

Ibiolola Kougblenou is 30 and originally from Benin.

My Life of Burman

ANONYMOUS, ST. PAUL

Information about my life

I was born in April 1995 in Burma. I am 21 year old. When I was five years old I went to school. My village name is K, lo. My village was very beautiful but when in 1997 the Burma soldier come to the my village also burned my village. After the Burma soldiers come to be burned the village the people moved to another place. Some people moved to another village. Some people moved to the Thailand refugee camp. On 2005 my family moved to Thailand too. They called the Thailand Karenni Refugee camp #2. I started again school here. It is Musuria school. I learning about the Karenni, Myanmar, and English. On April 5, 2015 I came to USA. I did not lived in another state. I am live in St. Paul Minnesota. I live two year here.

That is the people moved to Thailand Refugee camp, after the Myanmar soldier coming the Village.

My Story in the Thailand

ANONYMOUS, ST. PAUL

Information about my life

My name is Pa Lae Gay. I was born in May 1995. I was born Ta Mu Taw Burma. I lived in the Burma 12 years. I went to Thailand in 2009. I have three brothers and three sisters. I moved to Thailand Mae La Oo Refugee Camp. I lived in the new place six years. I went to high school grade 10. I went to the U.S. after five years. I came to the U.S. in 2014 on December 10 at 8:30 p.m. I live in St. Paul. I go to GAP school for two years. I speak Karen and English. When I lived in Thailand I know a little bit, but now I learn a lot of English. I came to the U.S. with two sisters and one brother.

Changes in My Life

MEE MEE, ST. PAUL

My name is Mee Mee. I am 34 years old. I am from Burma. I got married when I was 20 years old. My two daughters were born in Burma. We moved to a Malaysia refugee camp only 45 days after my youngest daughter was born. I had a third daughter in Malaysia. We lived in Malaysia for five years. Then we moved to Minnesota. On April 15, 2014 my oldest daughter had a baby in Minnesota at St. John's Hospital, so now I have three daughters and one granddaughter. We have been in Minnesota for two and a half years. Everything has changed, for the better. We bought our own house. Thank you very much to the United States for helping my family. We appreciate you so much.

Mee Mee is 34 and originally from Burma.

My Worst Decision

FABIOLA

My name is Fabiola and I'm 21 years old. I was born

in El Salvador where I lived with my Mom and Dad. When my Dad was drinking too much, he would get physically abusive with my mom. My mom and I left home when this happened and went to live with relatives.

When my Dad sobered up, he would apologize and we would move back with him again. This happened four or five times when I was ages one to five. I felt like my mom and dad didn't pay attention to me, because they were so involved in their own relationship.

My country was so poor but my mom worked hard to give me the necessary things. When I was nine years old somebody killed my dad with 13 bullets. That was so hard for me.

I continued growing and met a boyfriend when I was 15. He was involved in crime and ended up in jail. I have a daughter with him. He had no interest in our daughter but only wanted me. I could not visit him in jail because I was only 16.

When I broke up with him, I made the decision to come to the USA because he threatened to kill me. He said, "If I can't have you, nobody can have you!" My daughter's birth changed everything. I could not bring my daughter because I came illegally and it was not safe for her. My mother is now caring for her.

I always think this was my worst decision because I'm not watching my daughter grow up and I don't know when I will get to see her again. I can't go there and she can't come here because it is not safe. Now I have not seen her for three years.

This is the most painful thing a mother can feel; it is an inexplicable pain. I am thankful to God because He has helped me a lot.

Fabiola is 21 and originally from El Salvador.

My Family

MARIA SORTO, WORTHINGTON

I am from El Salvador. I am the mom of four children, one girl and three boys. My daughter is the oldest of the four. She is 18 years old. My other three children are eight, four and two. I arrived in this country

in 2005 with much sacrifice of having to leave my daughter and my parents. It was very sad to have to leave them without knowing when I would come back or embrace them again. It has been 11 years of not seeing them and that is the saddest thing for me.

Maria Sorto is 35 and originally from El Salvador.

I Hate Snow

BARECHA LEMESSA, MINNEAPOLIS

I hate snow because I didn't see snow before. There is only rain in my country of Ethiopia. One day I went somewhere with my sister. We were walking, and snow started. My sister said "Let's go back home," and I said "No, keep on walking." It was very dangerous. We arrived safely, but we had to walk back home. There was snow on the sidewalk, and it was hard to walk. It took a long time, but we arrived home. It hard to be outside when there is snow. I don't like snow.

Barecha Lemessa is 20 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Life in America

HELEN DRESSIE, ST. PAUL

My name is Helen Dressie. I came from Ethiopia in March, 2004. My husband and I arrived at first in Washington D.C. We lived there for two years, but because life was so expensive, we moved to Minnesota in 2006. Minnesota is really a good state, except for the snow and cold weather. We moved here because it is less expensive here than Washington, D.C. For example, rent was too much there. Minnesota also has more work opportunities. My first job was in an airport duty free shop. I worked there for a few years until I got pregnant. When I was seven months pregnant, I had a stroke, which affected the right side of my body. When I got to the hospital they delivered my baby. After three years I got divorced. Now I live with my lovely son only.

Helen Dressie is 34 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

CRISTAL GONZALES, ST. PAUL

I was born in Petatlain, Guerreso, Mexico. My city is 30 minutes from Zihuatanejo. It has many beaches and typical food including seafood. I am 27 years old. I have lived in St. Paul for three years. At this moment, I do not work. My boyfriend has two jobs, one is snow removal, the other is cleaning a school. My favorite foods are tacos and pozoles. When I lived in Mexico, I was a primary school teacher. I really enjoyed my job. I miss my parents and my two brothers a lot. Life in the USA has not been easy, but now I am happy because I have my own family. My very beautiful little girl makes me smile a lot.

Cristal Gonzales is 27 and originally from Mexico.

Childhood Life to Growing Up

SAW MEH, WORTHINGTON

I think everyone will have lives as I have. Why am I so sure to think like this? Because it's natural.

I would like to share my happy family's life with other people. I have seven people in my family: my parents and my four brothers. We have a happy family life. My parents are farmers. We were happy in our childhood and we were happy with our family. Later when we were school age we needed to be separate from living with our parents because our village didn't have a school. It was the first step to feeling sad.

Then when we were growing up into our adult lives there would be more separating. We would get married. The first step will be separating house by house and then by town to town and now countries by countries. Why? Because of the natural lives.

Now I miss my four brothers. My oldest brother still lives in Burma (Myanmar) and the second one lives in America but in a different city. Then my other two brothers live in Australia. It is too far for visiting each other and it's hard too.

Anyway we are the ghosts of the Earth. Sometimes

we are happy and sometimes we are sad. Because of the natural way of life, we couldn't stay being a happy family like when we were young. Now we just miss each other in our minds.

I think most people will accept my story and most people's lives will happen like what has happened in my life. Some people will know my story's meaning. Some people won't. Thanks a lot for letting me share my life story with other people.

Saw Meh is 34 and originally from Myanmar.

With the Broken Heart

GILMAR GAMBOA, BURNSVILLE

Coming to America was a huge adventure. I only came for a short time at first, but everything was changing. I'm from Mexico and I decided to come with my partner. We broke up two months after the great trip. When the time to come to America arrived, I chose to come by myself with my relatives, who live here. With my broken heart, I arrived at the airport in Minneapolis. All the stories I've heard from here were true, the cities, the people, the food, everything was quite new, my heart wasn't enjoying it though.

My family told me one I should look at for her, but in the bottom of my heart I knew this was already finished. We never talked again... It was like she would die. I left my family there and I decide to start a new life here. Everything changed and I think that every change is for a good thing. I hope that change in America will be for the best.

My Dream Isn't Lost, It Just Comes Second

HAWO HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Hawo. I'm from Somalia. I was born in 1982. I came to America on September 6, 2005. My dream was to go to school and become a nurse, but still I didn't become a nurse because I'm living in America and it is not easy. I'm a single mom, I have

to work for my kids, so my dream comes second. I hope one day my dream comes true.

My Challenging Changes

KEQIN MCDONALD, BROOKLYN PARK

In the past, I lived in my hometown for 10 years. I never moved to any other cities in China before I came to the USA. Before, I had my family, classmates, colleagues, and friends around me. I could meet with them often. I knew how to live. I knew how to cook my hometown foods. I could talk to others in my own language, fluently. But now, everything are changed.

It was a challenge for me when I moved to the USA. It is completely different than my hometown. I need to learn how to communicate and to write a new language. I need to learn how to cook using American stuff. I need to learn many new rules which are different than those in my home country. I have to drive to new places where I want to go, search for a new job and make new friends... I must work hard, then I can have a good life here. I need to endure missing my family, friends, and delicious foods of my hometown. However, Americans are kind to me.

I am homesick, but, I have hope living in the USA now.

Leaving the Important

NAILMA MORAES, APPLE VALLEY

My name is Nailma. I'm 29 years old. I arrived here in Minnesota about five months ago. My husband was transferred for here that work. He's an engineer and works at Bosch. I went with him because I love him the most, but I leave the most important things in my country, like my parents, my friends, my job and my profession. I loved my profession.

Now I'm stranded again in the USA. I found a new house, new job and many friends, but it is not the same thing like my country. I prefer to see this like an opportunity. I intend to learn more English and others things. I'd like to work in my area, because

today I work as a nanny.

I believe that God draws the path for each of us.

Leaving My Family Behind

OLGA MONTEL, APPLE VALLEY

I'm from Dominican Republic. It was a challenge for me to come to the United States. I had to leave my family and my daughter in my country. For me, that was really hard. It still is. I thought that to bring my daughter with would be easy for me, but it wasn't. I came in 2012. I'm still waiting to bring my daughter with me. Every time I call the embassy they tell me, "You need to continue waiting, we don't have a visa available for her."

That breaks my heart, and it's difficult for me to explain the situation to her, because it is her dream to come to United States to be a specialist in cardiology. She is a general doctor in the Dominican Republic. She needs to wait four more years to come here. We miss each other. I really wish to have my daughter with me.

POLITICS



Diversified??

AISHA BARRE, MINNEAPOLIS

They say America is “Great and Diversified,” but little do they know.
When black brothers and sisters are shot because of their race, there’s nowhere to go.
The American Muslim and black reality is really unfair.
Feeling judged, like you don’t belong every day, now, that’s a despair.
They call this country, the land of the free.
To some, I suppose, but I disagree.
In this country, the less fortunate are not cared for; For that, I am upset.
Do they get the same rights as the rich? I surely can make a bet.
Specifically for us Muslims, we tend to stay silent.
Every day is the same: We are “dangerous.” We are “violent.”
Like the flowers in spring, I pray we find unity.
Dare we say nothing, we’re not spared impunity.
With some people, it’s just straight up hate.
A white man goes on a killing spree, you say, “Oh, he was just sick.”
If mentally ill Muslim goes off, “Oh no! He’s a terrorist!”
Being called terrorist is only part of what we go through on a daily basis.
If we stay silent, we’re punks, and if we say stuff we’re crazy,
Why can’t we have a say???

It’s hard to feel like you’re worth a chance in this country.
How long do we have to fight?!

In this nation, it’s about unity, like the stars at night.
Why can’t we love one another’s history? Is it too much to ask?
Is it that hard to respect one’s ethnicity. It’s just one simple task.
Growing up, my mom would say “kill them with kindness.”
So now you know, we are not great, nor diversified.
For that, I’m sure I explained
We are more like separated and classified
But hopefully we’ll change!
Even to those who hurt you most, you should show forgiveness.

Aisha Barre is 21 and originally from Somalia

Born in Somalia, **Aisha Barre** grew up in Kenya and came to Minneapolis when she was 13. Aisha has a passion for poetry and often can be found writing poems outside of class. Aisha is a huge music fan and listens to all types of music. Her goal it to get her GED and then go to college for a medical career. Her advice is to never stop chasing your dreams.

Changes That Would Make America Better

MOHAMED ABDI, EDEN PRAIRIE

America is a great country that is developing year after year. In technology America has reached a very high level. But there are changes that would make America better if we decide to do so.

The first thing that would make America better is to take better care of safety in order to minimize crimes like what happened a few weeks ago. Some people were shot by police officers and police officers also shot some members of the society. So, in order to take better care of safety we have to reduce these crimes by becoming united and being careful about not discriminating against people. Also, letting society know that we are a united country that is trying to develop and progress for the future.

Another thing that would make America better is to take better care of the environment. We do not have sufficient plants in America. Also, there is a lot of pollution in the air. This pollution can cause death to human beings and animals. By reducing smoke and building awareness from the people who are cutting the trees and also planting plenty of trees we can improve our environment. The third thing that can make America better is to produce more fresh food because there is a lot of inorganic food which is not good for the health. So in order to stay healthy we have to reduce inorganic food by decreasing artificially flavored foods. We need to plant plenty of food and wait for organic food until it naturally ripens and then finally harvest it.

Finally, America is a great country that has already developed and has achieved a very high level in technology. But the above suggestions are some of the things that would make America better.

Mohamed Abdi is originally from Borama, Somalia.

Coming to Minnesota

GRACIELA PEÑA, ST. PAUL

I came to Minnesota in 2006. I moved in with my husband and three kids. They lived in the apartment with me. My other son lives in Mexico. I have not seen him for 10 years. I work at a fast food restaurant. I like to live in the United States. It's fun. My other son, Alexis, lives here. He is very smart and is talented in school programs. My other child, Michael, is in the special school program. He needs special help because he is special, and his brother, Fernando, is in kindergarten. I do not like the discrimination. Some people are racist, and I feel like we do not have rights.

Graciela Peña is originally from Mexico.

Who I Am

REZA, WOODBURY

I am a human from Earth. I am living on one of the planets of the Solar System. I know billions of planets are in the Universe, and I think we are not alone. Life is probably on some of the planets. If the other life ask, "Who are you?", how can I introduce "humans"?

Maybe I should say: I am human, and there are about 7 billion of us on Earth. But, humans are damaging our nature and our planet. Some of us are fighting for land, power, or money, and many humans are killing each other. The majority of people on Earth are living under the poverty line, but most of the minority—rich people—don't care about them. They only think about themselves and their lives.

However, some of us are "real humans." Usually real humans care about people, nature, animals, and Earth. They are kindhearted, compassionate, and merciful. They always want to live on Earth full of peace.

So when I look to my planet, I realize in the future we may be "Your guest at your planet".

Reza is originally from Persia.

Peace

CARBARIN ZENTENO MARIA, MINNEAPOLIS

Peace is like a garden.

Peace looks like the ocean.

Peace looks like my children.

Peace sounds like friends talking quietly.

Peace is sometimes sleeping in the quiet.

Peace is a happy party.

Carbarin Zenteno Maria is originally from Somalia.

Five Changes that Would Make America Better

SALWA ELTIGANI, EDEN PRAIRIE

America is an amazing country for many reasons. It is a first-world country and powerful so it is easy for it to lead the world in defense. It has democratic rights and freedom.

The first thing to make America better is to control the economy and increase jobs for every citizen and to make their paychecks better than now. America also needs to create more companies and factories. More construction is needed like rebuilding bridges and streets and developing new houses and tall buildings.

The second thing is to give all citizens health insurance with cheap prices. This country has a big problem in health insurance. The government can help to pay some money for it .

The third thing is to change the style for eating food. Like making it more natural like Australia. Everything about the food is fresh there. To make people not obese like roles everybody can reach.

The fourth thing is to make education better and stronger than now. Make all community colleges free. Have the government pay for all citizens.

The fifth thing is to give the world a chance to fix problems or make the United Nations solve them. I hope for us all Americans have peace and live a better life in this beautiful country. America is the greatest country in all the world and I say God bless America.

Salwa Eltigani is originally from Sudan.

Traffic

PHUONG NGUYEN, ST. PAUL

When I was a little girl, my uncle has said; "If you want to know where the another country is developed or undeveloped just see traffic." I always think about that but I don't know it true or false.

I didn't believe that it was true until I came to the U.S. When I lived in Vietnam, and drove a motobike on the road, I must worried there would suddenly be an accident. Do you know why? Because sometimes I think they drive like a "ghost rider." They don't care about the speed, the road (one-way, two-way, or road closed to traffic), the road sign and even their life... "Just drive any way you want." And that is the reason my country has high ratings in accident with high ratings people die when they join in traffic. When I came to the U.S., I saw everybody drive their cars carefully, share the road with bicycles and stop for pedestrians... which I never saw in my country.

I think if you go in the road and you feel safe, that means you can do everything faster and every person else too. And the country will develop because they live responsibly.

Phuong Nguyen is originally from Vietnam.

Three Decades of My Life

MATIULLAH FAHIM, ST. PAUL

I was born in a northeastern city in Afghanistan. When I was a young kid, we didn't have a wonderful life in our country because of the civil wars and personal conflicts between the warlords. They were fighting for their own purposes, and those wars caused too many problems. The biggest one

was paving the way for a human killing regime, the Taliban Regime! That made life harder for the whole country, even for the warlords. That regime was the most rigidly traditional one that I have ever seen in my life. We woke up every single morning with fresh bad news, such as killings, beheadings, cutting off people's hands, condemning people to death by stoning and other sad news. Finally, we immigrated to the neighboring country, Pakistan. At that time Pakistan was more peaceful than our country.

I grew up and graduated from school in Pakistan. Then I returned to Afghanistan after five years. When the Taliban regime was removed by American and ISAF forces, there was a new government that included all the ethnic groups in the country. When I returned, I saw so many changes. For example, the Afghan National Security Forces were acting as national country protectors, national and international construction companies were working, and educational and health services were activated. The most significant change that I saw was the Taliban execution ground had been changed to the Afghan National Soccer Stadium. I went there and watched a soccer match, and then I remembered those times, when they had brought men and women with tied hands, legs, and blinded eyes and killed them very ruthlessly. It also reminded me of when the victim's relatives, including men, women, and children were crying and asking them to forgive and release their family members. So, it was an amazing moment for me, when I compared this new democratic government with that old dictatorship. In three decades of life, I have experienced a very rigid religious government that had negative relationships with other countries. I also experienced a government based on democracy and public opinion that has the best partnerships with regional and international countries.

Then I understood that selfish and dictatorial governments take people's rights away and make life harder for them. But the government that is made by the people, keeps their rights safe and protects their lives.

Matiullah Fahim is 36 and originally from Afghanistan.

Water is Life

SAMI MUENALA, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

At beginning of the 19 th century, the petroleum was converted into a new energy source. The extraction industries initiated exploiting the oil no matter what, carelessly and without respect for our Pacha Mama (Mother Earth).

On April 2016, we began a new fight. Our native brothers and sisters from Standing Rock, North Dakota took a stand and spoke against running the construction of the 3.8 billion dollar Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). This newly proposed pipeline to run across the Midwest that would carry 570.00 barrels of oil per day from the Bakken region of North West, N.D. to a refinery in Illinois. The refinery puts out 250.00 tons of carbon per day into the atmosphere, but, " Why should we take a stand?" I've seen firsthand what the oil extraction can cause. I come from an amazon country where the extraction of oil has many consequences most notably in nature. Thousand of areas of the amazon forest were razed, many animals species lost their habitat, other animals died or went extinct, the rivers were polluted, and the indigenous people of the amazon were forced out of their homes.

If only our government could see beyond their own political and economic interests, if the big oil companies could understand that not everything is about money, if each one of us could understand that we can not drink oil, then injustices like that one at Standing Rock would be put to a stop.

Now more than ever, we need to stand together to support the water protectors in Standing Rock.

Sami Muenala is 27 and originally from Ecuador.

My Refugee Story

TOUA VANG, ST. PAUL

Many immigrants come to the United States for many reasons. Many came because of the persecution and civil war in their home countries. They were forced to leave their country. Why did my family come to the United States? My family came to the United States because of the Vietnam War and the civil wars that followed.

The majority of Hmong had fought on America's side against communism during the 1961-1975 war. Many of our soldiers lost their lives after the Americans pulled out. Why were the Hmong asked to fight along with the American side? They knew the geography of the land. General Vang Pao was a Hmong general at that time. He asked the Hmong to help. Many men were trained to use military tools and weapons. We fought bravely against the communists until we lost the war to the communists in 1975. Many Hmong families were in life-threatening situations. My uncle Long Vang and some of my cousins were those soldiers. Unfortunately my uncle died in the war.

After the Vietnam War was over, there was a civil war between the Hmong who were on the American side and Lao communists. Lao communists looked for Hmong people who were soldiers or their relatives. Any men who had uniforms or any kind of military things at home would be taken away from the family to learn the communist system. However, many of them never came back home. My family felt unsafe in Laos, so we moved out of the country.

We moved to Thailand as refugees. We stayed in the camp for a period of time. We got help from the United Nations. We hoped to go back, but after many years there was not any chance. My family had an opportunity to come to the United States, so we moved to the United States. We hoped our lives would be safe here. We hoped for a better life and better future.

Toua Vang is 35 and originally from Laos.

My Story

ANONYMOUS, ST. PAUL

I am from Mexico. I have three children and have lived in St. Paul for nine years. St. Paul is a beautiful city, but I miss my parents and brother who live in Mexico. I hope to see them soon. Now I am worried about my immigration status. The new President said he is going to deport many illegal immigrants. I am very afraid of being deported and having to leave my children here.

Somalia to the U.S.

AHMED ABDI, SAINT CLOUD

In Somalia, I lived in Dadaab for 18 years. In 1991, Somalia started the civil war. I felt sad because people died. When I left Somalia I went to the country of Ethiopia. I did not come to the U.S. until December 1, 2015. When I got to the U.S., I got peace. Today, living in the U.S., I feel good, happy, and peaceful. The things I miss about my country are Somali food, culture, camel milk, and meat. If I could return to Somalia I won't go because they are not at peace.

Going Back to My Country, 10 Years Later

DORA LOWTHER, LINO LAKES

When I left Mexico, years ago, my plan was just to come and visit for about four months, then go back. But when I started going to school and working, I changed my mind. I decided that, in the U.S., there was better future and more opportunity for me. Now, I definitely think that it was a good choice to stay. Last year, I went to Mexico to visit my family. I noticed a lot of big changes for the worse. Since I left 10 years ago, unemployment has grown and everything has gotten really expensive. The government has become more corrupt than ever, and crime has risen to an unacceptable level. Even though I don't live in Mexico anymore, it still concerns me. I worry about my family all the time. I am afraid to go visit there again. I would like to take my kids to visit my family, but I don't know if one day I will be brave enough to take them there.

What Happened in Somalia in 1990

HASSAN SHIRE, MINNEAPOLIS

There was a very strong government since 1960 in Somalia that controlled whole Somali country. The last government was led by a powerful military person. Unfortunately, rebels went against him and they tried to destroy the government and overthrow the president. They collapsed the whole country up and down and at the same time and devastated all infrastructures. There was looting, killing, and raping without classifying anything or anyone. The power became under militia with guns, thus everybody thought how he can survive by himself. Therefore, people ran away from the Somalia territory to neighboring countries. Before Somali people ran away from their own country, they didn't know about life out of the country and they didn't have integration into another community in the world, but at the moment they have become world-known people.

Life Changes

HEFA MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Hefa . My nationality is Somali, but I was born in Yemen and also I grew up there. I was born in 1994. My parents raised me to be very happy. We had a very large family with many aunts and uncles and grandfathers and grandmothers, who all lived in our neighborhood. When I turned 16, we moved to another neighborhood and we lived there for one year. I made new friends.

In the summer of 2011, a war began. We were scared, and my mother got sick. There was no water or electricity, and we did not feel safe there. These reasons made my parents decide to travel to another country. One day they told us about the travel and we were shocked! I felt sad. I thought, "How can I leave my friends, my education, and my country?" At the same time I knew it was the best solution for us.

I still remember the moment when I said good-bye to Yemen. My family and I went to the airport at 5 p.m. All of us, including me, cried, and hugged, and we promised we would never forget each-other. Finally, my uncle called to us and told us we needed to board the plane. I saw my grandfather. When I hugged him, I told him we were going and he was crying. My uncle said again, "It is time to go!" We got in the airplane. While we were in the air, I saw Sana'a from the window. It was so beautiful and I thought this could be the last time I see it.

When I remember these events, I want to cry because my grandfather died just two years later. Also, all of my friends have gone to other countries. I have decided not to return to Yemen.

Thankful for This Year

HELEN YANG, APPLE VALLEY

This year has not really been calm for me. A lot of things are unacceptable, but I still want to say thanks for my family for accompanying me on the ride through all the things this year.

I want to say thanks to my brother, Sun Jin. He let me know the body must be kept healthy. You must have a good body first then you just can do anything that you want to do. Don't waste your time, don't let someone or any good things and opportunities slip through your hands. We want to live in each moment and enjoy our life every day. Don't let yourself have any regrets. I miss my brother forever and hope him will have a good life in the other world

I also would like to thank my husband, Bruce. When I have any problems, he always does me a favor and fully supports me. He can always give me suggestions, and teach me many things. He does not let me have any worries problems to deal with by myself. He gives me a loving and warm home. I love him forever.

Although a lot of things happened this year, they are in the past. We need time to heal our wounds, I believe. One way or another we will get out of the pain and God willing, everyone can live better in the New Year.

Oromo Gada System

TEMAM JIBA, MINNEAPOLIS

Gada is a traditional social stratification system of Oromo in Ethiopia. The Gada system has eight classes; these are called Luba. Each class or Luba consists of the sons of the men in another older class. The entire class progresses through 11 different grades, each based on an eight-year cycle and each with its own set of rights and responsibilities. Structural relationships between Gada and ages are Dabble (0-8 years), Junior Gaammee (9-16 years), Senior Gaammee (17-24 years), Kusa (25-32 years), Raba Dori (33-40 years), Gada (luba) (41-48 years), Yuba I (49-56 years), Yuba II (57-64 years), Yuba III (65-72 years), Yuba IV (73-80 years) and Gadamoji (>81) years. For instance, to be Abba Gada, or president, it was expected to be 41 years of age.

Generally, Gada is a traditional system of democratically transition of power by eight years before American civilization. However, after Minillik, leader of Ethiopia, colonized Oromo, the system was collapsed for a century but thanks to Abba Gada, the Gada system is back to Oromo community and they are practicing it in the country.

The Difference Between False News, Satire, and Biased News

JEFFREY FISH, DETROIT LAKES

An unfortunate amount of ‘fake news’ has been going around. Some people may be wondering how they can tell the difference between ‘fake news’ and ‘true news.’ There is a third category as well, which is called satire. Not all ‘true news’ is completely reliable as it may have an undue bias.

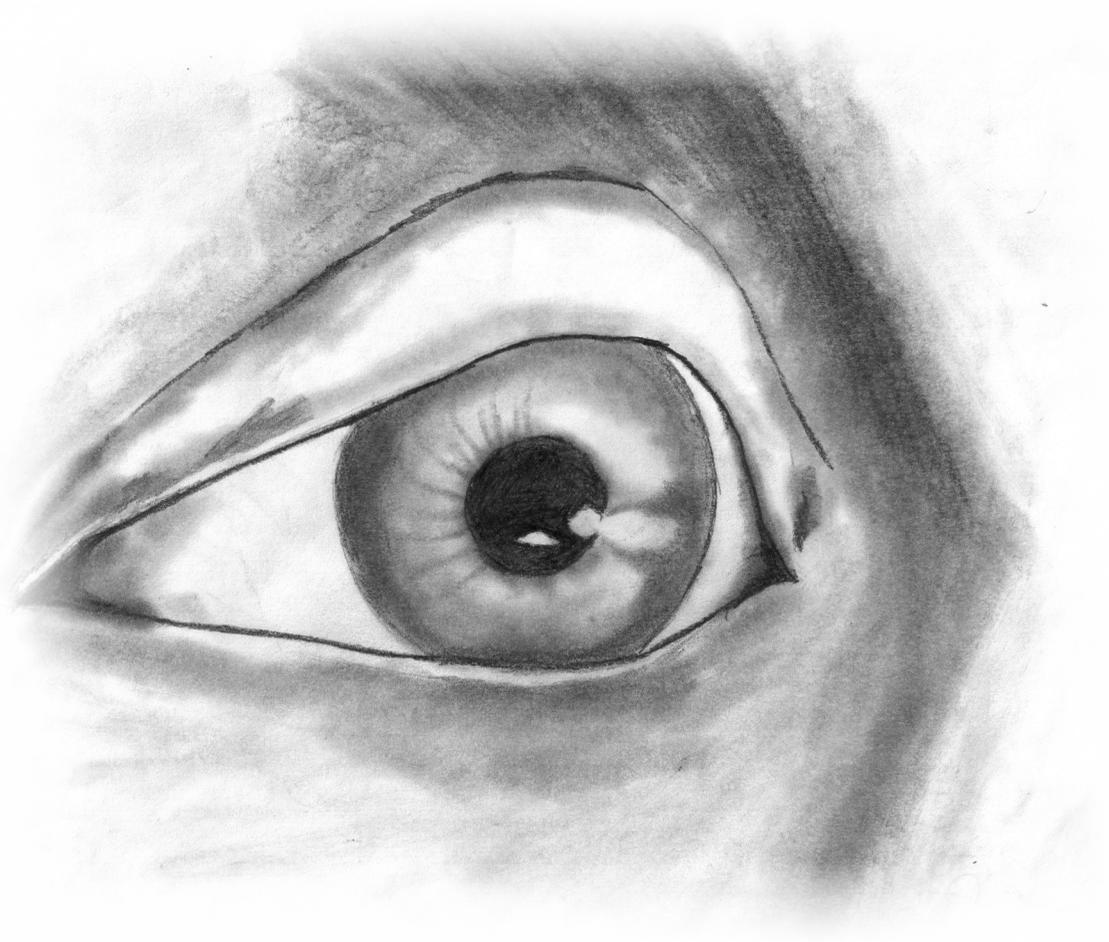
‘Fake news’ can be identified by looking into the reliability of claims made and those who make the claims. If an article is more than a day old this can be accomplished through a simple Google search. However with the speed of the internet come many downsides including things such as false information being spread faster than inaccuracies can be found. The only way available to combat this is for people

to take the time to look into facts for themselves. This can be accomplished by looking for a more reliable news source to corroborate the story. The consumer could also look for statistics in .edu or .gov sites or in scientific journals.

Satire articles present their problem when people read them as true news rather than as what they are; comedy often meant to showcase a point about the topic. This can happen when people only read the headline, when they fail to check the by line on the article, or when the author or publisher fail to make it clear enough that it is satire. People can recognize some satirical articles because they will be exaggerated to the point of ridicule. Others can be identified as satire with a search for their publisher name and the word satire e.g. ‘National Report satire.’ One must be careful using this method to discover the validity of a story. Someone who the satirist has made a mockery of can claim them as fake rather than satire in order to discredit them.

True news can be just as dangerous by only showing one side of the issue or leaning heavily to one side. This is the hardest to combat because it fits into people’s echo chambers so well without anything stated being controvertible. Unbiased news is virtually nonexistent, so one news source is never enough to get all the facts. There is no perfect solution. All that can be asked of anyone is that they take the news with a grain of salt until they can do the research on their own.

HOPES & DREAMS





Aaron Pike, III was born in Minneapolis, MN. After moving around quite a bit, he eventually landed in Las Vegas, NV with his grandparents. Partly because he hung around individuals who “didn’t even give education a thought,” he ended up dropping out in 10th grade. He then moved back to Minnesota where he obtained a Forklift License, which made him believe he could get his GED, too. Even though there are a lot of distractions amidst this process of studying for his GED, Aaron is pushing through and is grateful for his mother who supports him. He has a love for reading anything! He says that reading makes him feel powerful and it encourages him to pursue his GED. Aaron hopes that when he gets his GED it will help people realize what they can do.

The Road to the Future

AARON PIKE, MINNEAPOLIS

The path to find hidden treasures in oneself is full of obstacles.

Exciting and yet uninviting things come forward.

Dreams of what you want and what you can do.

Nightmares of the present.

Fears of the past repeating the same boring life.

Voices of the young and old personality of one’s character.

Regardless of what the surrounding circles of circles want me to be.

The strength of my failures.

The lesson of others’ wrong steps to make my steps right.

Wisdom from the elders to make my knowledge gold.

Gold to reflect my path to blind the obstacles in

my way.

What could not be, if you want, could be.

Welcome to the treasures of the mind.

If you allow your mind to hold such precious things.

I am not here to discourage you.

But I should have told you this road does not end,

And there’s no going back,

No substitute, no fill-ins, no teams, no off days.

You fall in or you fall out.

I only know two roads and since you came from the past,

You can either make your past be your future or rethink your future.

I didn’t want to show or tell you what you already know.

Good luck.

I hope you find your own gold.

Never Give Up

OLGA ADORSKAYA, PLYMOUTH

My name is Olga. I'm from Belarus (Europe). My family (my husband, our daughter, and I) won a green card and on January 7, 2016 we moved to live in Minnesota. We had never dreamed about moving, but we had the chance, and we took advantage of it.

Moving to another country means that you have to start from the beginning. But, when you're over 30 years old, when you have a small child, when you leave your mother and friends—it is not easy. In our country we had higher education, careers, and status in society. Here we have nothing but goals and plans for their implementation. Here we start from scratch.

You ask me, "Why do we need these difficulties, if we had everything?" My opinion is that if life gives you a chance, you have to use it! Better to do, than not to do with regret!

I believe that the USA is a country of great opportunities. If you try and don't give up, you will be able to realize your dreams and goals!

Never, never give up, just believe and go for your goal!

Olga Adorskaya is 32 and originally from Republic of Belarus.

My Life in Thailand

DAH LER MOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Dah Ler Moo. I was born in 1995. I was born in Thailand but I moved to Burma and moved back to Thailand again because of war. I had five people in my house, I have one brother and two sisters. I lived in a village called May Ther Mu Kee in Burma for only one year.

In 1997 there was a war in Burma, so my family moved to Thailand because of war. We didn't have enough food and many people died because of war. I lived in Thailand for 17 years. My first school was in Tham Hin Refugee Camp in Thailand. I studied at Tham Him School for 15 years. Tham Hin Camp is

a beautiful place. Tham Hin has mountains, bamboo, and trees in the camp.

On January 12, 2015 I came to St. Paul, Minnesota. I have lived in Minnesota for almost two years. I live with my parents. Now I am a student at GAP School. I go to school every day.

I have a job too! My job is PCA (Personal Care Attendant) for my father. He lost one leg below the knee when he was a Karen soldier. He stepped on a land mine.

The most interesting thing about me is that I play violin music. When I have free time I like to read books and listen to music. My favorite kind of books are history books because I like to read what happened in the past. My favorite movies are Karen dramas and English movies because I like to improve my English language. I have volunteered at church and I enjoyed it because they need my help and I want to help and clean the church. The hardest thing so far in CNA training has been when I am not studying. It will be the hardest when I take the test. I learn best when I listen to my teacher and face someone who is talking. Sometimes I am shy to talk English language because it's hard to talk and understand.

The most exciting thing I will ever do will be to graduate high school. Before I graduate I want to make sure my English language is good. After I graduate I want to go to college and work. I want to be a nurse because I want to take care of old people and my family too. I would love to travel to Thailand to see my family and friends. I want to go back to Burma to help my Karen people with education and health. I am the most proud when I see my Karen people have a better life.

Dah Ler Moo is 21 and originally from Thailand.

My Goals for This Year

YENG YANG, MINNEAPOLIS

My first goal is to study harder to improve my English in writing, reading and listening. I often misunderstand when people speak, I can't catch words or conversations on TV, it seems difficult to me. My writing is poor. I need to learn how to write

stories, then give them to the teacher to help me to check them out.

My second goal is to speak better. I have to practice more at home with my kids or friends. One thing that I hate to do is to use the past tense. I hope I will get this over this problem. I try to practice a lot so I will remember well.

My third goal is to get a better job. I have to study more English, so I go to school every day. I don't want to be scared to ask questions. I need to pay attention until I get details. I hope I will get it all in the future. Right now I attend class E.

Yeng Yang is 36 and originally from Thailand.

My S.M.A.R.T. Goal

NATALIA MAKSIMOVA, DELANO

My name is Natalia Maximova. Circumstances forced me and my husband to move to Minnesota. Here, I experienced the most remarkable event of my life. We had a wonderful daughter, Susanna. Unfortunately, I do not speak English, and as soon as my little daughter Susanna grew up, we began to go to school where I can learn English. My daughter understands the English language and develops in school. We are very happy to be in school, and I see good results in my child's development and my learning of the English language. We live in a beautiful place with thousand lakes, and people are great here, which strongly helps our family to adapt to the new location.

For my learning goal, I will use an online learning program every night for 30 minutes so I can communicate better with English speakers. For my personal goal, I want to develop Susanna's reading readiness. I will read with her every afternoon for 20 minutes.

Natalia Maksimova is 40 and originally from Ukraine.

My Learning and My Personal Goals

OKSANA DIERS, MONTROSE

My name is Oksana. I moved to Minnesota from Ukraine when I got married in 2010. My son and I attend family literacy in Buffalo. I like to learn anything. In class we wrote goals.

My learning goal is that I will improve my conversational skills by reading newspapers, writing, and listening (to CDs, articles) Mondays and Wednesdays for 30 minutes around noon until June 2017. This will help me to communicate with people.

My personal goal is that from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. every Thursday I will walk for 15 min. and swim for 40 min. (all year). I will add 1 fruit or 1 veggie to my child's plate once a week for a year. This will help us to be healthy.

Oksana Diers is 44 and originally from Ukraine.

Goals, Hopes and Dreams

FUZHEN YANG, BROOKLYN PARK

After I came to the United States, my life changed. Here, everything was very difficult for me, but I think of what my mother once told me: "We must learn to overcome the present difficulties before we can win the real future of our own." So, I have a lot of planning for my future... I want to challenge my English and communicate with people, I want to open my own business and I want to help my family and the poor people. Of course, I am thankful for my husband and this freedom. The peace of the United States lets me find my own dreams and goals.

Fuzhen Yang is 38 and originally from Yunnan, China.

Writing is my Dream Job

DWIGHT LAMBERT, MINNEAPOLIS

I want to keep pressing on to do what it takes for me to keep my hope to become a writer. Writing is my second job, I want to write books, poetry, screenplays, and be a creative writer. I strive to read a lot of books to help me to become a better writer. Writing is something that helps me to stay calm

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on things that go on in everyday life. Also, I want to write a story about my life, how I overcame the odds in life. I'm looking forward in the future to see all of my dreams come true. For now, I need to keep working in areas where I am weak, and get help from teachers and tutors to improve on skills to become a successful writer. I want to become a strong writer and stay focused on the topic.

I want to write about how I overcame things in my life. Twenty years ago I had an accident that nearly cost me my life. Somehow I had decided it was my time to turn my life around on the straight and narrow path and do what's right by making positive decisions with my life. It has been up and down, I experienced divorce, being out of work, and having no place to live. A year later I decided to relocate to Minnesota for a fresh start. I worked a couple of short term jobs in 2010. A year later things got better for me; I got into a job training program with pay; it lasted nearly three years. In 2014, I started working for Metro Mobility; I have been with the company for two and half years. The job has good benefits and a dollar raise yearly. Also I got married and my wife and I have got a bigger apartment.

My story will encourage people not to give up on yourself and keep your head up with a smile upon your face. Never lose hope on what you are seeking in life to help you to become a better person by doing the right things to keep your dream alive. The road is tough out there, don't give up on yourself, just stay away from negative people telling you to throw in the towel. Don't listen to that negative person, stay away from them. Hanging around someone with positive influence will take you a long way. Stay focused and don't be distracted.

Dwight Lambert is originally from Alabama.

My Perfect Job

MERCEDES MARTINEZ, APPLE VALLEY

My perfect job would be to become a registered nurse because that has always been my dream job. I would like to earn a degree in nursing because I love working in the health care industry. I like meeting new people and not doing the same routine every

single day. While earning my degree, I'll get more knowledge on the health care business and also get myself into a better financial situation. For that and more, becoming a registered nurse would be my perfect job.

Mercedes Martinez is originally from El Salvador.

A Purpose in Life

MARISOL B., ST. PAUL

It is important for a person to have a purpose in life. Since we are children, we dream bigger. It is as we grow that we lose our goals, our dreams. It's because nothing in life is free or easy. We must always have in mind our target.

Sometimes we give up because we fail many times, but the only way to reach the exit is to try a thousand times. Nothing could be worse than to not try. Life is not easy, but when you have a purpose, it becomes more interesting.

Each passing day must be an opportunity to try to reach our goals. We have to learn to see that failure is like a stairway to the exit. Always try to remember to be brave like when we were children with no fears. Nothing can stop us except ourselves.

Marisol B. is originally from El Salvador.

My Story, Education and My Dream

FOZIA HASSEN, APPLE VALLEY

I came to United States in 2010. At that time I was 25 years old. I came here to live with my husband. I lived in Minneapolis for five years. Then I moved to Apple Valley. The thing that surprised me was to see snow. I was very surprised when I saw snow for the first time because I had never seen snow in my country.

When I came to United States, I started going school and took English classes. The English classes were very hard. I can read but it's hard for me to talk and explain some words. At that time everything

was difficult. I had to wait for the bus. Sometimes I walked to school because the school was close to me. After one year I got a morning job. In the evening I went to school. After five months they changed my schedule and I had a hard time going to school. I didn't want to stop my school classes, but I wanted to work and help my family in my country. I had a very hard time when I stopped my school. After four years I went back to school with my three-year-old son. I was very determined to succeed in my education. I didn't give up!

My dream is to learn English well and to get a GED. Then, I will go to college. One day, I will be a Pharmacist.

Fozia Hassen is originally from Ethiopia.

My Goals

SHEMSHI ABDULAH, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Shemshi Abdulahi. I am from Ethiopia, which located in the Horn of Africa. I speak four languages: Oromo, Arabic, Somali, and Amharic. My hobbies are to watch TV, read books, and play games. My goal is to learn English well and use it as a tool to get a job and communicate with people.

My goal is to earn my diploma and go to Minneapolis Community and Technical College. When I finish my generals I will transfer to Metro State University. I would like to get my bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management. However, right now I want to focus on learning the English language and improve my skills in order to achieve my goals.

Shemshi Abdulahi is originally from Ethiopia.

Me, Myself and I

ABDIRIZAK MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Abdirizak. I was born in Kenya, but my nationality is Somali-Kenyan. I have brothers and sisters who make me happy. I remember my school life when I was in Kenya. I was a school footballer (soccer player) who played the central midfield and

attacker positions. I scored a lot of goals for my school. My dream is one day, one time, to become a star. My training teacher, Mr. Musila, used to tell us when we were training, "more pain more gain." That means that dreams and the future will not be easy. Life is changing at the time of the sun. Live every moment to the fullest; this very moment may not be there tomorrow.

Then I got my visa. Wow! That was great for me and started the next step of my life. Thank God! Fortunately, now I live in Minneapolis and am among the students of my new school. That's all for me.

Abdirizak Mohamed is originally from Kenya.

I Have a Goal

NOUVANG, ST. PAUL

I have a goal. My goal is to finish college and get a job that I want.

I originally grew up in Laos. Then I married my husband and came to the USA. It is challenging for me to learn a new language and new things in a new place. However, no matter how tough it is, how difficult the roads ahead, nothing will hinder or get in my way. I have been in the U.S. for five years. At first, I didn't know English at all and I started in the beginning class. I was able to get through these difficulties and I got my GED in October, 2015. My GED is very significant to me because it is a key to open many doors and it shows me that I am one step closer to my goals. Now, I study for the Accuplacer, and I am planning to go to college next year. As a parent, as a Hmong lady, as a wife, as a mother, a sister-in-law... I want to show how many responsibilities I have. I grew up in a low educated country and I learned to start speaking English from ABC's. If I can do it, people who are born in the U.S. here, and other immigrants can do it too. I especially want to be a good role model for my kids and show people who thought that women can't do things that men can do.

In this world, everything is very complex and hard to understand. If you set your goal high, you have a dream, and don't stop dreaming, you can do it. If you

are passionate about what you are doing, there will never be a barrier.

Nou Vang is originally from Laos.

God and My Dreams

ANGELICA DEGROAT, PRINCETON

I am Angelica from Puebla, Mexico. I come from one poor family with a lot of dreams and wishes. I have memories of wanting Santa to bring me a toy, but I received nothing. My illusion was broken when I was maybe four years old. I thought when I grew up and worked hard to give my parents and all of my siblings what I could, my dream of coming to the U.S. would come true. I got my dream in 1997 when I came to the United States.

When I got here, it was not easy. It was difficult to find a job, and it was different from my country. I see that God helped me. I didn't speak English, didn't drive, and didn't know how to use a computer.

I started one job and was trying to do my best. One day the supervisor invited me to go to coffee. I didn't want to go with him. He was crabby after that, and a few days later I lost my job.

I had my three kids, my sister, and her kids living with me. It was bad; we lost our house. We had nowhere to go. My oldest son stopped going to school and tried to find a job to help me. I needed to sell things to pay the rent for an apartment. A nice man from work brought us groceries.

In exasperation, I prayed all night. The next day when I went to buy a couple of things, I asked a lady about an apartment. I got the apartment at the same time I got a job. My life changed. With faith you can make all the things you wanted, but always you need to give God your burdens so He can take control. No one needs to be lonely because God is always with us. And that nice man from work? He is now my wonderful husband and a good father for my children.

Angelica DeGroat is originally from Mexico.

I Love My Job

JOSÉ CUPERTINO CADENAS MENERA, ST. PAUL

I like my job because I do what I like, smell the smell of freshly baked cake and pizza every day.

My dream is to start my own business.

José Cupertino Cadenas Menera is originally from Mexico.

What Motivates Me to Come to Class?

MIGUEL CHAVEZ, ST. PAUL

I have many reasons to come to class. The most important reason is to reach my goal, which is to get the GED certificate. It makes me feel excited and motivated to wake up early in the morning, take a fresh shower, and get ready for school.

Another good reason would be to meet the classmates and also the teacher, who is very nice with all of us. I feel really happy enjoying those couple of hours with them in class. It is like being in a small party for me. I have too much fun during the class time, so it does not stress me at all.

The teacher always has the best topics ever, and also she brings something new to learn every day, therefore the classes won't be boring at all. Let's say that sometimes we get as busy as bees. And we have to hurry up to finish the writing, or other task, but other than that just like I said: too much fun every day.

Miguel Chavez is originally from Mexico.

My S.M.A.R.T. Goals

KLAVA FOREMAN, BUFFALO

Hello my name is Klava Foreman. I moved to Minnesota in 2004 the year I was adopted from Russia by an American family. My daughter Joy and I attend family literacy in Buffalo, Minnesota. I'm

learning a lot of good communication skills and I like this class because it gets me interacting with other people and gets me out of the house. In class we wrote our personal and learning goals so that we can strive towards getting them accomplished and to have a reminder.

My personal goal is to go outside for 30 minutes each day. If it's not nice outside then I will sit by the open window for at least 10 to 15 minutes each day. This goal is important because the fresh air is healthy and good for the body and mind. I also love the outdoors.

My learning goal is to find a training program by January 31st, 2017 that will train me to become a dog groomer. This goal is important because I love animals and it will help me get my dream future job as a dog groomer.

Klava Foreman is originally from Russia.

This is My Story

AMINA ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Amina Ali. I am from Somalia. I came to the United States on February 10, 2011. I have six children: four boys and two girls. Two sons are going to the University of Minnesota.

Every day I am happy. I have work, but I would like to be a business woman and be better in English. In 10 years, my life will be different. I will buy a house because it is important. I want to be able to speak English by then too.

I think next year I will go on vacation to Africa. I want to see my brothers and sisters.

Amina Ali is originally from Somalia.

My Dreams

ASIYA TALYANLE, BURNSVILLE

My name is Asiya. I live in Burnsville. I came from Somalia. I was born in Balcad in 1983. I grew up with my large family that included 10 kids and my parents. My dad had two sisters and three brothers

that also lived with us. I came to the United States in March 2006. When I came here, I had many challenges. This country has more opportunity for education and work. I went to school because I couldn't speak English. After five months, I worked and stopped school because I didn't have enough time.

Five years later, I opened a small business selling clothes, bags, rugs and shoes. My business grew. Now I'm coming back to school to finish my GED. I'm so happy I came back to school.

Asiya Talyanle is originally from Somalia.

My Future

FATUMA AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was a child in my country, I lived with my parents. I remember when I was young, I felt happy. My favorite family memory is when we were together to celebrate and eat special food.

Right now, I am an older woman. I felt happy when I came to this country. I felt strong, when I started learning the language. On the other hand, I felt sad when my country started the civil war.

I hope my future is rich in education. I could improve my life if I try everything and learn English well. Someday, I hope my children will have a good education and are healthy and happy. Finally, my home country will be better if everyone will choose the true road.

Fatuma Ahmed is originally from Somalia.

Good Things

ISTARLIN MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

Many good things happened in my life when I came to Minneapolis with my son and daughter. I didn't have a job, but I got help from the government. I got Section 8 housing and food stamps. I was always thankful for whatever the county gave my family and me.

My family grew when I had another daughter. Finally I did get a job working with older people as a personal care assistant. I helped to feed them and clean them. I was so happy to get this job. It was easy for me to learn more English by working with clients.

Now I want to learn more English to get my GED. My goal is to learn to be a nursing assistant so that I can work with doctors. This will help me to live a better life, and it will help my children get a good education.

Istarlin Mohamed is originally from Somalia

Myself

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I lived in Minneapolis for 8 years and I like it. I go to Minneapolis Adult Education School, and I like this school because I have a lot of things to do there. My goal is to get a GED and graduate.

My Dream

RIDWAN MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I'm from Somalia. I remember when I was in my country. I liked to travel everywhere to see beautiful places and enjoy them with my family. When I left Somalia I was five years old. I went to Yemen. I went to school to learn the Arabic language, and I did it. I finished school and left Yemen when I was 22 years old, in 2005. Then I went to Malaysia and worked there with my uncle Naji Salim Ulami. He and some Indonesian friends I made helped me learn the Malay language. I left Malaysia in 2014.

When I came to Minnesota it was snowing. It was the first time I had seen snow in my life. I said to myself, "you're in America thanks to God."

My goal is to learn English; how to write and speak fluently to communicate with people and support myself. I have spent a lot of time learning the English language. I have been very happy to be in America. This country has many jobs and facilities to work in

and to buy what you need. I have had opportunities to make something good in my life. When I started working, I realized that the United States is the best place to live because you can make money and help your family.

My most important value is to be peaceful together with people. My future plans are to go to college and open my own restaurant. I will make my dreams come true. Thanks to God, my brother, sister-in-law, sister, friends, teachers, and others. I'm very happy to be enjoying my life in this country.

Ridwan Mohamed is originally from Somalia.

My Perfect Job, An Interpreter

SHARON WEI, APPLE VALLEY

An interpreter would be a perfect job because it would give me a way to rely on myself. I could have the confidence I need to be able to choose the destination, the locations I want. I could also choose the hours I want to work to accommodate my children's schedule as well as meet new people

Sharon Wei is originally from USA.

School Server

HEATHER YANG, EAGAN

A perfect job for me would be a food server because I am a homemaker. I know how to cook and keep hygiene for everything! With this job, my son can go to school, and I can go to work. It is the same time and the perfect time for me. I don't have to worry about my son being off from school and then I have to be off or find a babysitter. So that is what I like for this job. I hope I will have this job someday.

Heather Yang is originally from Vietnam.

The U.S. Election Day

HOLLY LAM, APPLE VALLEY

I came to America about 7 years ago, and this year was the second time I lived in a vibrant atmosphere, the day of the election of American citizens to vote for the U.S. president.

Four years ago, I didn't know much about that, but after I went to the ESL school to improve my English skills, now I'm interested to research this situation. I know the basic qualifications to be president of the U.S. That person must be at least 35 years old, a natural born citizen, and a U.S. resident for at least 14 years. Besides, the important criteria with the candidates, they need to have clear background; also they don't have scandals. After they became the party candidates, they have a campaign to run for the president. They need to go to all the states of America to give a speech with American citizens. That helps them convince the voter to vote for them. The best thing I liked to watch was two candidates debate three times to demonstrate they have enough qualifications to be the U.S. president. The Americans could listen to them, and decide who is the person they like to vote for.

I think the election in the U.S. determines freedom and democracy. The president will be the person people believe to give them responsibility to lead this country. I hope in the next election, when I become a U.S. citizen, I could go to a voting booth and vote for the U.S. president.

Holly Lam is originally from Vietnam.

My Hopes and Dreams

CHU MU DAH, ST. PAUL

My name is Chu Mu Dah, from Burma. I have one son, Darryl. He is almost three, but he can't speak like other kids. I feel so sorry for him when I think about him not being able to tell people what he wants. I am worried about him. Sometimes I see him in my dreams and he sings to me, plays with me, and talks with me. Then I wake up, and know that was just a dream.

After my sister-in-law and her two children moved in with us, my son started saying some words. My niece and nephew were using a different language, so it was difficult to understand each other. When

my son turned two years and eight months old, he knew more English than my language Karen. When I speak to him in Karen, he replies in English. Now, he is starting to use Karen a little. I will try my best to teach my son my language, so he will be able to speak my native language, and English. I hope my dream about him will come true.

Chu Mu Dah is 27 and originally from Burma.

My Future Plans

AH CHA NGWA, ST. PAUL

Planning for the future is very important for everybody. Everybody must have a future plan. If people don't have future plans, life is meaningless.

I have two plans for the future. One of my plans is when I get U.S. citizenship, I am going to visit my homeland to meet my parents and my relatives. When I meet them, I am going to tell to them about U.S. history. For example, I will tell them about the U.S. Constitution, and I will tell them about my experience in the USA. And then, I will tell them about the challenges I experienced in the U.S. in the first three months after I arrived. At that time, God helped me and I got many blessings from God. I am going to share how good God is for me.

Another one of my plans is when I get U.S. citizenship, I would like to visit every state in the United States. If it is God's will, I want to go to different countries to share the Word of God or the Good News as much as I understand. And I want to teach the Word of God for those whose spiritual eyes are blind. Because Jesus's second coming is soon. People must grow their spiritual life and we must be ready to go home to the Kingdom of God. These are my future plans. My future plans are very important for me. Therefore, I hope that my future plans will be complete in God.

Ah Cha Ngwa is 29 and originally from Burma.

My Story is About My Life

AUNG THEIN, WORTHINGTON

My name is Aung Thein. I'm from Burma. I came to

America on September 22, 2009. I didn't know what to do. I went to school because I couldn't speak English. I'm the only one from my family that lives in the U.S. right now. I miss my mom and my family so much.

I want to become a U.S. citizen because I want to support my mom to come here. Now I take a citizenship class at West Learning Center. I want to live here with my mom. Such a happy time!

Aung Thein is 33 and originally from Burma.

My Goals

SOPHAL THANN, FAMINGTON

In 2008, I had a plan when I studied the first year in Cambodia. I had moved to live in the city in Cambodia. I studied so hard with my major. While I finished at University I wished to become a computer repair technician in a good company. I had finished at university in 2012 then I applied for a job. I got a job for three years of experience at the bank.

In 2015, I moved to USA so I started everything again in my life. First, I went to study English at the school and I tried to speak English with another people around me. Second, I applied for job again in the USA. I got a job but it wasn't good for me. Now I try to apply for a good job. In future, I hope I will get a good job. I will finish my goals for life.

Sophal Thann is 30 and originally from Cambodia.

My Past and My Future

FARDOWSA HUSSEN, ST. PAUL

My name is Fardowsa Hussen. I am Somali, but I was born in Ethiopia. My date of birth is 1/1/1996. I am 20 years old. I was in a car accident in Somalia. Now I don't remember so well.

My family was very poor, but all of my family moved to the USA, at first to Atlanta. I moved to Minnesota in 2014. I like Minnesota but it is cold. I am happy here. I miss my mom and dad and all my family and my friends.

I can work. My goal for the future is to be an

excellent student. I want to continue to get better for my family and for me. I want to help my boy with his homework.

I want to be independent. I want to be able to do everything by myself. I know if I work hard and continue to study and learn from others around me, I will be a better person and I will be able to help others in my situation who come from different countries. I want to have more kids, have fun, take care of myself and buy a house about a half hour from the Twin Cities. I want more money because I have to help my family and my child.

Thanks - good job!

Fardowsa Hussen is 20 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Journey

SAADA SHERIF, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Saada. I am from Ethiopia. I and my family fled from my Ethiopia to Kenya 11 years ago. My dream was to get peace and freedom. Kenyan people are good, but the police are not good. They are very bad. They used to arrest me and take money from me, and again, my dream was broken. But I did not give up. I just moved on. The United States accepted me as a refugee. When I came to America, my dream came true. I am able to go out. I can breathe. I feel free now. Thank GOD!

Saada Sherif is 30 and originally from Harar, Ethiopia.

My Home

MAYNOR MANCHAME, ST. PAUL

Hello friends. My name is Maynor Manchame. I am from Honduras. This country is in Central America. It is very beautiful. There are eight million people in my country. The first language is Spanish. There are a few groups who speak their own native language. Honduras has beautiful beaches, nice people, and many good places to relax and vacation. I feel so happy because I was born in Honduras, but sometimes we don't have opportunities to improve our lives, because we don't have good politics and

authorities. Right now I'm living in Minnesota. St. Paul is my second home. I feel happy because America has opened doors for me. Now I am studying English because it is very important to have good communication and get more opportunities. Every Friday I go to a Bible class. My purpose is to prepare to return to Honduras as a missionary to the less fortunate people and work with children living in poverty and neglect. My prayer is for peace and prosperity in the world with no racial divisions. God Bless America and the world.

Maynor Manchame is 27 and originally from Honduras.

Weight Watcher

PRIYA RAMIDI, EDEN PRAIRIE

Hello, my name is Priya. I am a 30 years young woman. I have one kid, his name is Anirudh. After I gave birth to my son, I put on weight. When I was a teenager, my weight was 120 pounds. After the delivery, my weight was 140 pounds. All of my friends were wearing modern dresses; they looked thin and beautiful. One day I felt very bad because I was not wearing those type of dresses. I felt very sad because I was not looking beautiful. In that second I had an idea. I would reduce my weight. I would look good again. I saw on Facebook a couple of my friends started the program "Weight Watchers." When I saw that program I registered. That program is a five-week challenge. I saw the rules and regulations. The program costs \$100. They mentioned some rules. They gave the food diet and exercise list. After measuring the weight they register you. Every week they check the weight. During the program, I ate more often, but less food, and I drank more water. The first week I lost three pounds. My goal was to reduce ten pounds. Every day I walked five miles around the lake. Sometimes I did Yoga and Zumba. The third week I reduced four pounds. Last week I reached my goal! I reduced eight pounds in last week. In the total five weeks, I reduced 15 pounds. Finally, I was the winner of the contest. They gave a prize to me. All of my friends gave me a big hug. I felt

proud. It's the first time I won a program. Eventually, we celebrated with a big party. I would like to reduce five more pounds and I want to continue the healthy diet and maintain weight.

Priya Ramidi is 32 and originally from India.

What I Am Thankful For

NIBRAS SHAREEF, BROOKLYN PARK

Feeling thankful is a nice thing and it gives life a different test to people and makes persons know that they can't live in this world alone and they need help from another person. When someone gets this help such as any service in life, like health care, or teaching or anything, he must be thankful, and we must be thankful for ourselves when we give another person help.

I am thankful first for being in this life, and having a good family and good health, and I am satisfied in my journey in this life. Then, I feel thankful for every person who helped people and made their life easier and peaceful, including all writers and scientists and inventors. I must say thank you for my wife and sons and especially for my daughter for being in my life.

I also respect the American nation for making a day for celebrating called Thanksgiving Day. I think that all nations in the world must follow America in this, and celebrate some event in their history.

Nibras Shareef is 56 and originally from Iraq.

My S.M.A.R.T Goals

IRMA ARMENTA, BUFFALO

My name is Irma. I moved to Minnesota from Phoenix Arizona in 2013 when my husband changed work. My children and I attend family literacy in Buffalo. In class we wrote goals. My learning is to finish my venture book and speak English. My personal goal is I plan to lose 12 pounds and eat healthy.

Irma Armenta is 31 and originally from Mexico.

Jobs in My Country and the United States

GABINO HERNANDEZ DIAZ, WORTHINGTON

One example of a respected job in my country is a field laborer because all the people cultivate corn, beans, and more vegetables to eat and to sell. Some people buy cows for the production of meat or milk. It is common for women to stay home to take care of the children and do the home tasks. The men work outside the home to make money for food and pay the bills. My first job was in a store like Walmart in my country. I stocked the shelves with food like cereal and canned vegetables. I also loaded trucks with products from the store and helped the customers to find things to buy. I was very excited to do the job because it was my first job and I was only 17 years old. I'm now working in the Ridley Block Operation in Worthington and I like my job. But I love to do construction jobs, so hopefully someday I will start my own small company to do all types of remodeling like shingles, siding, windows, and things like that. Another goal is to obtain my CDL license to get a better job because in Minnesota most of the farmers are hiring drivers for the harvest season, and I think it is a good opportunity to get a good job. America is different than my country because America has so many opportunities for people, such as opportunities for more jobs, opportunities to live better, and more opportunities for students.

Gabino Hernandez Diaz is 33 and originally from Mexico.

My S.M.A.R.T. Goals

ANGELA MORALES, ANNANDALE

My name is Angela Morales. I moved to Minnesota from Mexico in 2004. I moved to be with my partner. I live in Annandale with my husband and three children and a niece. My daughter and I go to family literacy class in Buffalo.

My personal goal is to learn English. I keep going to school every Tuesday and Thursday. At home I can study Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for one hour.

My goal will be to learn English in two years.

I have two personal goals. My first goal is to learn how to cook delicious and healthy by searching and reading recipes in English and preparing the food.

My second goal is to reduce my abdomen in three months, by exercising at least four days a week for one hour and a half.

Angela Morales is 35 and originally from Mexico.

My Hopes for the Future

ARACELI RAMOS, WORTHINGTON

My name is Araceli. I'm from Mexico. I have a beautiful family. I'm married to my husband and I have two beautiful girls. I love my family because they are part of my heart. I have four siblings: three brothers, and one sister. I miss my brothers and sisters a lot. Part of my family lives in Mexico and part of my family lives in the United States. My goal is to work in the U.S. because I am the first in my family and I would like to help support my parents. I would like to be a Head Start teacher and work with children. In the future I would like to have my own business such as decorating for weddings or selling clothes. I remember when I came to America I liked it but I missed my family. Everything was different here, but I felt blessed because it would help my family financially. There are more opportunities and more security for my girls. My hopes for the future is to bring my family from Mexico and see my two daughters get a better education and see them triumph.

Araceli Ramos is 35 and originally from Mexico.

My Personal Goal

KHADIJO HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

I am going to school because I want to help people. Right now I am improving my English. Then I will get my GED. After I want to go to college. My goal is to be a teacher and help students.

Khadijo Hassan is 25 and originally from Mogadishu,

Somali.

My Dream About Freedom

PLA HKEE, WORTHINGTON

My name is Pla Hkee. I'm married. I'm from Thailand, Mai La Camp. All of my family lives in Minnesota. I have three sisters and three brothers. I have too many cousins. I have no uncles, but I have five aunts in Myanmar, and they live in the Karen state. I came to the United States to live in Worthington, Minnesota. I don't work, but I go to school. I like to take care of my baby, cook, and clean. I want to be a good mother for my children. I like to watch cool drama movies. One interesting thing about me is I want to become a teacher. I miss my relatives who stayed in my country and my true friends, too. I miss the big mountains, the forests, the big trees, the big farms, the rivers, and the villages. There is one thing I don't miss and that is the bad soldiers who stay around the village and beg our village people to pay high taxes and make people scared of them. I very much like America because it's the first time I got the opportunity to get freedom. I've waited a long time for my dream about freedom to be fulfilled. The thing I like the least about America is the snow blizzard.

Pla Hkee is 30 and originally from Myanmar.

I Am Me, This Is Who I Am

AVINA JACOBS, MINNEAPOLIS

I am dark, but yet light.

I am a dim light that shines so bright.

I am alive and awakened, but yet I feel dead and asleep.

I am the fire in homes that keeps you warm.

I am the original.

I am me.

I hate being judged.

It feels wrong, like I don't belong on this earth.

Living like when my mom gave me birth.

It may seem like nothing matters,

But deep inside my heart shatters.

I'm lucky to live this life, but if I am continuing to be judged it will never feel right,

Not in my mind nor my heart nor my thoughts.

I cry myself to sleep at night, I cry because I'm tired of the arguments and fights.

I have a loving family, but I still feel empty inside or without love.

I wish everyone just accepted me.

My Motivation for Coming Back to School

AYAN SAMATAR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Ayan Samatar. I was born in Somalia, but I was raised in the United States. I dropped out of high school in the 10th grade. I didn't like school that much. I use to skip and hang out with a bad crowd of people. After I turned 20, I got my act together. I didn't go back to school. I had to take care of my elderly father, who was ill at the time and shortly after a few years he got really sick and passed away in June of 2014. Shortly after my father's passing, I tried to sign up for GED classes, but it didn't work out as I had hoped it would. I started to look for a job. After a long couple months of looking, I found a job.

One day, I was heading home from work and I met this guy name Fahad. We dated for a couple years, fell in love, and got married. Now we have two beautiful daughters. Kamilah is two and a half years old. She's very smart, bright, and loves singing. Last but not least my youngest Milaan, she is one and a half years old. She loves looking up to her older sister, she loves me singing to her, she's very loving, and also she loves her cartoons. I love them both so dearly. Every decision and everything I'm doing is for them. I would love to give them everything I never had, and everything their little hearts desire. I honestly wouldn't know what my life would be today if I never turned it around.

The reason I came back to school is for my children,

my mom, and siblings back home. Everyone back home in Somalia is depending on me for everything. I don't want to let my kids nor my family down. So I am trying my hardest not to let them down. It's a lot of pressure. My family motivation means everything to me. So I hope to God that I'm strong enough to finish my GED classes, go on to college and hopefully find a good, well-paying, job. This is the story of my life. To whomever reads this, I hope my story inspires you.

Starting a Business

BISHARO ESSE, MINNEAPOLIS

My mother worked as a businesswoman in Somalia. She started her business selling clothes in 1990. Now she has recently opened a store at South Minneapolis Karmel Mall. Her work ethics have inspired me to follow in her footsteps. I go to the store on weekends to gain experience in selling and the business in general. Our products include carpets. The carpets interest me because the artistic work is inspiring. I like colors that are red and warm and rich. We also sell beauty supplies and traditional clothing.

Now I think of joining the business world. In my spare time, I usually draw on paper, so I thought to myself, "How about trying henna or quilting or sewing?" Henna has become my first choice since I am more familiar with it because of Eid celebrations. Perhaps I will try a henna business to start.

Henna is applied by hand and mostly used during Eid celebrations. It is appealing to the eye when perfected artistically. Henna is usually applied on hands and feet in Somalia. It takes about 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the artistic styles to apply. Salons include henna as part of their business because of the customer demands at times of Eid celebrations and weddings. Starting a henna business will take quite a while because it takes a lot of time to practice and learn how to do it. However, it will be worth giving it a try.

GGMR

EMMANUEL DEVEAUX, MINNEAPOLIS

Hi, my name is Emmanuel DeVeaux. I am creating my own label called God Got Me Records. I have been writing music since the early 80s. I am influenced by singers like Michael Jackson, Prince, and Dolly Parton. Music has always been. I can remember when I was first introduced to music. I was only six years old and my stepfather would make us have a dance contest. The winner would receive five dollars. Then and there I knew what I wanted to be. My goal is to start my own record label for the youth because I feel like the kids are the future. So the next time you see this logo, GGMR, think of me.

Goals

KMOO PAW, ST. PAUL

I am from Thailand, a refugee camp, and I received my high school diploma there. I did not have any high goals for my future because there were not many opportunities to be outside of the camp. In the camp, there were some schools to attend after high school, however, you had no chance to study more or work outside the camp after you graduated from there. Only Thai citizens and those who had money could do that. So, I was reluctant to study more and had little interest in working for my future. At that time, when people asked me "what are your goals?", I had no response. I had been in the camp since I was six years old, until I came to the U.S. at the age of 23.

When I first came, I took an ESL class and CNA (certified nursing assistant) class. I started working and quit school after I got the CNA's license. I worked at a nursing home for five years and quit while I was pregnant. Overall, I decided to go back to school for myself and for my family as well. In the U.S., everyone has the right to do anything he or she wants for the family and self. Now I am studying at the Harmony Learning Center. My aim is to obtain the GED. I study hard towards it. For I know, if I own this, I will have abundant ability to have a better job

or the joy of college.

My Dreams and Goals

MARIA MORALES, APPLE VALLEY

My name is Maria and I'm from El Salvador. I feel blessed to be part of this great country. In America, I can have a better life and education.

It was very difficult at first because I didn't know any English, so I decided to go to the school. I think it's so important to learn the language because that is going to help a lot with communicating. My dream is to finish my GED and go to the college and get a medical assistant degree because it's never too late to go to school.

My goal after school would be to one day work in the hospital and be able to help people. I grew up in a town where every one helped each other so it's always been a part of me to help people. I plan on getting better at speaking English because that will create more opportunities for me.

Strive to Reach Your Goals

TREBELLA RICE, MINNEAPOLIS

When you are striving to reach your goals, try not to focus on your past, it will keep you from your goals. It doesn't matter where you came from, but it does matter where you are going. Life is a challenge when life becomes hard and you don't see a way to go. Hold on to your faith whether it's small or large. Sometimes people look on others from the outside and not from the inside, the only difference we all have is the color of our skin. We all have dreams and goals in life. It's just up to each and every one to reach our goals. What I see in life is time does not wait for no one. If one door closes it's always one that will open and try not to question something, where God has put it. I think some things in life is just not to be known. So just keep striving to reach your goals.

My Goal

ZEMZEM ADEM, MAHTOMEDI

My dream is to go to the Century College in September 2017. I would like to go to Century because it has a good reputation and there are a variety courses available. My dream is to become nurse or social worker. My passion in life is to help people with their needs. I always feel content when I assist people. Also, my life will be totally changed because I will make adequate money and will be able to buy a house for my family. Once I have achieved my dream, I will eagerly pursue more opportunities in this field. Maybe if I want to move to different states or countries, there are always jobs for that position. Going to college and achieving my dream is the ultimate achievement. I will be able to assist people and my family's life will be better.

About School

JASON MENDEZ, BLOOMINGTON

I want to learn English. I like my school. My school it is so big. My school has alot of rooms. The school, it is beautiful. I like to read at school. I want to have my GED. I wanna go to college. I need to study hard. I like to come to school. It's important, the school for me. I like to speak English at work.

My S.M.A.R.T Goals

EVA BARAJAS, BUFFALO

My name is Eva

I moved to Minnesota from Mexico in 2013.

My husband made a request to enter the country to get married and to be together.

My daughter and I attend the family literacy In Buffalo.

I learn to speak English.

In class we wrote goal so we will focus.

My learning goal is to learn the numbers 1-100.

My personal goal is to maintain my current weight
Eva Barajas is 44 and originally from Mexico.

My Goals

YASMIN YUUSUF YUSSUF, EAGAN

My name is Yasmin Yussuf. I am from Somalia. I grew up in Qatar. In 2006, my family moved to Somalia and I lived seven years there. The life I had there was different than before. There were some things I liked and some I didn't like. I continue my life. I always want to succeed in my life. I decided to travel to another country. In 2013, I went to Dubai to study, but I couldn't do it, because it was very expensive. Then I decided to go to work. I worked in Dubai two years in a mall and again I decided to move on by coming to the USA. I came to the USA Dec 20, 2015 and I was happy!

Now, I started studying and working at the same time. I will continue my life until I get what I want. My goal is to become an FBI translator. That is my life story and my goal.

Yasmin Yuusuf Yussuf is 22 and originally from Hargeisa,
Somalia

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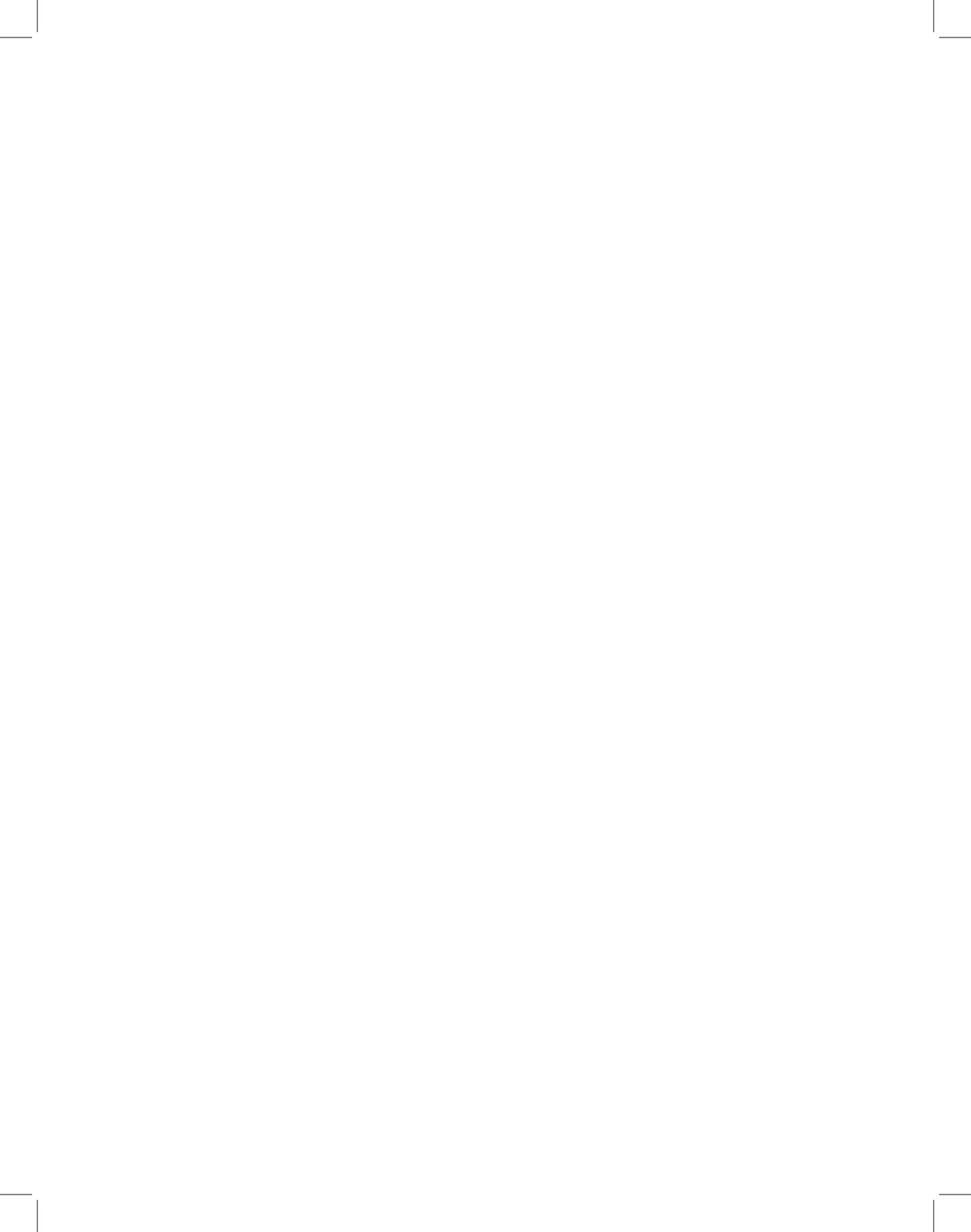
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Journeys Curriculum Unit

OVERVIEW | Minnesota Literacy Council is pleased to offer this curriculum unit to accompany *Journeys 2017*. It is written for an audience of Advanced ESL learners (CASAS scores 221-235). The learning objectives below are aligned with the Transitions Integration Framework (TIF). For more information about the TIF, visit atlasabe.org.

OBJECTIVES | After the unit, learners will be able to:

1. Discuss the concept of “storytelling” and its varied roles across cultures.
2. Read and navigate a table of contents, activating prior knowledge and making predictions about content. (TIF LS 1a, 1b)
3. Identify and analyze examples of literary genres in *Journeys*. (TIF CT 1b)
4. Compare and contrast *Journeys* texts using graphic organizers. (TIF CT 1c)
5. Read *Journeys* texts aloud with fluency, focusing on appropriate speed, accuracy and intonation.
6. Use a personal response journal to synthesize and reflect on the *Journeys* texts. (TIF CT 1c)
7. Write a *Journeys*-style text, using a prewriting/rough draft/final draft process. (TIF ALS 3a, 3b)

STRUCTURE | The curriculum consists of eight cumulative lesson plans, including ready-to-use activities. Each lesson is designed to be approximately 1 to 1.5 hours in length. Teachers are welcome to adapt the lessons to accommodate their unique classroom settings. Since class levels and sizes vary, a range of times is suggested for each activity.

LESSON CONTENTS |

Lesson 1: Storytelling	Lesson 5: Compare and Contrast Texts
Lesson 2: Navigating a Table of Contents	Lesson 6: Culminating Activity: Prewriting
Lesson 3: Literary Genres in <i>Journeys</i>	Lesson 7: Culminating Activity: Rough Draft
Lesson 4: Reading with Fluency	Lesson 8: Culminating Activity: Final Draft

TECH TIP | To copy handouts onto 8 ½ x 11 sheets, use an enlargement ratio of 121%.

LESSON 1 | Storytelling

OBJECTIVE: Discuss the concept of “storytelling” and its varied roles across cultures.

MATERIALS + PREP:

1. *Journeys 2017*: teacher’s copy or class set; **2.** Reference copy of the unit’s learning objectives (see previous page); **3.** Copy and cut Storytelling Mingle Cards (see next page) so each learner gets one card. Note: there are only four questions total, so learners will have duplicate questions.

LESSON PLAN:

1. Introduce the unit (**10-20 min**)
 - Show and introduce *Journeys* as a book of stories written by Adult Basic Education (ABE) learners across Minnesota. It is published annually; this year over 700 learners’ stories and poems are in the book.
 - Explain that the class will be using *Journeys* to work on some reading/literacy learning objectives. Talk through the objectives in detail if appropriate.
 - Explain that as a final project, learners will write their own Journeys-style texts; ask them to keep in mind what story of their own they would like to tell.
2. “Storytelling” warm-up (**15-20 min**)
 - Remind students that *Journeys* is a book of stories, as well as some poetry. Write the word “storytelling” on the board and define/discuss.
 - Lead a Think-Pair-Share activity with the prompt: “What do you think of when you hear the word ‘storytelling?’”
3. “Storytelling” mingle activity (**30-40 min**)
 - Introduce the three questions about storytelling—see the cards on next page.
 - Lead the mingle activity: each learner gets one card. They mingle around room, asking peers the question on their card, and answering questions from peers.
 - After the activity, facilitate a class conversation to discuss and summarize learners’ answers to the questions.
4. Free silent reading (**with any remaining time**)
 - With any remaining time, invite learners to browse *Journeys* and get to know the book.
 - If you only have a teacher’s copy, make copies of a variety of pages of the book.

Storytelling Mingle Cards

<p>Who is the best storyteller you know?</p> <p>Why?</p>	<p>Who is the best storyteller you know?</p> <p>Why?</p>
<p>Is storytelling important in your family? In your culture?</p> <p>Why or why not?</p>	<p>Is storytelling important in your family? In your culture?</p> <p>Why or why not?</p>
<p>In your culture, are stories told mostly by speaking, writing, or both? What is an example?</p>	<p>In your culture, are stories told mostly by speaking, writing, or both? What is an example?</p>
<p>What are some reasons to tell stories?</p>	<p>What are some reasons to tell stories?</p>

LESSON 2 | Navigating a Table of Contents

OBJECTIVE: Read and navigate a table of contents, activating prior knowledge and making predictions about content.

MATERIALS + PREP:

1. *Journeys 2017*: teacher's copy or class set;
2. Make copies of the Table of Contents page;
3. Optional: make copies of the Table of Contents Quiz (next page).

LESSON PLAN:

1. Key Vocabulary Word: *Anthology* (10-20 min)
 - Show and re-introduce *Journeys* as a book of stories written by MN ABE learners; remind the class that at the end of the unit they will be writing their own stories.
 - Introduce and define the vocabulary word *anthology* as “a book or other collection with writings by many authors.” Post the word on your word wall or board.
 - Elicit the contexts in which learners may have heard/used this word. As a class, generate a sentence with the word.
2. Table of Contents/Prior Knowledge and Predictions: Activity 1 (15-25 min)
 - Give handouts of the Table of Contents page, and project using a document camera. Orient learners to the organization of the Table of Contents for this anthology.
 - Model reading the Table of Contents with a partner, and making predictions about what types of stories will appear in each section. Model some creative predictions.
 - Ask learners to do the read and predict activity with a partner.
 - Optional: the Table of Contents Quiz (next page).
3. Table of Contents/Prior Knowledge and Predictions: Activity 2 (10-15 min)
 - Model reading the Table of Contents individually, marking the sections you're interested in with a * and the sections you're wondering/confused about with a ?
 - Ask learners to read and mark their own Table of Contents page.
 - Assess interest in each section by asking them to “vote with their feet”: read the name of each section, and ask learners to respond by standing up to indicate high interest, a “so-so” gesture for medium interest and sitting down for low interest.
4. Free silent reading (**with any remaining time**). See Lesson 1 for notes. Remind learners to pay attention to which stories resonate with them, and what stories of their own they might want to write about.

Journeys Anthology

Table of Contents Quiz

1. On what page does the “Seasons and Celebrations” section begin? _____

2. On what page does the “Challenges and Changes” section begin? _____

3. What is the name of the section that begins on page ____?

4. What is the name of the section that begins on page ____?

5. How many pages is the “Family” section? _____

6. How many pages is the “Memories” section? _____

7. What are the three sections that sound most interesting to you and your partner?

LESSON 3 | Literary Genres in Journeys

OBJECTIVES: Identify and analyze examples of literary genres in *Journeys*. Use a personal response journal to synthesize and reflect on the *Journeys* texts.

MATERIALS + PREP:

1. *Journeys 2017*: teacher's copy or class set;
2. Make copies and cut Genres Matching Cards, one set per pair (next page);
3. Make copies of *Journeys* texts: choose one text per genre;
4. Make copies of *Journeys* Which Genre? handout (next pages).

LESSON PLAN:

1. Key Vocabulary Word: *Genre* (10-20 min)
 - Review the vocabulary word *anthology* from the previous lesson.
 - Introduce the vocabulary word *genre* as “a type of writing with similar form, style or topic.” Post the word on your word wall or board.
 - Elicit the contexts in which learners may have heard/used this word. As a class, generate a sentence with the word.
2. *Journeys* Genres: Activity 1 (10-20 min)
 - Explain that you'll be studying five different literary genres that appear in *Journeys*: Autobiography, Narrative Essay, Descriptive Essay, Verse, and Folktale.
 - Lead the genres matching activity: each pair gets a set of cards (5 vocab words, 5 definitions); they match each genre with the correct definition.
 - Follow-up by checking comprehension of the genre definitions. Add the words to your word wall or board.
3. *Journeys* Genres: Activity 2 (30-45 min)
 - Select a short text from *Journeys*. Read the text as a class. Decide together which genre this text belongs to, and why.
 - Select three or more texts of different genres from *Journeys*. Give learners copies of the *Journeys* Which Genre? handout. Ask learners to work in pairs, reading the texts and completing the genres analysis.
 - In the “my notes” section, suggest that they note any ideas for their own texts, and remind them that the class will be writing their own *Journeys*-style texts soon. Follow-up by checking comprehension in the large group.

Genres Matching Cards

Genres

Definitions

autobiography	A text about the author's own life or history.
narrative essay	A text about one event or experience that was important in the author's life, usually demonstrating a lesson learned or some insight.
descriptive essay	A text that describes a person, object, event or place in detail, so the reader feels like s/he is there or makes a strong connection.
verse	A poem (may or may not rhyme)
folktale	A fictional story in which magical characters learn a lesson, often passed down by oral tradition within a cultural group.

JOURNEYS: WHICH GENRE?

Text Title	What genre is this text? Why does it belong to this genre?	My notes



LESSON 4 | Reading with Fluency

OBJECTIVES: Read *Journeys* texts aloud with fluency, focusing on appropriate speed, accuracy and intonation. Use a personal response journal to synthesize and reflect on the *Journeys* texts.

MATERIALS + PREP:

1. *Journeys 2017*: teacher's copy or class set; 2. Make copies of two *Journeys* texts for fluency practice; 3. Make copies of the *Journeys* Personal Response Journal handout for each learner (next page).

LESSON PLAN:

1. Key Vocabulary Review (**10-20 min**):
 - Return to the key vocabulary words from Lessons 2-3. Use a vocabulary review activity to reinforce new vocabulary acquisition.
2. Reading Fluency Activity 1 (**20-25 min**)
 - Choose a *Journeys* text that fits most learners' fluency level.
 - Explain the purpose of fluency practice: today we'll practice reading accurately, at a good speed (not too fast, not too slow) and with good intonation (including pausing in the right places). This will help us become better readers and be more comfortable reading aloud.
 - Read the text aloud to the class. Ask them to follow along, paying attention to your speed and where you stop to pause. Pause to answer and questions students have about the text.
 - Lead the class in a choral reading of the same text. Debrief to ask if they noticed the pauses.
 - Read aloud in pairs: one student reads the text aloud; the other student listens. Then they switch roles.
3. Reading Fluency Activity 2 (**20-25 min**)
 - Choose a new *Journeys* text that fits most learners' fluency level.
 - Model a think-aloud, scanning the text for punctuation and the phrasing/intonation conventions for each: commas, periods, question marks, etc.
 - Read the text aloud to the class, with everyone tracking the text signals. Pause to answer and questions students have about the text.
 - Lead a choral reading of the same text.
 - Repeat the pair reading from Activity 1, where one student reads aloud and the other listens, then switch roles.
 - Ask if anyone would like to read the text aloud to the class.
4. Personal Response Journal (**with any remaining time**). Give each learner a Personal Response Journal handout. Explain/model the activity and ask them to write a response.

Journeys: Personal Response Journal

Instructions:

1. **Choose** a reading from today that interested you the most.
2. **Choose one** of the Response Questions.
3. **Think** about the question, then **write** a few sentences in response.

Response Questions:

1. What connections did you make with this text? They could be from your experiences, others' experiences, or other texts.
2. What do you wonder after reading this text? Why?
3. What are some other titles for this text? Which one do you like best? Why?
4. What sentence(s) are the most important in this text? Why?

My name: _____

Today's date: _____

Text name: _____

My Response:

LESSON 5 | Compare/Contrast Two Journeys Texts

OBJECTIVES: Compare/contrast two *Journeys* texts. Use a personal response journal to synthesize and reflect on the *Journeys* texts.

MATERIALS + PREP:

1. *Journeys 2017*: teacher's copy or class set;
2. Make copies of two *Journeys* texts, making sure they're of the same genre;
3. Create a handout with comprehension questions about the two texts, and make copies;
4. Make copies of the Venn Diagram handout (next page);
5. Make copies of the *Journeys* Personal Response Journal handout (previous page) for each learner.

LESSON PLAN:

1. Read and Summarize the Texts (30-45 min)

- Introduce the two texts, explaining that they are of the same genre.
- Ask the class to read both texts. After reading, they answer the prepared comprehension questions.
- Make a T-chart on the board with the names of the two texts at the top. Ask learners to scan the texts individually, noting a few key ideas in each text.
- As a large group, discuss the ideas they noted. Through discussion, arrive at a consensus about the two or three most important ideas in each story. Note these in the T-chart.

2. Compare and Contrast the Texts (30-45 min)

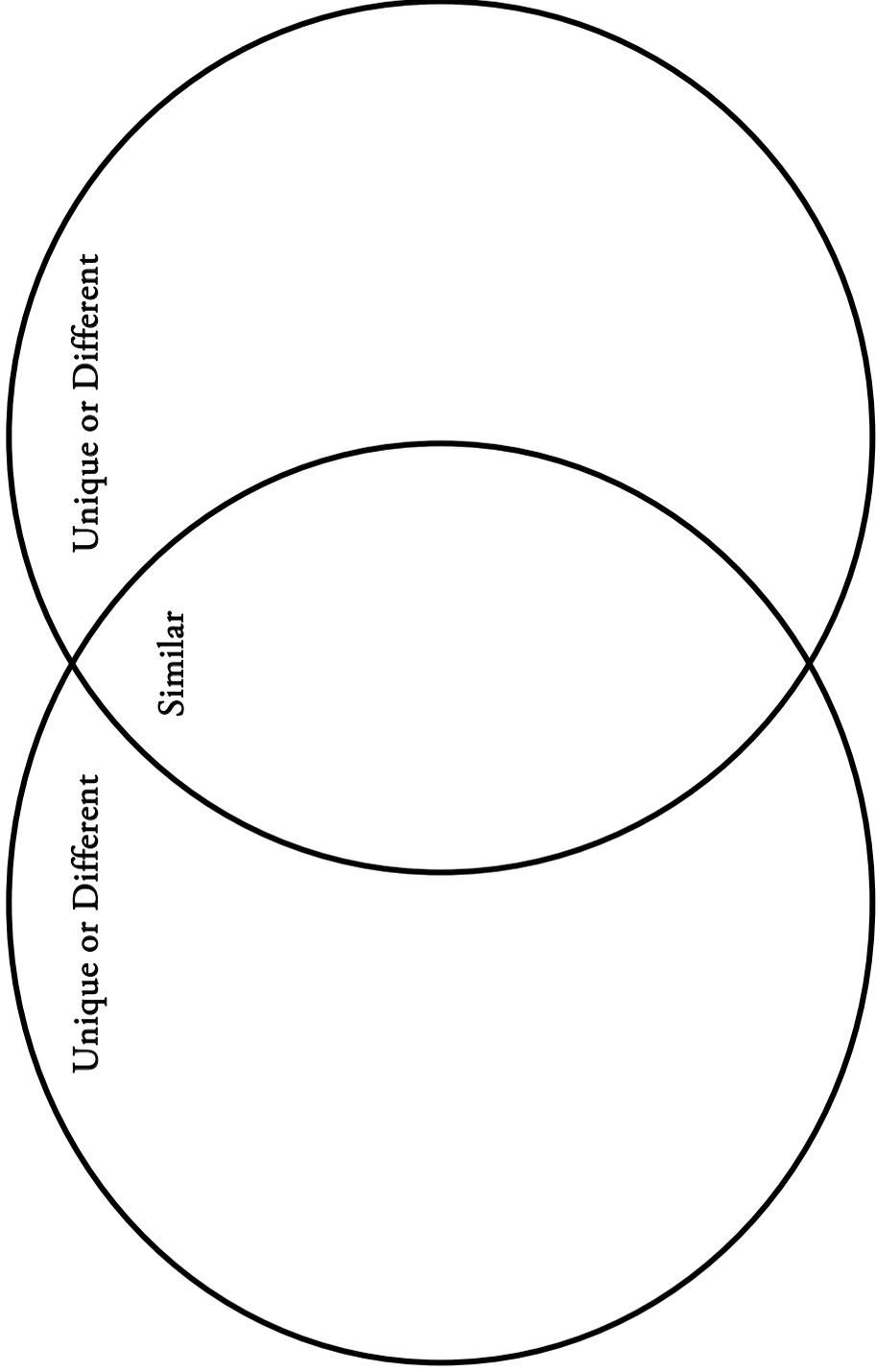
- Ask for an example of one thing that's similar about the texts, and one thing that's different.
- Next, model how to fill out the Venn Diagram with one thing that's similar, and one thing from each text that's unique/different.
- After you model, ask students pair up and work together to fill out the Venn Diagram.
- Follow-up with a large group discussion, eliciting students' responses to the activity.

3. Personal Response Journal (with any remaining time). Give each learner a Personal Response Journal handout. Explain/model the activity and ask them to write a response.

Compare and Contrast *Journeys* Texts

Text 1: _____

Text 2: _____



LESSON 6 | Culminating Activity: Prewriting

OBJECTIVE: Write a *Journeys*-style text, using a prewriting/rough draft/final draft process.

MATERIALS + PREP:

1. *Journeys 2017*; 2. Make copies of the Planning to Write Graphic Organizer (next pages).

LESSON PLAN:

1. Free Reading (10-15 min)

- Pass out a class set of *Journeys* books (or photocopies of a variety of texts). Allow learners to free read several texts that interest them. Suggest they choose texts from different genres.

2. Brainstorming/Mind Map Activity (25-45 min)

- Review the different texts the class has read during the unit, making a list on the board.
- Model a “mind map” activity to brainstorm and choose a text topic to write about:
1) Brainstorm three different text ideas. 2) Brainstorm some details for each idea.
3) Review the themes and details, and decide which text has the most potential. 4) Choose which text to write.
- After you model, invite the learners to do the mind map activity on their own. If appropriate, ask them to share their choices with a partner.

3. Pre-Writing Activity (45-60 min)

- Introduce the class to the prewriting graphic organizer.
- As a large group, talk through the process of planning to write a text. Fill out the graphic organizer together, using an example text.
- Give students time to think about their texts, completing their pre-writing graphic organizers.

LESSON 7 | Culminating Activity: Rough Draft

OBJECTIVE: Write a *Journeys*-style text, using a prewriting/rough draft/final draft process.

LESSON PLAN:

1. Prewriting Review (10-15 min)

- Ask learners to locate their prewriting handouts from the previous lesson. Give them a few minutes to review their work, then a few minutes to share their ideas with a partner.

2. Rough Draft (30-45 min)

- Introduce the rough draft process to the class, and ask them to transfer their prewriting ideas into paragraph form.
- Reiterate that at this stage, they don't need to worry about spelling/mechanics. Encourage them to focus on the text's organization and development.
- Give the class enough time to write a rough draft of their stories.

3. Editing the Rough Draft (with any remaining time)

- If there's time, ask learners to begin editing their rough drafts—see lesson 8.

LESSON 8 | Culminating Activity: Final Draft

OBJECTIVE: Write a *Journeys*-style text, using a prewriting/rough draft/final draft process.

MATERIALS + PREP:

1. Make copies of the Editing Checklist (next pages).

LESSON PLAN:

1. Review & Editing the Rough Draft (30-45 min)

- Ask learners to locate their rough draft from the previous lesson. Give them enough time to re-read their text.
- Introduce the Editing Checklist, and model how to review/edit the rough draft, checking for the items on the checklist. Give them enough time to review/edit their texts.
- Give students a “brain break” after editing! 😊

2. Final Draft (30-45 min)

- Introduce the final draft process to the class, and ask them to write/type a final copy of their text, incorporating the edits they just made.

3. Share with Peers (with any remaining time)

- If there's time, invite learners to share their texts with their peers.

Planning to Write

Topic:

Genre:

Main Idea:

Supporting Details

Supporting Details

Supporting Details

Conclusion

Planning to Write

Topic:

Genre:

Main Idea:

Supporting Details

Supporting Details

Supporting Details

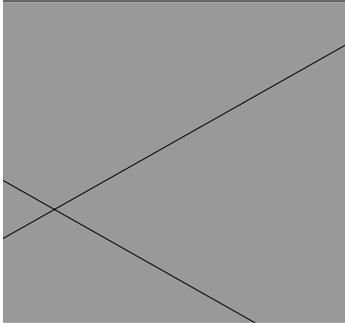
Conclusion

Editing Checklist

Re-read your rough draft, checking for the items below.

Items to check:	Check for:
Sentences	If you have run-on sentences, break them up into shorter ones.
Subject/verb agreement	Check that there is agreement between your subjects and verbs. For example, she have has.
Verb tenses	Check that your verb tenses are consistent through the text. For example, if your text starts in the past, use past tense throughout the text.
Spelling	If you are unsure about a word's spelling, look it up.

JOURNEYS TEAM

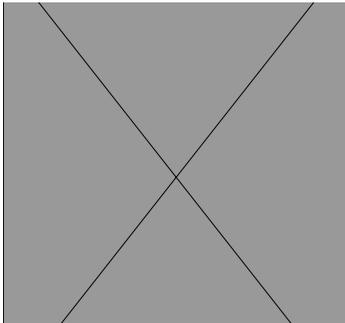
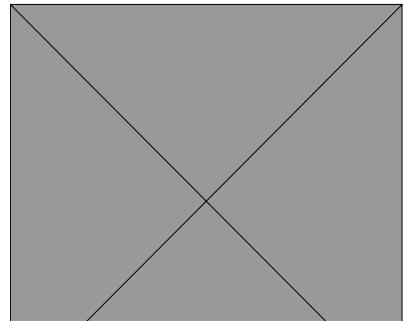


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Managing Editor

Emily is a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where she studied Professional and Creative Writing. In the past she worked as a writing tutor, and her favorite projects always involved encouraging expression in others. She was happy to discover a new channel for that with *Journeys*. She plans to keep writing and editing, as well as biking and hiking no matter the weather.

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