

# JOURNEYS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING

2013

# 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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Front Cover Art  
*Nhia Thao, Saint Paul*

Back Cover  
*Tiffany Sundstrom, Wadena*

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# INTRODUCTION

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Dear Reader,

This year, *Journeys* celebrates its 24th year of publication. This marks nearly a quarter of a century of voices from a valuable Minnesota community that have found their way across tangible and intangible distance to a larger audience who might not otherwise hear them. As we approach our quadracentennial, I would like to pause to reflect on the nature of *Journeys*, and why I believe its continued publication is so important.

*Journeys* is a book of stories. Some stories are a recounting of an event in a student's life, some take the form of art, some even take the form of fiction. But all of the stories are true. They offer the perspective of Minnesota adult literacy students enrolled in reading, English as a Second Language, GED, and basic skills classes across the state. These are students who are, like the rest of us, on a journey. It may be a journey to learn a third or fourth language, a journey to earn a diploma, a journey to learn a job skill such as digital literacy that will prepare them for a better career, or a journey of personal improvement. Maya Angelou once said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." *Journeys* fosters a place of communication where these stories are not only told but heard.

And the hearing is as important as the telling. At the Minnesota Literacy Council, we believe in the necessity of "sharing the power of learning." More and more studies suggest that culturally relevant texts are an important factor in a student's engagement in learning. *Journeys* provides a text of authentic learner stories for teachers to use in the classroom and an acknowledgement of the tangible value and contributions of adult education to the larger Minnesota community.

At the same time, we know that students are not the only *Journeys* readers. Perhaps you are a member of the community at large, a fellow Minnesotan, a fellow believer in the power of words, a teacher, tutor, or a supporter of literacy education. However you find yourself connecting to the pages of *Journeys*, one thing is certain: you are on your own journey. We all are. And as we continue on our way, knowing the stories of other travelers, of the struggles and victories they've had along the way, of their similarities and dissimilarities to our own, we become better able to navigate the world and our place in it.

During the past two decades, *Journeys* has grown from a few collated pages to a bound compilation of writing and art from nearly 600 students. This couldn't happen without the hard work of our four interns, the generous support of our individual donors and readers like you who purchase the book.

**Thank you for your interest in *Journeys* and happy reading!**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Nesheim', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eric Nesheim  
*Executive Director*

# MEMORIES

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## **My First Snow**

*Meseret Naway, Columbia Heights*

I am from Ethiopia. I've been in USA more than thirteen years. When I arrived to Minnesota on December 13, 1999, the temperature was very cold but there wasn't any snow on the ground. When I was in Ethiopia, I had never seen snow, but I heard about it, and sometimes I had seen it on the TV or in movies. Otherwise I had never seen real snow.

It had been two weeks with no snow. I was very anxious to see real snow. Every day when I woke up in the morning, I checked by the window to see if there was any snow on the ground. But one morning, my dream came true. When I opened the window, the ground was very white and beautiful. I was very happy and I went outside to touch and walk in the snow. I did what I always wanted to do. I walked on the snow and I held it with my hand. I was very happy. But after a few minutes I started feeling really cold and my body started shaking; also my fingers were really numb. I couldn't feel anything in my fingertips, because when I went outside I was only wearing a very light jacket, with slipper shoes and no gloves. I decided to go inside, and as soon as I walked inside I started to get warm, but it took me awhile to get warm again. Ever since that first snow day I liked to see snow but I don't like the cold and freezing temperature! That is my short and unforgettable story about my first snow.

*Meseret Naway is originally from Ethiopia.*

## **My First New Year's Day in Minneapolis**

*Suleiman Dhunkal, Minneapolis*

I came to Minneapolis on December 17, 2008. When I came here, it was the last month of the year. A few weeks later, I saw huge fireworks in downtown Minneapolis, which I never saw before. I didn't realize these were fireworks. I thought there were some clashes in downtown Minneapolis. A few minutes later, I glimpsed the sky, and I saw gigantic fireworks. I felt dismayed, because I never thought these were fireworks. I thought this was real fighting. Basically they were using fireworks, which looked like a real war. That was my first New Year's Day in Minneapolis.

## **Memories of a Not So Distant Past**

*Christopher W. Heinrich, Virginia*

I remember when things were new  
When things got old  
Holding my sons  
Holding her  
Hoping for the future  
Wishing things were better  
Wishing things were normal  
Pretending we were happy  
Actually being happy  
Thinking things would last forever  
Knowing things would never last

## **My Name is Shirin**

*Shirin Nejati, Burnsville*

My country is Iran. I was born in Iran. I lived with my family I have three brothers and one sister.

Now I am living in the United States. Iran has two big mountains. Their names are Elburz in the North of Iran and Zagros in the South of Iran. The Caspian Sea is in the North and the Persian Gulf is in the south of Iran. Iran has the best rugs. Iran has four seasons and has many holidays. My favorite holiday is Norze. All Iranian people celebrate it on March 21. It is a very hot month of the year. I miss my country and my family.

## **A Picnic Party**

*Elizabeth Nguyen, Crystal*

When I was in Vietnam, the last day of school my math teacher invited all of the students in her class to come to her house for a picnic party.

It was a beautiful Saturday morning. My friend came to my house and picked me up at 8 a.m. We went to the grocery store. We bought beef, chicken, noodles, vegetables, lemons, and fruits like oranges, mangoes, and grapes. We got to her house at about 9:30 a.m. All of the girl students helped cook together. Some boys played the guitars and sang songs. Some boys helped set the tables. We cooked curry chicken and beef noodles, soup, and a lot more different foods. My math teacher made egg rolls.

After that, we ate together. Then we played "seek and hide." She had a big house and a big garden. We enjoyed our lunch and we had a lot of fun. We talked about our future, how we would see each other and where we would live if we got married. Time was going by quickly. At 10 p.m. we had to say goodbye to each other. We didn't want to go home. After I got home, I couldn't sleep because I missed my friends, my teacher, my party.

Now every time I go to school I miss my teacher from Vietnam. I will never forget her. I am thankful to her for giving me the most wonderful party of my life!

*Elizabeth Nguyen is originally from Vietnam.*

## **My Garden in Bhutan**

*Hari Gurung, Saint Paul*

In my home in Bhutan, I lived with my daughter and we had pigs, chickens, goats and a cow. Together we milked the cow. We had a garden with flowers.

*Hari Gurung is originally from Bhutan.*

## **The Move to Minnesota**

*Chatunyun J. Smith, Minneapolis*

I was about eight years old when my mother told me and my sister that we are moving to Minnesota. Well, my sister was too little to be excited, and I didn't want to move away from my grandmother, friends, and cousins.

On October 4, my family and I were on the road to Minnesota. Now as I remember it was very warm when I left Malden, Missouri. The weather really didn't get cold down in Malden. It would snow, and then it would melt within the next few days.

Well, this is when I found out that the weather was not the same all over the world. From traveling through a few states, I saw that it had rain and was cold. The weather would just change from time to time. My mother had turned around and said, "At the next stop you should put on some pants and a jacket! It will be very cold there when we get there." Well you know, I was an eight-and-a-half year-old girl. I didn't believe her, so I stayed in what I had on, and I went back to coloring in my book. I must have fallen asleep because when I woke up, it was very, very cold, and snow was everywhere! I had not seen so much snow ever in my little lifetime.

I had to be about at least four feet tall and the snow on the corner was taller than I was. I had not had so much fun in that depth of snow. Whenever it snowed I was scared that we would get snowed in. After a few years of being in the state of Minnesota, I now like the snow. I have learned how to make more than just snowman in the snow. I can make slides and igloos and dogs. My mother registered me in the school across the street.

So I have learned that the climate is not the same everywhere. I could make more things in the snow. I had to get used to a new school. That was a lot for an eight year-old to take in after a cold birthday.

## **I Could Never Forget My First Ride on a Bus**

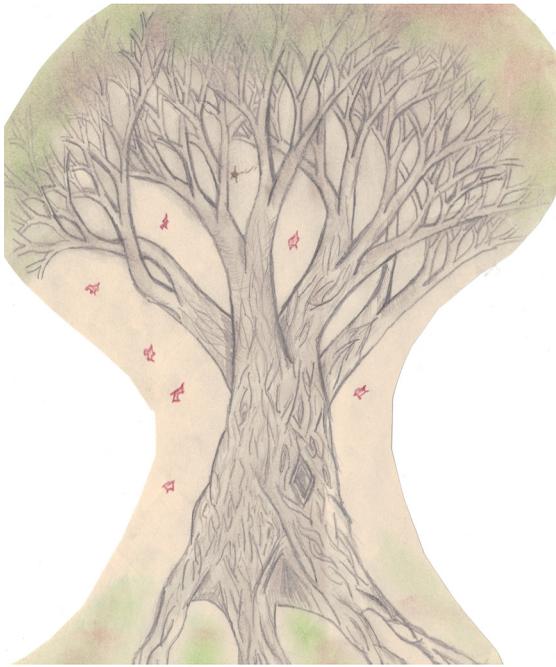
*Rosa B., Apple Valley*

My name is Rosa. I am from Mexico City. When I came to Minnesota 14 years ago I didn't have a car, and my husband needed to give me a ride to work every day. He also picked me up in the afternoon. One day, he was not available to get me and I took a bus for the first time. I got lost. I could not speak English enough to ask questions or understand what people were saying to me. I felt afraid and frustrated but I was lucky too, because I found a very nice man to help me. He called my husband and gave him the name of the street where I was. My husband thanked the nice man for helping me. I was so glad to see my husband again. That is why right now I continue at the ESL school. Speaking English is very important to improve my life.

## **Story from Cambodia**

*Sok Sokhan, Saint Paul*

The first day of the visit I was introduced to Justin at DDP, The Deaf Development Program Office, on December 20, 2012. My visit included a motorcycle ride and a haircut from other deaf people. It also included visiting Phnom Penh, Cambodia for the first time. We took a van transit ride of our very own to the Khone Pha waterfall in the Lao Niagra, on the Mekong River in southern Cambodia. We visited the Cambodia capitol as well as a three-week trip to explore the Khmer ruins, and a bustling Cambodia marketplace. Cambodia's capitol rates high with the national museum, housing the world's best collection of Khmer artifacts. The far walk to the Yeak Loam Lake (a volcanic crater) is the most beautiful. The trip out of the city to the Ochheuteal Beach is by far the most popular and touristic beach in Sihanouk Ville. Rabbit Island is a small tropical island in the Gulf of Thailand. My visit included many highlights, for example a waterfall, volcanoes, and a Buddhist temple. When I walked I become sweaty, because it was very hot.



*Sarah Wood, Holland, MI*

## **My Beautiful Day**

*Jonah T., Minneapolis*

My beautiful day had sunshine. The bright yellow, orange, and red sun sent energy through me. I went outside to find something to do. I enjoyed the view over the water with the reflection. I sought the tree to overlook. It grew tall, the beautiful giant tree. Also, I heard the birds singing in harmonious voices and sounded smooth. I smelled the air. The air was very clean and nice. I love to hear the sounds in the background, where the children are playing in the playground. They are laughing and making excited sounds. They are enjoying and playing in the outdoors.

We look like one. I have never forgotten those memories. I have memorized the past. Now I am growing up. Those really precious moments are never ending. They will always continue forever.

## **Embarrassment**

*Ali Sembro, Minneapolis*

I can remember about two and a half years ago, it was midsummer and I was babysitting my niece and nephew for my older brother while he and his wife went out for a good night in town. The kids were very loud and energetic the whole evening. I made them spaghetti with meatballs for dinner, and bought them candy and juice for the movie we were about to watch.

They ate, and I popped in the movie *Shrek*. About 40 minutes had passed by, and I was getting very drowsy and sleepy. The next thing I knew I dozed off. After about 30 minutes, I woke up but I kept my eyes closed. The kids were tickling my ear with a feather out of the pillow I brought. They didn't know I knew they were trying to make me slap toothpaste on my face. So I waited until they were focused on me. Then I jumped up and screamed. The kids ran away screaming and laughing at the same time, while I laughed thinking to myself, "I got you two turds."

When the two returned, they said they'd get me back before the night was over and I just blew it off. Shortly after, my brother and his wife arrived from their night out. The lights were dim, so they couldn't really see me. The kids were lying down on the verge of sleep.

My brother took them to their beds and tucked them in. Then he walked into the kitchen for some spaghetti. He called me to come put the spaghetti in the fridge, so I went in there and when he looked up at me he burst out laughing about the permanent marker mustache, and raccoon eyes I had drawn on my face.

That was the funniest and most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me due to those youngsters. They had already drawn on my face while I was sleeping, and I didn't even know the whole time. That's what makes the story embarrassing.

## **My Trip to Nairobi**

*Abdirahman Rooble, Waite Park*

First of all, it was Tuesday the 29th. We arrived from the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport to Nairobi, Kenya. But first the airplane stopped at the Newark International Airport as a transit. Later on it has been told the airplane will be delayed for about two hours. After that we continued our trip to Nairobi, Kenya. It was quite long to get there, but finally we made it. We reached Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. We saw our family and friends waving their hands and waiting for us. We took a taxi to the hotel. A day after I was walking by the road, looking around. I passed a little tiny village and trees. The road was very rough and dirty water was everywhere. Everything looked so foreign and strange. It wasn't anything like America, but on the other hand the life wasn't that expensive. Food and grocery was very cheap and we had more fun over there.

## **Teachers**

*Nou Yang, Saint Paul*

Teachers are very important for us because they teach us how to write and read. Teachers not only teach us to become literate, they also are like our parents too.

When I was in third grade, my instructors were very strict. They pushed me to study hard and sometimes they hit me too, but I didn't mind because that made me smarter, and I learned more. Actually, I was very naughty too because I didn't do my homework. I liked to draw pictures so much at school, and I also got a warning too. However, my teachers always teach me about how important education is, and education is the foundation of our life and our future. This is what I remember and I keep it in my head until today.

The most important things I have learned from my teachers are that people can steal things from me, but they can't steal my education.

## **My Childhood and Village in Indonesia**

*Tukirah Fnu, Saint Paul*

I'd like to tell you about my village where I lived before, when I was a little girl. I'm the youngest of five siblings; I had a sister who was eight years older than me. I grew up as a tomboy, a little naughty girl. I wasn't scared of anything, except foxes, snakes, and scorpions.

I really loved to climb on top of trees, and I never felt scared or afraid of breaking some part of my body.

I lived in a village named Kedungringin. It is a quiet place with nice weather and no pollution, the air there was still fresh. It was a little bit hot in the daylight, especially in the summertime, but always cool in the night.

Most of the people who lived in my village worked as farmers; my parents were also farmers. The farmers there grew rice, corn, peanuts, and some vegetables. And also tropical fruit grows in that area.

I loved to play, run, hide, and see the farm. There was a river near my farm too. I never worried about my skin being dark from the sun.

My house had a large yard and there were many trees surrounding it. It had bamboo trees, mango trees, papaya trees, guava trees, and pineapple trees. It also had vegetables such as cassavas, taros, chili trees, and long beans.

When the harvest came, the people there usually shared the vegetables and any kind of harvest with neighbors. People in the village liked to help each other, even if we had financial difficulties, they liked to lend some money or give something to help. There were also small gardens like roses, jasmine, and some flowers that I don't know the names of in English.

One of my favorite times, when I lived in my village, was in the raining season. I enjoyed the voice of the frogs, they were dancing and singing in the pond. My mother still lives there. I have not seen her for 12 years. One day I could visit there again, God willing.

## My Childhood

*Dhan Bir Lingden, Roseville*

My name is Dhan Bir Subba. I was born in 1976 in a small village called Kharkhola. It was a remote area covered by green forest in a hilly region.

When I was small, I used to walk with bare feet wearing only a shirt. I played with dust and mud mostly. Whenever my mother asked me to take a bath, I ran away; but she chased and caught me for bathing. She used sponge gourd, soap, and stone to clean my body. I looked after the cattle in the forest with my older brother when I was about seven. We took them in the morning and back home in the evening every day.

Luckily, when I turned eight years old, my parents admitted me in a primary school. The school was in a distant place. I couldn't attend the school from home. So my father built me a small cottage to live in near the school where I lived with five other students who were my villagers. I lived there for six years. The cottage was by the forest. It was made out of bamboo, wood, and thatch. There was no separate bedrooms and kitchen. It was like a hall, but small. We cooked, washed clothes, and did everything ourselves. On Sunday we used to collect twigs and firewood near the forest for cooking food. We went home once in a month. And sometimes our parents came to visit us while coming to the market for shopping.

My school was small. It was made out of stones, mud, wood, and tin. There were about nine teachers along with 250 students. Most of the teachers were very strict. They caned us badly for any small mistake. Like when we couldn't present homework, remembering notes, etc. I still remember some bitter punishments that I got from the teacher. Anyway, the education was good.

Later, due to politics, agitation broke out in the country while I was reading in standard five. Finally, Nepali-Bhutanese in southern Bhutan were forced by the Bhutan government to leave the country. I fled to Nepal with my parents in 1992 to save our lives.

## Crossing the Line

*Hussein, Saint Paul*

My family's tradition of not eating certain foods is something I grew up with. It was hard to me to change the family's tradition. However there was a time when I crossed the red line. I was about to eat a fish.

One bright day I was walking with one of my brothers in downtown Kismayo in southern Somalia. My brother's name was Hassan. He wore black shoes and a white shirt. He asked me if we could go into the fish market a couple of times.

I said, "No." He did not like my response and started moving toward the fish market. I followed him. The fish market smelled unpleasant to me. I compared a fish's smell to rotten meat. I did not want to go deeper in the market.

I yelled, "Come back!"

He laughed and said, "Come in."

I asked him, "Why are you walking into the fish market?"

He told me, "I'm buying a fried fish."

At this point I was shocked because I didn't know that he ate fish. He said, "Fish is delicious."

I replied, "I heard about fish's good taste, but I don't like its shining color, which resembles a snake's appearance."

Then he asked me, "Would you agree to eat fish?"

I strongly said, "No!" Our family did not originally come from a fishing community.

He told me, "Fish is yummy."

After that, I agreed to try it. I realized that fish from the Indian Ocean is more appetizing than all traditional meat I grew up eating. I started buying fish from vendors. Fried fish was sold in restaurants and tea houses. It was seen mostly as fast food in Southern Somali coastal towns including Kismayo, Brava, Marka, and Mogadishu.

This event happened to me in 1985 at the age of 22. Since that time, more people have started to eat fish in Somalia. The government was encouraging people to eat fish to reduce hunger and take advantage of fish nutrition benefits.

## First Fear in my Life

*Hue Her, Minneapolis*

I lived in the refugee camp of Thailand called Ban Vinnai. The camp had about 45,000 Hmong refugees living there; including my family. The camp had plenty of water, but it was not so good to drink because it was unhealthy and the taste was a little bit salty. If you wanted to drink it, you had to boil the water first and then you can drink the water they sold in the store that was too expensive; a liter cost five baht. At that time we didn't have more money to buy enough water for my family to drink. On the mountain near the camp was a little stream that had good water for drinking. We usually walked about 40 minutes to get that water for drinking.

I remember a day in 1988 when I was only 16 years old. In the afternoon my brother and my three uncles and I traveled to the mountain to bring that water. When we arrived at the stream, we saw three Hmong guys still filling their water jug, and we went down to the stream and said, "Hi, good afternoon everybody!" but they didn't answer. I heard somebody say, "You don't move you will die!" They spoke Thai language. I looked at the other side of the stream and I saw two bad Thai guys hiding in the big tree and they held up a long gun. That time I felt my body get very hot and I had more sweat out of my body, I felt very afraid. The two bad guys popped out of there and forced us to give them money. Each person could give them 1,000 baht (1,000 baht is equal to \$33 U.S.) and they would let us go. So they let one of three guys, who was called Leng Vang go to the camp to get the money for them. However, he was very smart. He would not bring the money; instead he went to tell the security of the camp. The security came with about 50 people with their guns on them and they surrounded the place so they could arrest the two bad guys. They took them to the police station and we all went home. After that happened, we never went over there again. Even now when I think of that situation, I still have some feeling of fear.

*Hue Her is originally from Thailand.*

## What If There Was No Electricity

*Suree Yang, Brooklyn Park*

Thirty years ago, I lived on a farm. At that time, I was two years old and I lived with my parents in a small house without electricity. My parents did everything at that time. When I grew up, I helped them as much as I could. I cooked and washed dishes by hand every morning and night. In the day time, my mom and I went looking for logs to get ready for the night time and for cooking because there was no electricity.

At that time, we did not have a washing machine for clothing. We did laundry by hand and we did not have a car. We went on foot everywhere we wanted to go. I worked hard and had a difficult life without electricity.

Now it is a new life. We have electricity everywhere we go, but I will remember how my parents lived. I will teach my daughters to save electricity for the next generations.

## My Trip to Norway

*Sheryl Turner, Minneapolis*

It was so long ago. I guess it was Oslo. We all went together. A friend and his wife, and another girl and I went. The two women were sisters. One tried to say we were triplets, but we weren't. She was being silly. We stayed in a house. There was snow when we got there. I bought a watch there. There were also different kinds of chocolate. I can't remember what was better, the chocolate or the watches. Pictures of Norway show many goats, but I didn't see goats. I wanted to live there. I met some people, but I don't remember their names. There were people from the United States. Some of their speech was in English, and some was different. We went out. I don't remember a car, so we were walking. It was fun.

## About My Life

*Ubah Abdi, Minneapolis*

My name is Ubah Abdi. I am from Somalia. I moved to Kenya in 1996 with my family. I have a big family. I have seven brothers, three sisters, and my parents—altogether fourteen people. My two older sisters and I moved to America on May 18, 1999. I didn't know how to speak English. My older sister spoke English very well. When we were in the airport my sister and I needed to go to the bathroom. We didn't know how to ask for help. We went back to my older sister and she was so angry. She said, "How many times have I told you guys you have to learn English?"

*Ubah Abdi is originally from Somalia.*

## Untitled

*Feisal Hassan, Saint Paul*

I lived in Somalia. It was a very nice place that I remember. I remember the land. It was beautiful and had trees, houses, and a warm climate. I remember when I was a kid. I used to play outside.

## My Name is Shukri Agoole

*Shukri Agoole, Minneapolis*

My name is Shukri Agoole. I came from Somalia. I was born in Mogadishu in 1971. I grew up with my large family that included 27 kids with four parents and my dad had 15 sisters and 11 brothers. I was very excited about my life because we are happy people. My dad was an Engineer, my mom was a shopkeeper, and my two step-mothers were nurses, even though one step-mom died in 1978. After that, my dad passed away on October 20 1979. I graduated from high school in 1986 and went to college. When I was in college, I married on June 22, 1990. This was the year the Somalian Civil War started, it was bad. My mom passed away in 1999. I tried to go to another country but I couldn't. After 12 years, I came to Cairo, Egypt on August 18, 2002. I went to United Nations. We were very happy because we came to the United States of America on September 27, 2004.

In Baton Rouge, Louisiana it was so hot and we wore jackets, my kids and I, because we were embarrassed. My husband knew not to do that because he was living there a long time ago. We saw the people wearing t-shirts. My husband and I have seven kids. I know little English. Not much, but my husband knows English very well. I don't need an interpreter though. I got a job in two months, but I didn't have an interview. I had that job for seven months and then I moved to Wisconsin. I started another job working for an Italian who didn't interview me either. I worked in that Wisconsin restaurant for two years. The name is Café Mario. Then I moved to Minnesota. My first job here was at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Bloomington. After that I worked many jobs. Now I learn more English at Open Door Learning Center. I am improving my English and helping my kids, too.

*Shukri Agoole is originally from Mogadishu, Somalia.*

## **Unforgettable Memories**

*Kadra, Minneapolis*

When I was back home, my friends and I had a group to help each other before final exams were coming. Every Friday we also went to one of the group members' house. That person prepared food for us to eat when everyone came. I missed all those things when I came to America because I didn't have my friends here. I did everything by myself because I didn't have anybody to go anywhere with.

One of my friends from Somaliland came to America four years after I did. She is married and always pushing me to marry, but I always tell her I am not ready yet. Now I need to finish high school and go to college.

## **When 9/11 Happened**

*Chong Chang, Minneapolis*

When 9/11 happened, I was watching a Thai talk show and doing my work like usual. The next day, I went to my friend's house to watch my favorite TV series. When the news was on, my friends and I watched it. That was bad news!

There were four airplanes. They tried to hit the important buildings in the U.S. There were three airplanes that succeeded in hitting the target they wanted. One airplane failed and crashed in a corn field. One hit the Pentagon and two others hit the buildings in New York City. 9/11 was big news. I saw it in the news for nearly two weeks. A few months later, President George W. Bush wanted to pay back the terrorists. The U.S wanted to arrest Osama bin Laden. Whoever arrested Osama bin Laden or gave information about him would get a good reward. That is why Osama bin Laden became "The U.S Top Wanted." After 9/11, we couldn't go to Canada without a passport. Now, we have to get a passport to travel to Canada. All airports increased the security. 9/11 has changed a lot of American life.

## **I Miss My Home Country**

*Ding I., Saint Paul*

My name is Ding I. I am from Burma. In Burma, I lived in a small village in the state of Chin. In the United States, I live in safety and a very beautiful country. But I miss my home country because I grew up in my country.

In the United States, I can build a house and own a car. But I miss my bamboo house and walking every day. There I can't drive by car to the village and there are no electric lights. When I saw the United States it was very pleasant and the ground is so flat and the electricity is on all night and day. But I miss my country's rivers, forests, mountains that go up step by step, many kinds of flowers, and many kinds of bird sounds and I miss the fire place where we cooked. Also we have so famous a waterfall in my state. It looks very beautiful. Forever I miss my home country.

*Ding I. is originally from Burma*

## **My Family's Journey**

*Klar Paw, Roseville*

My father told me that his beautiful village used to be full of peace. It was surrounded by mountains, rivers, and trees. In 1974, a group of mean Burmese soldiers arrived in his village and shot the village leader. Later they caught people to carry food and some heavy equipment for them. One year later, soldiers came back to his village and shot more people. Many villagers ran away and hid in the caves of the forest. They wanted to go back, but the village was not safe anymore because Burmese soldiers could come and kill the villagers at any time.

In 1978, my parents ran away from their village. They followed the Karen soldiers from place to place until they arrived at some Karen villages. They stayed there for almost two years, and my mom gave birth to my brother in December 1979.

When my brother was five years old, Burmese soldiers arrived at their village, so they escaped into the forest for a few weeks. But when they came back, their village was empty because the soldiers burned

down all of their houses and took all of their farm animals. They didn't have anything left so they planned to go live in a Thai refugee camp. They didn't have enough food with them, and it was a long distance to the camp. There was a lot of rain, and the streams were flooded. Many of their children got sick. Some kids lost their lives.

A few months later, my parents arrived at a Thai refugee camp where they lived under a plastic tent. It was so hot. Some kids got sunburned. They decided to build a small house to be safe from sunburn. Later in October 1986, my mom gave birth to me, and I grew up in the camp. When I was twelve, we heard gunshots and people yelling and crying at midnight. We hid in the ground and under the trees. It took about a half hour until the Burmese soldiers left.

In the morning, I saw a lot of blood. They killed my teacher and my friends. I told my mom I hated the Burmese soldiers! In 2007, my parents and my only brother went to Finland. Finally, in 2009, I arrived in the United States of America to build a better life with my husband and children.

*Klar Paw is originally from Burma*

## **My Story**

*Veronica Balderas, Fairmont*

My name is Veronica Balderas. I'm 32 years old. I was born in a big city in Mexico named Monterrey. I grew up with two brothers younger than myself, in a little house outside of the city.

I went to the local school until I went to the university to study veterinary medicine. At this time I was by myself, so it was lots of fun at college but also very difficult being alone and having to pay rent, food and college fees.

I made many trips all over Mexico, taking courses in areas of medicine but none of this would have been possible if I didn't get a scholarship. So I played soccer for four years and worked on a goat farm from college which gave me extra money to keep going.

I graduated five years later after a lot of studying and working at the same time. I worked in a local vet clinic with Dr. Ana Sosa, who inspired me to do ev-

erything that I wanted to do. I learned that you never underestimate a cat—even if they are little they can and will defend themselves in any way.

After graduation, I took an English course for five months in a private school. By this time, I was working at the veterinary clinic and preparing for my wedding in April 2004. Yeah!

I got married and life continued. I went to Management College in 2006. We had a baby boy, Sam, in 2008. Juan, my husband, got a job in the United States in 2009. I stayed in Monterrey with my baby until I finished college and graduated again. Then I came to the United States to meet my husband and to be together at last as a family.

I'm now working at LB Pork Inc. in Northrop, MN. I have been taking care of pigs and doing a little management for the last two years. This was a radical change for me as I was used to working with goats and cats only, but that hasn't stopped me. I learn new stuff every day about my work, the people, and the culture.

I like this area, the people are very kind and peaceful. I am now having a great time in my English class. I meet new friends and they have become part of my new life.

*Veronica Balderas is 33 and originally from Mexico.*

## **Funny and Stressful**

*Paola Navarrete, Maple Grove*

Sometimes with kids many funny and stressful situations occur. I am going to tell a story about my son that happened some years ago.

When he was 4 years old, somebody gave him a magnet pieces game to build different structures on Christmas. He was too young for this kind of game, and he decided to taste the small pieces and swallowed some of them. When I saw him, luckily I did, I asked him "why did you do that?" He said "I wanted to taste them and they were very good."

This is the funny part of the story. Then I had to go to the hospital with him, he was checked by x-ray and scanner. I was really scared because the doctors were not sure if the pieces would pass through all of his small digestive system. They were even thinking

about surgery.

The other big problem was the chance of those magnet pieces joining and pressing his intestines producing an intestinal obstruction and a serious infection. At that moment I experienced a very stressful situation.

Finally, after six long hours waiting at the hospital, the pieces passed through the smallest parts of his digestive system and we could go back home and wait for the final part of the digestive process.

My son was tired and a bit scared about all this and he promised me, "Mommy I will never eat magnets again."

*Paola Navarrete is originally from Chile*

## **Diamonds at Night**

*Michael Aldrich, Minneapolis*

Others would like to walk  
A road of gold or rubies  
Under their feet.  
But richer still am I  
To walk a road of new fallen snow.  
In sparkling radiance  
Enchanted by the sight  
I walk among diamonds at night.

## **Memories of an African Childhood**

*Muzamil Yaha, Minneapolis*

I was born and raised in the city of Taltale. It was where my mom brought me into the world. It is in the southeast part of Ethiopia. The city is full of natural resources but not an easy place for women to live. I had a happy childhood, even though I did not have anything appropriate to play with, no toys or playthings, but plenty of trees to climb and time to climb them.

I was born in 1990, during the season of political uprising across Ethiopia. The political party 'Tigre' was struggling with the previous government and calling for more freedom for the people. However, once the party took down the dictatorship, a new dictator

took power and was as brutal as the one before. Like the preceding government, the Tigre ruled the people with an iron fist.

Taltale is where I was raised and lived most of my young life. It's a beautiful town with seventy thousand people. Most of them live on farms where the land is covered with grasses on which a variety of animals feed. However, besides the fresh air from the forests and the native grasslands, few of Taltale's natural resources are used by the people, for the citizens are not educated enough to fully develop them.

I was born at home, as many children in underdeveloped countries are. The day of my birth, the birds began to sing. When my mom was ready to give birth, only my brothers were at home, and they were not mature enough to help her, but my oldest brother, I smile, went next door to one of my momma's neighbors, an elderly woman who helped deliver many babies before; she helped my mom deliver me and most likely saved her life. It took over three hours to deliver me to the world; the delivery was difficult, and my family was blessed that mom survived.

Taltale is where I was born and where I first tasted the sweetness of life. My childhood there was difficult, but my memories of those early days will remain with me forever.

## **My Story**

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

I am from Ethiopia (Oromia). In 1991 the military junta leadership "Derg" failed and the new era started in Ethiopian political history.

The new government gave all ethnic groups in the country a chance to support any party. During this transition period there were many political parties in the country. It is at this time Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) came into the picture and joined the transition government. The organization represents 40 million and Oromos in the country started supporting it.

After a while, their problem was between ruling party and OLF. That is when the Oromo Liberation Front left the charter. This is when the ruling party started arresting, killing, looting the property of OLF supporters. It became common to flee the country due to fear of government brutality.

In July 1992, I was taken from my home and jailed for the crime of supporting OLF. I was jailed in military camp and other prisons in the country for four years. I was treated in inhuman ways physically and psychologically, including torture. I was released in February 1995. Even if I was out of jail I was not able to live a peaceful life. I used to get bullied and warned every now and then. I was living in fear of being jailed again. I was told I have to work with them or else.

In fear of this I started working for ministry of agriculture. I was working in this position until April 2002, when out of nowhere and without wrongdoing, I was arrested again. I was released on July 2002. I asked the officers "What have I done?" They could not give me any specific answer except saying I am suspected.

In December 2002, I heard the government soldiers are looking to kill me. To save my life I left my family and the country on December 12, 2002 and arrived to Kenya. After living in refugee camp for 10 years, I came to the U.S.A. in December 2012. I so far have settled in peaceful U.S.A. and received big help from the settlement agency. I hope to see my family and country one day!

## Our First Trip to the U.S.A.

*Ghislaine Gillard, Hastings*

For us it was very important! First, we were going to America, and we took the plane for the very first time. We were going for my son's wedding. It was our first real holiday ever. Our son really wanted us to have an unforgettable memory of our first visit, and everything was perfect!

Our son was waiting for us at the airport. He had planned a huge surprise for us. A limousine and driver were waiting for us. We met the family of my daughter-in-law. They were very nice people who immediately accepted us. We all went to a cabin on Lake Superior.

After this weekend, the wedding was celebrated. It was fantastic, and in no way similar to French weddings. The newlyweds had another surprise for us. They took my husband and me with them for a Las Vegas honeymoon. Our son and daughter-in-law had treated us like a king and a queen!

*Ghislaine Gillard is 63 and originally from France.*



*Chitsae Vang, Saint Paul*

## Earthquake

*Machiko Tanaka, Minneapolis*

On January 17, 1995, there was a big earthquake in Japan. It was early morning. I slept with my family. First, I heard a big sound. It was like a dinosaur coming, so I woke up and then I felt a big swing! I've never felt that before. I didn't say anything, I didn't do anything. A few minutes later, neighbors gathered, but the earthquake had interrupted the supply of electricity, gas and water. So we didn't get information. After electricity was restored, we could get information about this earthquake. We were surprised. The news was terrible. There was a big fire and many buildings were broken. More than 6000 people died.

On March 11, 2011, 16 years later, we got a big earthquake again. It became a tsunami. Many people were swallowed up by the ocean. More than 15,000 people died and still now many people are lost in the ocean. An earthquake can take many important lives. I hate earthquakes.

## Remembering My Childhood

*Veronica Moctezuma, Falcon Heights*

When I was a child, I played at being chef with dirt and water, and decorated with flowers from the garden of my mother, but I also played with my siblings run and hide, and one of us counted till ten and then we searched. My God how nice it is to be a child.

## My Home in Burma is Made of Wood and Cement

*Hla Htway, Roseville*

A long time ago, my family lived in Burma. This is my house. It's made of cement and wood. On the first floor, I have the kitchen. My family lives on the second floor. We are eight people, my mother and father, my three brothers and my two sisters. I am happy.

*Hla Htway is originally from Burma*

## My Story

*Nino Chkheidze, Minneapolis*

I want to tell about my love story, how I got married. My husband and I have known each other about 1 years and before that we were only friends. Then he emigrated to The United States, I stayed in Georgia and we were far from each other and had different lives. But in 2008, when he came to Tbilisi to visit his family, we met and continued our friendship, which gradually became love. In 2012 we decided to get married, but it was a very difficult decision for me. I had to change my life completely. All my relatives, friends, work, and co-workers were in Tbilisi. I have had to make new relationships with new people, find myself in this society and realize myself. Despite this I think that I made a right decision and I am happy to be here in Minneapolis with my husband Kaha.

*Nino Chkheidze is 36 and originally from Georgia*

## The Citizens of Jamaica

*CM, Apple Valley*

I am from Jamaica. The Independence Program and Festival made many people proud. I remember when I was 13 years old, and my mother picked me up for a visit. I went to the Papine Lister Mair Gilby School for the Deaf. The rule was I must behave and appreciate it. My friends learned more of the alphabet. We practiced famous speeches in voice. Citizens of Jamaica love to sing.

My teacher used sign language. All of the deaf going to school graduated. We celebrated. Our parents were proud. I went to school to practice speech. I have a hearing aid and hear a little. No matter, I still use an interpreter. I am in a local Minneapolis Deaf Adult Education class. It will help me get US citizenship, and a good job through more learning. They teach to respect American Sign Language and to be proud of ourselves. Thank you so much everyone.

## Speaking English

*Raho Warsame, Minneapolis*

I am an immigrant who came to Minnesota in 1995, knowing only a few words of English. You may have seen me (or a woman dressed like me) walking down our Minnesota street, wearing a long dress that covers my ankles and scarf that covers my head. I am a Somali woman, a Muslim, a mother of four children. Now, after 17 years here, my English is better and I am working full-time and taking adult education classes. But after I left the refugee camp in Kenya to join my family in the U.S., I had some very upsetting experiences. At the time, I didn't have much English or the expertise to stand up for my family or myself.

The first incident happened when I was traveling from Germany to the U.S. alone with my four children. The agent asked me if I wanted smoking or non-smoking and I said non-smoking. When we boarded, I discovered I was separated from my 16-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter. They were seated in smoking. I was so distraught, but I didn't know how to ask the flight attendant to change our seating.

Shortly after arriving in Minnesota, I went to take an ESL test at a community center. They said I had 1.5 hours. After awhile, the tester said it was over. I knew I had more time, but I didn't know how to challenge him. As a result, my evaluation was not accurate.

Another time, while in my low-income housing complex, I heard complaints from the Somali and Hmong residents there that the site manager came to their apartments unannounced. She entered, start yelling and sometimes went through and handled their possessions. They felt angry, intimidated and violated. I thought they were exaggerating until it happened to my family.

I was a professional woman in Somalia who lost almost everything. I and thousands of refugees like me from around the world have been stripped of our possessions, homes and often family members. But we have not lost our dignity. I ask that when you encounter someone who looks or sounds like they are from another place, at the very least, please don't mistreat them.

They may not be able to communicate to you now, but they are human beings who deserve respect.

They'll remember, and some day, like me, will be able to talk about their experiences in your language.

## Favorite Winter Memory

*Alham Kadhum, Coon Rapids*

Winter is a beautiful season for me, and I like it more than any season. I have memories that happened in winter when I was in Seattle. I got married in winter with cold weather. It was a beautiful time in my life. After one year of marriage, I gave birth to one of my children in the in winter—in February. The weather was very cold, and the apartment where I lived was very cold and wet. It had many windows in it too. My husband was with me, and he was great with me during this time. These memories were happy ones for me. I also remember how I was tired, sick, lonely, and knew very little about caring for children. I didn't have enough money for more children at that time because my rent was very expensive, and with many bills, I should pay them. I smile because with all the tiredness I was still happy. My second child was born in another apartment and in a very different and much better situation. My God gave me three gifts: my husband and both of my children.

I hope to again see Seattle in winter. The rain here helps me to remember how I was happy when I was living there. Sometimes we have situations that don't let us live as we would like. Now I don't live in Seattle. I just have the beautiful memories of my winters there.

## My Funny Christmas

*Anh Duong, Brooklyn Park*

There was one Christmas I had which I will never forget. I was with my friends, brother, and sister. In my country during the Christmas season, shopping malls downtown are decorated with Christmas trees strung with twinkle lights, snowmen, and Santa. A lot of people like to take photos for Christmas greetings.

I really liked to see the Christmas sights and hear the sounds of Christmas, so we often went downtown after work or on the weekend. I remember a funny memory when we went downtown to take photos on Christmas that year. As other people did, I chose to take a picture with a nice Santa who was next to the beautiful tree. Because a lot of people liked to take photos with him, I had to wait until my turn. My brother was ready to take the photo for me, and I stood next to Santa and held his hand. Unfortunately, his pants fell down at the same time my brother counted one, two. Then everybody had a big laugh. I was surprised and looked at the nice Santa because I didn't know what was happening to him. Until I recognized he was no longer wearing his pants, I was embarrassed and confused because I didn't know what I could do. I didn't want to help him pull up his pants, but I was not able to leave while he had no pants. Luckily, a nice guy helped the Santa. He was a security guard. I was so thankful to him for helping me escape a confusing situation. I left Santa without having taken any pictures. This was my funny Christmas in 2008.

## Memories of Camping

*Cynthia Johnston, Fridley*

From when I was four to six my family and I camped for almost two years in Florence, Oregon, at a park ground called Honeymoon. My mom and step dad couldn't buy a place or even pay rent for an apartment-especially for six kids. So we camped out in tents or a van. We would take baths in the river or heated up the river water on our fire and filled up our big red bucket. Before you get worried that this is a sad memory, let me give you some more info on how it was a great for me growing up.

Honeymoon Camp Ground was the ideal camping place. There were green trees all around, sand dunes to roll down, trails to a little lake to play. Those were the best of days. I remember on the other side of the lake were some sand dunes, and on the other side of the sand dunes was the ocean. The scenery of the things around me when I camped was worth not having a house or an apartment.

Camping as a child taught me a lot about the outdoors, and I grew to love to be outside a lot. Going crabbing off the ocean docks, crawdadding in the rivers, playing in the woods and even getting hit in the head with a rock by my eldest brother Mike and having to get stitches was worth it. Because even though I don't remember the rock accident, I am happy it didn't erase my memories of camping.

*Cynthia Johnston is 23 and originally from the U.S.A.*

## My Reading

*Kadra Farah, Fridley*

When I was in Somalia, I lived in a small village. The population is about 2,000 people. I have a big family. My mom was a farmer and every morning she went to the farm and came back in the evening. My older sister took care of us. My dad worked in another state and he came home once a month. After a few years, my mom said to me, "You are going to school this year." I felt happy to hear that, and then after one week the first day, I started school. At first, I felt like I was in the middle of nowhere because I didn't know the kids and teachers in the school. After some weeks, I felt normal. I continued my school up to high school; it was hard for me in high school. The homework made me sleepy when I tried to do it.

After I finished high school, the war happened in Somalia between the government and the people. After the war became bigger, my family and many others fled Somalia. We were like popcorn-each flying in separate directions. My mother, two brothers and I went to Italy. We lived there for 7 years. We come back to Africa and got the rest of the family. After two years, we were sponsored from a refugee camp and they brought us to the United States. But I still feel sad when we lost our dad. He was missing for 5 years. After that my brother found him, and he was alive but then he died soon after. I didn't see him since the war started until his death. For these reasons I stopped my education and my reading. Here in Minnesota I'm trying to catch the time I lost in my country.

## The Challenger

Laurie Roberts, Hilltop

The Chicago Bears made it to the Super Bowl in 1986. We hustled up some tickets and drove to the Superdome in New Orleans. We were living in Ft. Lauderdale at the time. We were in such a good mood after winning the game. We wanted to continue our historical adventure, so we drove to Coca Beach to watch the first teacher launch into space, on the Space Shuttle Challenger. I remember that day in Jetty Park (the closest place for civilians to watch) was the coldest day I have ever experienced in my twelve years of living there. It was rigidly cold, like in mid-January in Minnesota, when you walk the snow crinkles under your feet. Launch watchers were in their cars with the heaters on. The fella next to us had a small TV. One minute before launch he got out of his truck, we got out of our car and watched the launch together. This was the first space launch I had ever been to and the excitement was building, like a pressure cooker, since they had cancelled two previous launch dates, because it was too cold.

“Five, Four, Three, Two, One, we have lift off!” You could see the straight line of smoke coming out of the rocket. Then, 73 seconds into the launch, the smoke had many plumes going every which way, like a slinky being twisted in all directions. Little fires were breaking off the rocket and looked like dud fireworks that were lit but didn’t make an explosion. “I think we lost ‘em,” the fellow with the TV belts out.

“No, no, I’m sure it’s supposed to do that,” I said in disbelief. But deep down, I knew.

By now, everyone was out of their vehicles. It was eerily quiet. The faint crying got louder, almost as if a choir was singing low to high notes gradually. We formed a circle and prayed.

What else could we do at that point? We were in it together; we experienced the worst kind of history. It is forever with me and leaves a knot in my stomach every time I relive that day. That smoke in the sky where seven people just exploded was the only mark in the sky for over a hundred miles.

And I wonder what people were thinking when they looked at the blotch in the sky.

## Chances

Perry Jensen, Big Lake

I know that I got one of the biggest chances in life on June 25, 1976. When I was seven-and-a-half, my brothers and some of our neighbors got out of summer school early. Our dad was working and our mom was at the hospital for her hysterectomy recheck, so no real adults were at home. Bear, my thirteen year old brother, found the keys for our parents’ car, and we took it for a ride. We did not know the transmission would not work after the car transmission got hot.

When we got back from our drive, we had to park the car in front of the snowmobile. I got out of the car to make sure the car did not hit the snowmobile. Then my brother’s foot slipped off the break and hit the gas pedal. I was pinned between car and the snowmobile. When Bear put the car in reverse, it did not go backwards, and the car went right over me. I almost died. I was in the hospital for eleven months. My heart stopped a few times in the hospital. The doctor told my mom that before I went into surgery that he won’t give her a nickel for my life. In the hospital after I got better, they called me the bionic boy. They have a wall that says that.

*Perry Jensen is 43 and originally from the U.S.A.*

## Journey from South Africa

Nimco Abdulkadir, Minneapolis

I left Somalia in 1995 and went to South Africa and stayed there for 16 years. I was a business woman in South Africa, but left because of xenophobia. I came to the United States with my children in September 2010.

Winters were very cold, but the snow was worse. After one month, I started to attend an adult school. The first day of English class was hard for me because I didn’t know how to read and write. I felt embarrassed, but my teacher was nice. She told me I was good. Now I know how to fill out and application and many other things.

## Just Cause

*Iliana H., Wyoming*

I was 18 years old when the American and Panamanian soldiers fought to force Noriega out of my country. I was living in an American base in Panama and I was so scared. My friends were there with me, and we were not allowed to leave the base, so we had to stay in. One night at midnight, we heard: "BOOM, BOOM." I turned the television on to see what was happening. The news said the Americans attacked the Panamanian police to take Manuel Antonio Noriega out.

We were happy because he was not a good person, but I felt sorry for all those people and soldiers who died in the war. The day after this happened, everything was destroyed and people were in the street breaking windows and stealing from stores. People cheered and were happy that Manuel Antonio Noriega was taken away.

After one month I went home to see my family and I was so happy that everyone was safe and alive. That experience was something I never will forget and probably one day is something I will tell my grandkids.

*Iliana H. is 41 and originally from Panama.*

## Close to Danger

*Anonymous, Marine on Saint Croix*

I came from Laos in 1961. My country fought with the Lao Communist called Pa Tha Lao. They tried to take over my home town in a province in the south of the country. When they were close to my home town, my dad, my two sisters and I fled to the big city. The rest of the my family was already there. The Pathen Lao couldn't take over my home town. When the situation was back to normal, my dad took us back home because we had school. During the trip the bus broke down and the driver didn't know how to fix it. We needed to stay over night there. We found one family who let us stay with them. We slept by the stairs in the kitchen without doors. At midnight the Pa Tha Lao came and asked the owner of the house "Who are those people?" the owner said.

"They are civilians. The bus broke down here." They asked again. "Are you sure they are not soldiers?" "No," he said and the soldiers walked away.

That night I couldn't sleep at all. I could hear every little thing. I thought, "Thanks to god and thanks to the owner of the house. If he had said that my dad was a soldier, we may have been killed."

## My Happiest Time

*Eh Nah, Saint Paul*

The happiest time in my life was when I lived in the refugee camp because in my life I had set up a goal about I will go to the U.S.A. When I was a student I was willing to go to the United States but I didn't know how I could get there because in Burma to go to another country is very expensive. For me, I didn't have money to go to another country. But I listened to B.B.C. News and it said the U.S.A. welcomes Burma refugee people. So, I thought the first step for me was to go to the refugee camp to live and study. I started my plan. In 2002, I came to the refugee camp in Thailand. In 2005, the UN took registration for refugee people. At that time I didn't have the opportunity to apply. In 2009 I had the opportunity and when I applied I had to go through many processes. In 2012 I came to the U.S., so I think this became the happiest time in my life.

*Eh Nah is 32 and originally from Myanmar.*

## What is Your Dream in America?

*Soua Dao Thao, Saint Paul*

My name is Soua Dao Thao.

I am 65 years old.

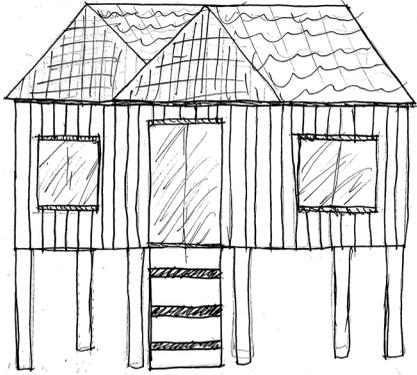
I am from Laos

I came to America because of the Vietnam War.

My dream is to be relieved from the war.

No sound of guns.

The second is money and to have a house.



Savy Mao

In my country, when we make a house,  
 We cut the tree to make logs. We put the house  
 on top. The house is high. We put the floor across  
 the logs. We make the wall, we put the roof on top.  
 We go up to the house on a ladder.  
 My country is Cambodia.

Savy Mao, Saint Paul

## My History

Rukia Osman, Minneapolis

My name is Rukia. I came to the U.S. four years ago to join my husband. I got my citizenship last year, thank God. Now I am a proud U.S. citizen, for which I am so grateful.

I was born in the Eastern part of Ethiopia. I came from a big family with seven siblings. We used to have fun when we got together. We all gathered around the dinner table, laughing, joking, and enjoying the joyous family atmosphere. It was heartwarming to see the beautiful smiles on the children's faces during Eid ceremonies, especially when they put on their brand new clothes and visited their families. Meanwhile, we used to reach out and feed the poor and the homeless just like Christmas time here in the U.S.

All the cooking has been handled by the females of the family. I have seven siblings, two brothers and five sisters.

During Ramadan, all of us used to get together to fix the traditional main dishes. To break the fasting we used to present light tender delicacies such as (in native language) sambousa, baklava, bagiya and some native biscuits. All made from scratch, along with some fresh dates. After that they were followed by the main course. Believe me, it was fun working together.

*Rukia Osman is originally from Ethiopia.*



Hla Htway, Burma

Hla Htway, Roseville

## Thin Ice

*Zhanna Zasulevich, Champlin*

A long time ago, forty years back, happiness happened. I was a five years old. I lived with mom, dad and my brother in an apartment. Near my house, 5 minutes away, across the highway was the river Svisloch. In summer it was picturesque and very attractive for small children. The river had frogs and snails, you could catch crucian or minnows. In the winter everything looked different, snow clouds floated low, they brushed the tops of tall trees, the river was frozen.

That winter my mom gave birth to my little sister and stayed in the hospital several days. My father and I were in charge of the home. I imagined being an independent older sister. I cooked lunch for my dad and went to 'work.' My work was at the playground outside with other kids. As I played with my friend, we plodded towards the river. We were curious of the thick ice near the shore. We moved towards the middle of the river, the ice became thinner. We were amused by the sprawling cracks under our feet. They looked like snowflakes or kaleidoscopes. Suddenly, the ice cracked and I was in icy cold water. My friend was scared and ran away. No one was nearby. I clutched the thin ice, but it broke off repeatedly. The river was fascinating under the ice. I raised my eyes to the sky and asked God, "Jesus, please save me!" On the shore there were two workers. They pulled me from the water and brought me home.

Father gave me hot tea and put me to bed. We prayed to God. I didn't get sick. We agreed to keep our secret from mother because we didn't want to upset her. We kept it a secret for 7 years. When my father died, I told the secret to my mom. I forgot to ask my dad if the rescue was real or if God sent his angels.

Often in our lives we don't think seriously about sin. It is as if walking on thin ice, which may easily crack. To escape the depths of sin is difficult, more than out of cold water. Only God is able to lend us his saving hand, just like the man on the river with a saving board.

*Zhanna Zasulevich is 47 years old and originally from Belarus.*

## I Miss Mexico

*Carmen Lormendez, Columbia Heights*

My name is Carmen and I am from Veracruz, Mexico. I miss my family very much and think of them every day. I miss my mother the most. Where I come from there is a beautiful ocean and the weather is hot. The sun shines a lot too. I like the summer most because everyone swims and plays in the sand. I like to walk on the beach. I miss the food in Mexico and how it is prepared.

*Carmen Lormendez is originally from Veracruz, Mexico.*

## The Last Day of High School

*Hugo S. Martinez, Owatonna*

In August of 2006, my graduation from Ateneo Fuente High School took place. That day my friends and I met at Central Park to take some pictures to have some memories. Then we went to a church for the religious ceremony that the school had organized. Later, my friends and I went to a restaurant to have a dinner and to make a toast to our success. Next, everybody went to their homes to get their suits and gowns to get ready for the main event. After that we went to school for the graduation ceremony. The principal congratulated us and a student gave a very good speech. Finally, my friends and I went to a ballroom for our graduation party.

*Hugo Martinez is 24 and originally from Mexico.*

## Remembering My Childhood

*Rigoberto Salas, Austin*

When I was a child, I played with my siblings. We played marbles and baseball, and I played with my dog. In the school my favorite sport was basketball, and I played with my friends on monkey bars.

## Favorite Childhood Memory

*Theresa Lambrecht-Johnson, Big Lake*

Many childhood memories I have are about my grandparent's cabin in Aitkin, Minnesota on Fleming Lake with my grandparent's, mother, brother, and cousin.

Over the 45 years that they had their cabin we made many trips there. One time is when my mother, cousin, and I were on our way there, and drove right into a snow storm, and my cousin, who was 12, started crying because he was scared that we wouldn't make it. When we finally got there, he hugged Grandma and then called his mother, to tell her that we made it.

Another memory that I have is that my grandparents were in their Explorer and we were in mom's car returning from the cabin. Suddenly the tire blew out on mom's car! We pulled over and Grandpa fixed it, but after the spare was on, my brother, cousin, and I were too chicken to ride in her car again. Sure enough I had to because my brother and cousin got babied and rode with my grandparents the rest of the way.

Some of the best memories are of us sitting down in the evening playing cards. After dinner, we would have teams and take turns and playing 500, or my cousin and I would play cribbage with our grandfather. We would get up early in the morning or at sunset and go sit on the dock and catch fish for dinner. My cousin also taught my brother and I how to ice fish one winter.

Many memories are of my brother, cousin, and I building a fort in the trees next to the cabin. Any season we were always out there improving our fort. Sometimes we would come in with wood ticks on, but it was worth it. We went to our grandfather many times and asked if there was anything he wasn't using so that we could use it and most of the time he would say "yes." He would say "no" sometimes. We would just go back out because we were happy using our imaginations and spending time together.

All of these memories I have I will treasure because the day the place was sold broke all of our hearts. It is still up for sale, and I hope one day to buy it and give my children or grandchildren those same memories I had growing up at the cabin.

*Theresa Lambrecht-Johnson is 23 years old and originally from Minnesota.*

## My Special Place

*Lacey D. Upton, Forest Lake*

Everyone has a place that is special and, for me, that special place is Georgia. More specifically, Cedartown Georgia. Whenever I get sad, angry, depressed, etc, I just remember that I'm back in my old home where I know whom I'm around and know how to get to wherever I want, or need, to go.

But it's not just about being able to get around without getting lost. It's where my family is. There was nothing better to me than getting to take my girls out to go visit with my grandma. Sometimes, we would even walk to the nursing home just so we could go and visit with her.

I miss being able to see my mama, my nephews, my sisters, my brother, just everyone I was close to. It pains me to watch as my girls talk on the phone to the people we all are very close to. Sometimes, after they get off of the phone, they'll start saying they miss whomever they were talking to at the time.

Then, after they've finished talking, I get back on the phone. I get blamed for "taking them away," as well as "making a mistake by sending Summer to a Spanish school." I try to change the subject, but it rarely works. I eventually end up just rushing off the phone by this time.

After all of these events take place, I end up having to remind myself that moving to Minnesota was, and still is, the best step I've made for my girls and for myself. There was nothing but my family left for us in Cedartown, Georgia. No job, hardly any money, and debt all around us. I admit, it's not 100% better, but life's getting better for us every day.

*Lacey D. Upton is 25 years old and originally from the U.S.A.*

## Remembering My Childhood

*Veronica Moctezuma, Austin*

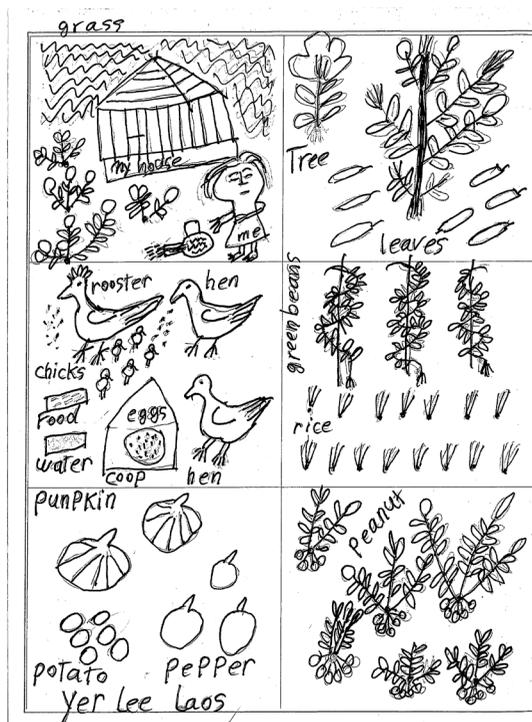
When I was a child, I played chef with dirt and water, and decorated with flowers from the garden of my mother, but I also played run and hide with my siblings, and one of us counted until ten and then we searched. My God how nice it is to be a child.

## My Childhood

Kimchhean, Ham Lake

I remember one day my family and I went to the river to swim but I couldn't swim so I walked away from them. I went so far in the water that my family didn't see me. 10 minutes later they all left. I was in the water over my head and alone. I didn't know how to swim. I jumped up and down in the water. I wanted my family to see me and help but they were gone. So I tried to yell for them and jumped up to keep my head above the water. No one was there to help me so it was up to me to save myself. I kept jumping forward in the water until my head was above the water. I finally got to the shore and safety. I walked home and told my family what happened to me. I will never forget about that.

*Kimchhean is originally from Cambodia.*



Yer Lee, Saint Paul

## The School Bus

Rubi Ibarra, Brooklyn Park

I was 10 years old when I rode for the first time on a school bus. I will never forget that day. I was new at school; my family had just emigrated from Mexico. Anyway, I had to be at the bus stop at 6:30 a.m. I was really scared and excited at the same time. I remember thinking of it as a new adventure. As I got in the bus I noticed I was the only kid there. In school, the day went by as normal as it would for a kid who did not know a single word of English.

On my way back home I was really nervous because I didn't know when it was I what my turn to get off. I soon realized that I was going to be the last to be dropped off. About an hour went by and there were only three of us left on the bus, "two more stops and then I'm home," I thought to myself. Oh boy, how wrong I was. To my surprise the two kids left were siblings and we shared the same bus stop. They had missed their bus in the morning. The bus stopped, and the kids got out and started walking. I remember the bus driver staring at me for several seconds, I did not move out of my seat. Then he stood up and said some stuff to me that of course I did not understand, but he kept pointing to the door. I still didn't move. I knew that wasn't my stop so I ignored him hoping that he would realize that he was confused. Then I noticed that he wanted me off the bus, I was scared. I told him that I did not know English so he got out of the bus and called the two kids back. The oldest one told me that was my stop and I couldn't get on the bus again. I panicked, I told him that I didn't recognize my way back home and that I was lost. The driver called the school and in less than 10 minutes my mom was there to pick me up. I was embarrassed. The next day the siblings didn't show up again for school but this time I knew my stop and my way back home.

*Rubi Ibarra is 19 years old and originally from Mexico.*

## **My Dreaming**

*Sofia, Apple Valley*

When I was child I was always dreaming to go to many places and explore, and learning many other languages. My last vacation was in Hawaii. That was the most awesome experience I ever had. I am also dreaming of many places like Italy, Greece, Paris, Iceland, and England. That is why I want become a citizen and then I can fly to see many other places around the world.

*Sofia Melanson is originally from Colombia.*

## **Don't Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth**

*Abdulkadir Mohamed, Minneapolis*

Meaning, don't be ungrateful when you receive a gift. It sounds good to me by not questioning obsoletely a gift that you received from friends or relatives. That's true, you don't need to question about the gift that you didn't spent any money, its not a good idea, when somebody receives a gift to judge by it's quality of goodness or badness. A couple years ago, I traveled to see one of my cousins who lived in other city than mine. His city was 300 miles away from mine. I traveled all the way down on a rough road by very crowded bus. The road was vicissitude. Finally I arrived in the city. I was so tired and exhausted, all my body was covered with dust. We were so happy to see each other. We started talking, hugging, chatting, and asking each other about our lives. The reason I visited him was to receive something valuable, since he came from Saudi Arabia, and he also offered for me to come to his town. My expectation to have valuable things from my cousin, was higher and deeper to my feeling. We spent a couple of more days together. We started going out and eating delicious foods and then it's time to go back home. One night, the night I have to leave back for my journey, I call my Cason and told him, I am about to go back, I stay enough with you. My cousin came out from his room smiling and gave me a gift. I opened the gift, it was used clothes, but they werewere in a good condition. I started mumbling and talking to myself why he gave my used clothes. Finally I

call him and started to speak about the gift and showed him that I don't totally like what he gave me. I gave it back, after a couple of minutes of arguing, I decided to take and give to somebody else. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth is true, because it's shame on you, by examining a gift that you received from families or friends, that you didn't spent a penny on. I learned from that saying above proverb, not to judge or scrutinize any kind of gifts that you received from friends or families. Keep the gift that you received and try to give it to somebody else.

## **Our Visit to Rochester**

*Vinh Tran, Saint Paul*

On Christmas, my family took a trip to visit my friend David Joe and his wife, Cherry Linda in their home. They are living in Rochester. It is a quiet place south of the Twin Cities and located about 80 minutes away from Saint Paul. My daughter's name is Teresa. She drove the car; she drives very well. Alongside the highway are large fields with snow. She knows by heart the way because from 1998 until 2003, she was a student and lived in Mr. Joe's home. During the time Teresa studied at the college, Mr. Joe and his wife were sponsors for her. Mr. Joe is a journalist and Linda is a teacher. Teresa graduated in 2003, and then in 2005 she got a job at the Symantec computer company in Saint Paul. I am always grateful to Mr. Joe and teacher Linda. When we are arrived in Mr. Joe's home, Linda ran out and very gladly said "Welcome, welcome!" We were sitting near the Christmas tree; there were string lights and ornaments. Linda brought out coffee, tea, fruits, chocolate, and apple cake. Everybody ate, drank, and spoke about the New Year. Everybody was very happy. We had to say good bye and come back to St. Paul. Mr. Joe and Linda gave me two big squash, they grew in Joe's garden. My car took off but they were standing waving the hands to look after our car.

*Vinh Tran is originally from Vietnam.*

# FRIENDSHIP

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## Columbus Day

*Phat Le, Waite Park*

Today we celebrate the date that Christopher Columbus and his crew set foot on the island of San Salvador in October, 1492 as the first traveler in the Americas. Christopher didn't go to school to get education, but he has a lot of tutors in the navigation area who were proficient sailors. In the same way, Christopher Columbus' tutors prepared him for his journey to the new world, Mr. Paul is preparing me for my life in the new country.

I'm learning English in Adult Basic Education. One of the skills that I am enthusiastic to learn is American idiom. I know that an idiom is the natural manner of speaking to a native speaker in the language. I wish to learn and speak a few of those proficiently. The American idioms are confusing, funny, and surprising to me. I have learned a lot of American idioms with my tutor Mr. Paul. He was a soldier in World War II. He is a strong, tall man. His face is ruddy, his eyes are intelligent, and his voice is as sonorous as the sound of a bell. His mind is strangely perspicacious. Although he is 88 years old he seems like a man of 78 years old. He is in the stage of his life that offers him the luxury of time. He still comes to Adult Basic Education twice a week as a brave soldier to go to bat for new immigrants so they have a good opportunity to practice English skills. Sometimes I wonder why he loves us as much as he does and why he doesn't leave us high and dry. Perhaps he wants to help us have a good life in this country. English is the first step that we need to try and take and we are looking for the next step. I comprehend this deeply. Therefore I am trying to take advantage of these changes to obtain the knowledge for myself. I also appreciate his invaluable assistance, his patience, and his forbearance.

In April 1492, Queen Isabella and Christopher had an important decision that changed the history of the world. The helping of Mr. Paul with us could be like that. Why not?



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My name is Phat Le. I am a new immigrant from Vietnam. I have been in the US two and a half years. I am learning English in Waite Park, Minnesota. I also get the invaluable assistance from my tutor Mr. Paul. I wrote this essay to display my heartfelt gratitude to him. I am happy about my English ability. I hope that he will be happy when he reads this essay.

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## **A Good Neighbor**

*Hanifa Ghedi, Rochester*

Neighbors are a group of people that play an important role in our lives. Neighbors need each other. Some of the qualities of being a good neighbor are willing to help if you need it, being friendly, and being polite.

First, it is good to have a helpful neighbor that is willing to help you. For instance, if you aren't at home and your kids were dropped off by the school bus, they would let your kids stay with them. You are not going to worry about them because you know they are in good hands. My neighbor likes to bring food for us, and always said, "You guys are too busy to cook, that's why I cook for you!" My kind neighbor, she does a lot of things that I can't describe in words.

Second, another quality in a good neighbor is being friendly. Every time you see them outside, they are going to say things like, "Hi, neighbor. How are you? Where you going?" A friendly neighbor will call you and ask you if it's okay to go walking or eating, etc. For instance if you had long day at work, and they see you outside they could change your mood to just saying friendly words. Some of the bad situations, a good neighbor can change to laughter.

Third, when you have polite neighbor it is easy for you and for them. To get along with your neighbors, you need to respect each other. For instance, polite neighbors knock on your door before they just coming in. And also, everything they want they will ask you for in the proper way. I can say the neighbors I have are polite neighbors. Whenever they are doing loud things, they will let me know ahead of time. That's what I call a polite neighbor.

In conclusion, there are many qualities that make a good neighbor, but these are three main ones, in my opinion. Some of the qualities of being a good neighbor are being willing to help you if you need it, being friendly, and being polite. No matter where you came from, it doesn't matter. Neighbors need to be like friends and family.

## **Funny and Scary Story**

*Leonardo Perez, Waite Park*

When I was nine years old we usually met in a soccer field to play many sports, but once after we played soccer, we made a circle and we were talking about scary stories that old people say. Then there was a friend talking about what happened to him. One time, when he was driving to work at 4:00 a.m., he said that someone tapped the back side of the car making him stop the car, and then he stopped and there was nobody. He heard the knocking on the car and the voice. That was the scariest story I heard. When I walked home, I walked about 15 minutes in a dark street without houses, only trees on both sides. I heard a noise while I was walking home and I started to run home. Two blocks before I got home I tripped over a stone and fell down. When I got home my aunt was in the porch with a friend who was a lady and they asked me if I heard a noise that sounded like a crash. Then I said, "no!" But it was me when I fell down. When I remember it I just laugh, ha, ha, ha...

## **An Unforgettable Friend**

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

Ahmed Abdu was my best friend and my former roommate for a long time, at least three years in Jordan, the Arabian country in the Middle East. Ahmed and I had some unforgettable times. We are friends who helped each other in hard or normal times. Ahmed was a polite and generous person. He was a man who respects all kinds of people. I mean anyone, whether they are young or old. Ahmed was a tall and thin boy. He has curly hair and a flat face. In fact, Ahmed was not a handsome boy, but he was a smart, polite hard worker and a generous person. I hope to see you again, Ahmed.

*Omar Abdilahi is originally from Jordan.*

## What it Means to be a True Friend

*Pedro A. Romero, Minneapolis*

A true friend is somebody who always is there for you. A true friend always helps. A good friend is somebody you can trust, share your free time with, and help. To be a true friend means to share your plans and receive good advice.

When somebody gives good advice, you can trust in that person. That person is a good friend. A true friend always tries to give you very good ideas because he/she feels good when you meet your goals. A best friend is always somebody you can trust.

A best friend is when you share your free time with a person. A true friend always shares. When you share something with a person it is because you believe the person is your true friend. When you have a true friend you try to share your free time with the person. Sharing time with a person, that means friendship.

To be a very good friend means when you need help, the person helps. When somebody helps, it is because the person feels your problems. When the person helps, it is because he believes in what you need. If you have a true friend, you can understand what it means to help somebody who needs it when he calls you. A true friend is a person who worries about you and asks if you are okay in your life.

To be a true friend means you trust in somebody, share you free time with the person, and a person who helps you. For me, a true friend is somebody who worries about you always.

## A Friend in Need

*Maryam Ahmed, Minneapolis*

A friend in need is a friend indeed. She tried every day, she didn't leave me alone so that every human good friend. When always makes you happy when you sad. That's a friend. I think proverb is very good friend, because when you know you have a good friendly. For example, when you have wedding you need a lot of help to prepare. A good friend will help you and be with you in your wedding. Also if you are depressed or lost someone you need support from is your friend. Long time ago I lost my son when I live alone and my

friend help me. She didn't leave me alone, she tried every day to travel to me several miles. She always be there, anytime no matter if it's day or night a true friend are always around you. Overall, no one can live alone so helping each other is very important, because I remember one proverb that said, one finger cannot clean your face. So that every human begin need somebody who stands beside.

*Maryam Ahmed is originally from Somalia.*

## Money

*Hamdi Shakib, Minneapolis*

You cannot buy a friend with money. By having money you can't have a good friend. The money will not help you when you needed some help, but a good friend will help when you need his help.

Money is not going to give you advice when you need some advice but your friend will give advice if you need any kind of advice. You can buy a lot of things with money but you can't buy a friend with money. The money is always gone, but your friend is never gone, because when you need he or she is reliable for you, but money isn't reliable for you.

The money can end at any time, but friendship is never-ending, because you can't buy a friend with money, but you can buy the things with money. The money can go at anytime, but the friend is never gone like money. Your friend is always there for you when need him.

## My Happiest Day

*Gaheyr Warsame, Minneapolis*

My happiest day was July 13, 2010. This was the day when I passed all interviews to be a refugee. It was a long process. First, I came to Hagadera refugee camp in northeastern Kenya, specifically the Dadaab area to get a refugee ID. After two days I got the ID to become legally a refugee person. Because of the ID, I had more rights from the UNHCR, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. After six months, the UNHCR called us to come interview, and the interview was with different organizations and going step by step. The first one was UNHCR.

The second was JVA, the Joint Volunteer Agency, and the last one was INS. I started this process on November 11, 2009, and I concluded on July 13, 2010. It was my best time when I passed my interview process and it became my happiest day.

I called some of my friends and they called me back for the sake of my happiest day. I called my relatives and neighbors to share this great day. I gave them different presents, and the presents were clothes, money, and foods. This day was different for me from other days. Every person was hugging me when they saw me. Even when I went to town people were calling and they were saying, "Hello hello Gaheyr. We are very glad about your happiest day and how you gave the people presents." Lastly, ten of my friends and I went to a restaurant and I told the waiter, "Please give us tea and water." After drinking and joking, we stood up to go, and I paid for everything. This was called our tea party.

## My Childhood Friend

*Safia Jama, Owatonna*

Asha and I were neighbors when we were little girls. We were about the same age, and went to the same school until 5th grade. In 1991 when the civil war started, everybody in my neighborhood fled to the neighboring country where we all escaped the war. My family and I came to Kenya, where we lived for nine years. After nine years, I came to United States of America where I started my adult life.

Four years ago I met accidentally my childhood friend Asha at the Carmel Somalia Mall in Minneapolis. First she didn't recognize me, but I asked if she was Asha, she told me "Yes, I am Asha", I said "I am Safia," and we hugged. After a long conversation we exchanged our telephone numbers, and now we meet sometimes and telephone to each other.

Asha has been married for eight years. She lives with her three children and her husband in Minneapolis. Her family lives in San Diego, California. Asha is a part time nurse at Park Nicolet Clinic. She finished her schooling four years ago, and got her degree as an RN from Mankato State University. Asha is happy, and I am happy for her.



*Leader of the pack*

*Joseph Jackson*

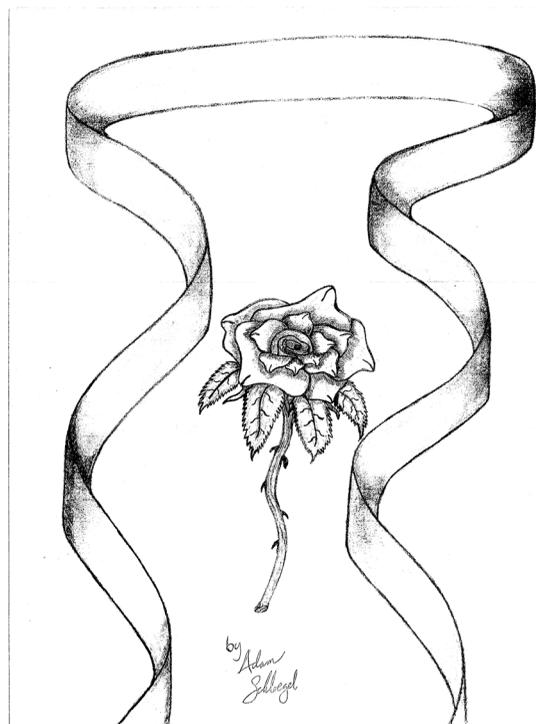
*Joseph Jackson, Minneapolis*

## My Best Friend That I Lost

Luda Bies, Linwood

This story is about my mother. We always were very close, sharing everything with each other. She was my best friend. When my parents divorced, I stayed with my mom and she worked very hard to make my life happy and I had everything. I went to many different classes to learn dance, music and art. My mother was very sweet and an honest woman having a good heart and soul and she tried teaching me how to be a good person. When I married and had my first child we found out then my mom had breast cancer. The world at this time crashed around me. I could not believe I was losing my mom and there was nothing I could do to stop this. We tried everything that the doctor told us, but nothing helped. And when my mom was in a hospital the doctor told us then she had only a week to live. We spent most of the time that we could with each other praying and saying good-bye.

We had so many plans for the future but life can stop tomorrow. Think about your family, call your parents today, not tomorrow. Put happiness in your life. My mother died when she was 51 years old. She will always be in my heart and I will always miss her.



Adam Schloegel, Rochester



Mao Xiong, Saint Paul

## **When I Work at Rainbow Foods**

*Nyapeni Poh Chay, Saint Paul*

I have a friend name Andy Stone is a generous influenced and grateful he taught me. When I ask him friendly and honest he mean me to do something he is a good friend. Me and Andy we are best friends. This is my story.

# LOVE

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## How and Why I Came to the U.S.

*Dok Vue, Brooklyn Center*

My name is Dok Vue. I come from Laos. I came to the United States because I had been to the United States with the Hmong Cultural Group from Thailand. I came with them as a singer in 2005. I traveled to California for three months and I really liked the United States because the United States is a very beautiful country. I would have liked to have stayed in the United States at that time. I thought that someday I would get married to a Hmong-American man. At that time, I met my current husband and we took a couple of pictures at the Hmong New Year celebration. After that, I went back to Laos and we couldn't contact each other for five years from 2005–2010 because we didn't know how to contact each other.

In 2010, he traveled to Laos and we met each other the second time. He remembered who I was. He remembered that we had taken pictures together and at that moment he had fallen in love with me. He asked me to get engaged to him. I decided to get engaged to him in October 2010. But, I didn't love him as much as he loved me. But, now I love him as he loves me. I had three reasons to decide to become engaged to him. First of all, I wanted to help my family. Secondly, I wanted to have a good education. Finally, I wanted my children to have a good education.

After we got engaged, we did my paperwork in order for me to come to the United States. It took seven months to finish my paperwork. We started to do it in January 2011 and finished it in July 2011. After that, I got my visa and I came to the United States and more specifically, Minnesota. On my trip, I changed my flight three times, and I flew on four different airplanes. It was not easy for me to change flights because I couldn't speak English. It took about 28 hours to get here. One month after I got here, we applied for our marriage license and my resident card. When I got here everything in my life changed. I hope everything will continue to get better as time goes on.

*Dok Vue is originally from Laos.*



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Hi, my name is Dok Vue. I am a student at Osseo Adult School in Brooklyn Center. I have studied at this school for almost two years. I like to study English and read books when I have free time. I came to the United States in 2011. Now I live in Brooklyn Park, MN. I appreciate that you chose my story to publish; it makes me want to study more English. I will try to practice my English every day.

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## **A Crying Heart**

*Arthur G. Strong, Rush City*

My heart cries out for love  
That only God can give from above.  
And if he'd allow your heart and mine  
To walk, hand in hand,  
I'd promise to be  
An honest and faithful man.

I'd love you  
Morning, noon, day and night.  
I'd love you for the rest of my life.  
I'd respect you and treat you  
As my queen.  
I'd worship you and all your dreams.

These sworn vows  
I'd promise to keep  
Because you're very special  
And mean so much to me!

## **The Love of my Life**

*Amy O., Saint Cloud*

My handsome man, the love of my life,  
One day we will be joined as husband and wife.  
Even though right now our freedom is denied,  
Some day we will be back by each others side.  
They can try and break us down, keep us separated,  
But our love will stay strong, stay dedicated.  
They think that we lost, but we know we are  
winning,  
Because you had my heart and soul from the very be-  
ginning.  
Past, present, future I will be there for us,  
Never doubt my love, never doubt my trust.  
My handsome man, the love of my life,  
One day soon we will be joined as husband and wife.

## **Colored**

*Kenny Matthews, International Falls*

Where to begin with all the colors?  
As a child I like the color blue which means sadness,

believe  
But I was very happy; maybe opposites attract, indeed,  
indeed  
Now I really like the color green which represents hap-  
piness  
When all I feel is mostly sadness until I look at my  
pictures of you  
The bright, pink lips kissing at me make me quiver,  
shake, and shiver  
I love you in the beautiful green grass with pink and  
black fingernails  
You and your bright, colorful pictures you've sent me  
give me hope today  
Pink, blue, black, green and gold—all colors that re-  
mind me of my better half—you!  
Yellow, yellow, Keegan Rose—your favorite color is  
yellow  
But all the colors are yellow to you  
So where do I start?  
Well, I'll just begin with it the way you see things, my  
lovely daughter  
You bring color into my life when I think of you, my  
baby  
I think of purple, red, blue, and yellow  
And now I am at peace  
Thinking of yellow and pink, the colors that come to  
mind when I think  
Of my favorite two girls  
Thank you for coloring my world



*Zaman Albdeer, Coon Rapids*

## The Joy of My Life

*Juan Carlos Berrezieta, Minneapolis*

Last year I wrote about my arrival in the U.S., how hard it was and how sad I was to leave my Ecuador, but I leave that aside, forget past problems, suffering the same, but not forgetting the joys. That's something I always try to keep in my heart.

That's why today I smile a lot to life, despite the stress and business that exists in this country. My smile always tries to be reflected in the eyes of those around me, expressing my joy and kindness to them.

My family loved me, and all beings around me, and made my life follow a path of happiness, but today, despite the fact that I love my family very much, I have a special reason to be happier. The girl of my eyes whom I thought I would never see, but wanted to ever be by her side, is more than a reality, perhaps long-term. My life has been in this country for a few years, and my dream's to have her here with me. I'll have to wait a bit, but that patience, confidence, faith in my God, and above all the great love of her, will make everything go well for the next few years, after which my life will be complemented by her presence.

Time to walk the path of good, of dedication and effort, of struggle and work, patience and love.

*Juan Berrezieta is originally from Ecuador.*

## Marriage Superstitions

*Khang Chai, Saint Paul*

In Thailand where I come from, people truly believe in superstitions. Some superstitions are so strong that it's almost hard to believe them. Two of the most popular superstitions for married couples are the following: don't eat vegetables during the marriage festival, and when a widow remarries no youth should show up at the wedding.

Our Hmong people believe that during a marriage festival, no one should eat any vegetables. Even though you are not the two people who are getting married, you still may not eat vegetables because that

would bring bad luck to the married couple. They will have an unhealthy life full of arguments. Due to our Hmong beliefs, no vegetables are eaten during this festival.

The other superstition for Hmong couples is when a widow remarries. At this wedding, no young people should show up due to the belief that bad luck will come to you. Whether you are male or female, Hmong seniors don't want anything like this to happen to their kids in the future, so they would never allow any youth to attend the marriage ceremony. This is a rule in our Hmong culture.

Superstitions are useful because they protect you and bring luck to you. Because everyone wants protection from evil and good luck, we strongly believe these superstitions.

## Computer

*Murry Walker, Aurora*

My heart is like a computer  
You just hacked into my life  
You stole my love, feelings, and thoughts  
Your face is my screen saver to my mind  
When I'm hurt by your cost, my hard drive freezes  
When you're hurt or upset,  
Your heart sends me an email  
The only way to remove this virus  
Is to download a registry cleaner  
But that will also erase everything  
About you out of my heart  
So let's just reboot this computer  
And start over again

*Murry Walker is 30 and originally from the U.S.A.*

## Walking

*Josue Palacios Lopez, Minneapolis*

I have crossed borders risking my life,  
Walked through the desert looking for water,  
And I survived.

I have crossed through towns and cities looking

For my dreams.  
I've been sick and I have healed.  
I have been a prisoner of ignorance until today.

Not even the borders, deserts, sickness, and jails  
Can stop my dreams.

I refuse to go back. Today I have united  
My dreams with the dreams of a special  
Woman; my wife.

For her, I would cross the deserts again.  
I would risk my life to be close to her.  
Together, we will make our dreams come true.  
I love her.

If I couldn't find any more words  
In the dictionary to express my feelings,  
And if she would ask me for a sign of love,  
I would be willing to take my heart out and give it to  
her.

My heart is yours, Claribel.

*Josue Palacios Lopez is 29 and originally from Guatemala.*

## **My Story**

*Jassapena Noh, Saint Paul*

My name is Jassapena Noh. I'm from Burma but I went to Mae Ra Moe Refugee Camp in Thailand. I was born on May 24, 1989 in Karen state. My state is very beautiful because it has a pretty mountain watershed and many waterfalls because my country has much beauty. It's really hard to leave my country. I really miss my Karen state.

Then in Thailand, I was a student. I have three brothers and six sisters. They are older than me. There I was a little girl because my dad and my mother all my family really loves me so much. So I never have a sad day. Always I'm very happy. Their love is full for me. Thank you my family.

One day my dad said to me "I will go to visit your sisters and your brother in Thailand Mae Ra Moe Refugee Camp." Then I wanted to see my brother and

sisters. Because I never saw their faces, then they moved to Thailand in the refugee camp long ago when I was baby. We came to the refugee camp on Nov 13, 2001. We were glad to see each other. We were very happy with my relatives.

In the Thai refugee camp I was a student. I wanted to study Karen language and Karen history because I was a student for three years.

Now, I'm married. I have two sons, Kue, and Joe. They are pretty children. I'm happy for them because they are very clever. Now I am pregnant. I'm happy too.

I came to the United States on July 7, 2010. I'm very happy. I want to say thank you so much to the president because you take care of many in the refugee camp. Next time thank you God bless you and your family also. And your country has a place with peace and pleasure. Thank you.

*Jassapena Noh is 25 and originally from Burma*

## **My Story**

*Eh Lar Paw, Saint Paul*

My name is Eh Lar Paw. My native country is Burma. When I was eight years old I went to Thailand. I lived in Thailand 13 years. My mother and father live in Burma. I talk to my parents on the telephone. My family is very happy. I have a big family. My sister and brother live in Burma. I have three brothers and three sisters. My date of birth is May 13, 1986.

In Thailand I was a student. I learned to grade 12 at Number One High School. I learned math, history, Burmese, Karen, singing, English, and geography. I came to the U.S. June 28, 2012. I came to the U.S. alone.

*Eh Lar Paw is 25 and originally from Burma.*

## Scared of the Dark

Antonio B., North Branch

Something happened to me that I will never forget. My weekly responsibility was to get milk and bread before 7 p.m. The earlier I got there the more chances I had to get groceries because the grocery store doesn't receive enough to provide the whole neighborhood. That was the reason why everybody tried to get.

## Untitled

Maria Figueroa, Fridley

Finding the time, finding the way  
Minute by minute, starting again  
Fulfill of sensation with no regrets  
Look for creation, hoping the best,  
Tic, tac, toe...runs the whole day  
Measure the strength, adjust and reset  
Gazing again my inner inside.  
Suddenly delusion.  
Become enervate me beating my brain, inert as a  
creep!  
It's not enough? A feeling that submitted me  
Transformed me as a slave.  
Continuous sensation a minute of happy a minute of  
insane  
Controversial pain, it's hurts but it's real, connecting  
my mind direct  
To my heart.  
How to grab those feelings as a only way, lost in time  
Or finding the cure, for that sense of sickness.  
Hoping some day to receive the same. Fulfill sensa-  
tion  
Irresistible desire to feel someone the other piece  
To complete a whole being, a human in love

there before 7 p.m. The worst part was to walk back home in the dark.

Well today is Monday 7:30 p.m. Oh I need a watch! Well now it's dark; what fright! Remember the rules Antonio, I said to myself. Don't look to the right, don't look to the left and don't even try to look behind. I looked up to the sky searching for the moon. Only stars everywhere, but still so dark, I was thinking, just before entering the bridge. Oh JEHOVAH! What bad things are lurking in a dark night! Why don't I get scared at the nights when I'm hanging around with my friends? Because I'm not alone then. Wait a minute, does it mean I'm afraid of the dark? No, of course not! I said, to myself.

"Boo!" I heard in front of me.

What happened? I don't know, but my right hand tightened more to the jar handle, and my left hand tightened also to the bag of bread. I didn't tighten to prevent the milk and bread falling to the ground. I did tighten because I was going down into the hole that was opening around my feet at the same time. I screamed!

"Hey it's me, your brother Emiliano," he said.

I wanted to smash the bread in his face and hit his head with the jar of milk, but my hands were empty. He didn't escape; I punched him right to the nose.

"I'm bleeding through my nose," he exclaimed.

"You deserve more," I replied. "The groceries, where are they?" With my eyes adapted to the dark, I saw them on the ground. What a mess. I picked them up. "Whoops, but no milk." I looked around. My brother was sitting by the bridge cleaning his bloody nose. We looked at each other. "I didn't get milk," I said to him with a sense of humor.

"Antonio, you are terrible!" he exclaimed.

"No I'm not terrible! I'M AFRAID OF THE DARK! Well, not any more."

## The Gift of My Mother's Blessing

Monica Agoildeer, Coon Rapids

The gifts I have reserved were a blessing from my mother. I'm the youngest in my family, and sometimes my two sisters and two brothers made fun of me. My mother always said, "Don't worry. You will be blessed." That came true. I'm the first person that left

Sudan, and I helped two sisters leave too. They and their families went to Australia. My two brothers are refusing to leave Sudan. This is why I believe the blessings and curses are in the power of the tongue. Life and death are in its power. I tell my sisters and brothers to be careful when they talk with their children because they bless their families too.

*Monica Agoildeer is originally from Sudan.*

## **My Best Gift is My Life**

*Dmitri Ogui, Coon Rapids*

My best gift is my life. You can never buy life, you just get it! I think it is the nicest gift because you can change your life how you want! You can do different good things in your life.

Once, on a sunny spring day, I took a walk during my break time in college. I met a beautiful girl; this is my gift number two! Now she is my wife. Four months ago my son was born. My life is getting better and better. It means my gifts continue to grow each day.

## **At the Farm with My Family**

*Natasha Taylor, Circle Pines*

When I was a child, my father had a big farm that we used to go to. When he came home from work for holidays, the whole family went to the farm together, except my older sister who was in boarding school at that time.

When the time came to go to the farm, my mother got me and my little brother ready and dressed us appropriately in a way that we wouldn't get itchy from leaves that could give us a rash. At the farm, we wore long pants, long sleeved shirts and hats. My mother also got all the necessary things that we might need at the farm. She got things like pots, spoons, cups, plates and some basic ingredients like sugar, salt, rice, oil and some other things we couldn't get at the farm. My father, on the other hand, gathered all the tools they would need to do the farm work like a hoe, shovel, rake, cutlass, etc.

My siblings and I were always happy to know it was a "Farm Day"! We got to eat oranges, mangos,

bananas, and guavas. We played local games called ampe and ludo and we kicked the soccer ball to each other in a big yard.

But at the farm, we also had to work together as a family to help each other. Now I remember when my mother wanted to set up fire on a coal pot to cook, and I had to fan it so it did not go out. Anytime we wanted to heat something, she had to set it up again and that was so hard and sometimes frustrating. Fortunately we had a stove and we didn't have to worry about buying charcoal and bringing a coal pot and kerosene with us whenever we went to the farm.

We also helped each other by picking the cassava and cocoyam and gathering up the crops that my dad and the other workers were digging up from the ground and putting them in different baskets.

Going to the farm with my family was one of the ways that brought us closer as a family, because my dad worked in a different city, so he wasn't able to come home as much as he should have. Though he had some people who worked at the farm for him, he still wanted us as a family to go take a look at the farm and also do some work there and bring some of the crops that were ripe home with us.

I do miss those times because now we don't go to the farm anymore, mostly because my sisters have moved to different countries and my brother is in college. Those will always be moments to remember because we worked and did everything together as a family.

## **My Lucky Life**

*Lin Feng, Owatonna*

In China, a lot of parents abandoned their children on the street (especially if it is a girl). I'm one of those girls that was abandoned, but I'm very lucky. I was raised by an aunt and uncle who loved me as their own child. They gave me an opportunity for school that allowed me to graduate from middle school. Unfortunately, I couldn't find a job because I didn't have a high school certificate. Then my parents sent me to the United States of America in 2004. After a year, I met my husband at a restaurant in Wisconsin. I married him in 2007, and I now enjoy my beautiful life here in America.

## Love

*Ayalenesh Kebede, Woodbury*

There are many different kinds of love. Love is an important issue in my family. To my family, love is when a person loves another person. Others believe that love includes friendship and family love. Some believe that giving chocolate candy, pictures or flowers is an expression of love. But love is sometimes painful as well. For me, the truest love is the love of Jesus. It is unchangeable, constant, and true love to me.

*Ayalenesh Kebede is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Speak

*Connie Bruhn, Minneapolis*

In Loving Memory of Ernest J. Wyttenback.

As I stand here trying to talk to you, my feet wet from the freshly fallen snow. I start to get angry, because you won't speak to me. Are you even listening? Do you even care? Speak to me.

I am trying to say—I am sorry. I know you thought I didn't need you and that I didn't care. I do care. I do need you more than you could ever know. I came here to tell you these words are coming from my heart. I love you. I miss you. Please speak to me.

I've lost my chance, haven't I? It was just a fight. I didn't mean to hurt you. Please, I beg you. Speak to me. I am scared. I've lost you, haven't I? I can feel it. My heart is breaking.

Millions and millions of tears begin to fall down my cold face. Suddenly a warm breeze brushes against my face. Did you really hear me? Are you really listening to me, I thought to myself. Could it be?

As I laid a single bright red rose on your head stone. A million more tears fell. Because that's when I fully realized you are gone. I have lost you forever. You will never speak to me again.

## My Story

*Nino Chkheidze, Minneapolis*

I want to tell about my love story, how I got married. My husband and I have known each other about 15

years and before that we were only friends. Then he emigrated to the United States, I stayed in Georgia and we were far from each other and had different lives. But in 2008, when he came to Tbilisi to visit his family, we met and continued our friendship, which gradually became love. In 2012, we decided to get married, but it was a very difficult decision for me. I had to change my life completely. All my relatives, friends, work and co-workers were in Tbilisi. I have had to make new relationships with new people, find myself in this society and realize myself. Despite this I think that I made a right decision and I am happy to be here in Minneapolis with my husband Kaha.

## Miracle

*Yarseah Degbeh, Saint Paul*

Being alive today is a success story not because of my own efforts, but by the glory of the Most High who sent the right experts to revive me from what would have been eminent death.

It all began about seven years ago when I was diagnosed with liver cancer. Each day was like a year. With many symptoms raging from my bad liver, and no help in sight, sometimes I wanted to choose death over pain. But a true friend kept encouraging me not to give up on myself. He told me to trust in the All Powerful God in heaven that I would be up on my feet one day. That truly happened after my body had begun to give up on June 18, 2011, and I was taken to a hospital where I received a liver transplant. When I woke up a week and a half later, I saw my family, friends, and well-wishers standing at my bedside watching me. Miraculously, all of my senses were intact, and I recognized all of them.

The second miracle was the fast rate at which I healed, considering I was 60. I was discharged from the hospital earlier than expected and sent to the long-term care center where I had spent close to two years awaiting my transplant.

Attending the Hubbs Center is part of my rehabilitation. When I began attending classes in the summer of 2012, I was very weak, but I was determined to make it through. My instructors, Miss Ashley and Miss Francisco, kept us very busy and interested until the end of the quarter. Also, all of my instructors this

semester are active and motivating. Much of the deficiencies I had are nonexistent today. Moreover, I have met many people, some of whom are my friends, from many parts of the world.

I am blessed that I am in the United States, else I would be dead. Had I been in Liberia where hospitals and clinics were destroyed during the long civil war, and the doctors and nurses had to flee for their lives, I wouldn't be alive today.

With all her ugly faults, America will continue to be blessed because of her benevolent acts. Many have received great assistance from the U.S., making America the Promised Land of the world. My challenges which would have been fatal, ended with a great, happy ending.

## **I Missed Her**

*Philippe Yang, Hopkins*

Whenever I saw her,  
My heart felt a flutter.  
I could talk with her every day,  
I knew she would not be away.

Her body and her thoughts were mine,  
Although happy or sad anytime.  
Her skin was so smooth,  
And her voice never rude.

In the darkness, I saw her light,  
She dazzled me throughout the night.  
I would like to be her shadow forever,  
To follow her and we would be together.

I was not in a fairy tale,  
Those great times will not pale.  
Ahhh... my Toyota was fantastic,  
Every compliment for her was magic.

## **My Son**

*Brianna Leonhard, Annandale*

I'll give you the world, or so it will seem,  
Everything you'll need to be living a dream...  
I'll give you the love your heart requires.

I'll do everything in my power to fulfill your desires.  
My undivided attention to you I will give;  
Dedication and loyalty is the life we will live.  
I'll protect you from harm; mentally and physically.  
Nothing will touch you without touching me.  
Nothing will affect you without affecting me.  
We'll battle life together and fly through it with ease.  
I'll be the sugar that sweetens your lips,  
Also the reassuring touch on your finger tips.  
I'll be your shoulder to cry on when in need.  
I'll hold you against me while your emotions are freed.  
Yes, indeed.

## **Who Are We?**

*Shirley Milton, Minneapolis*

Young men walk and talk about who we are. You wear your pants down to your knees and say that you have friends. You don't have friends when you're out there running the streets, doing what everybody else is doing. You have enemies everywhere. Saying that they are going to watch your back is a lie. How is he going to watch your back when he has to watch his own?

You may call me old fashioned, but I have my life. Lord, how do you bring this family together? We have been down this road before. This is not the first and probably not the last, but why would you want it to be another. Your friends are not your friends. The only friends that you have are your family that loves you.

Mothers, Fathers, Sisters, and Brothers talk to your children. Tell them you love them. Tommie was a young man who was trying to put his life on track. Tommie loved everyone in this room and he would want us to move on with our lives, remembering the good times that we shared together.

## **Me, to You, and Us**

*Charles Bentley, Rockford*

I'll give you the world, or so it will seem,  
Everything you'll need to be living a dream...  
I'll give you the love your heart requires.  
I'll do everything in my power to fulfill your desires.  
My undivided attention to you I will give;  
Dedication and loyalty is the life we will live.  
I'll protect you from harm; mentally and physically.

Nothing will touch you without touching me.  
Nothing will affect you without affecting me.  
We'll battle life together and fly through it with ease.  
I'll be the sugar that sweetens your lips,  
Also the reassuring touch on your finger tips.  
I'll be your shoulder to cry on when in need.  
I'll hold you against me while your emotions are freed...  
Yes, indeed.

## **My Children: My Nicest Gifts**

*Bezayenesh Woldeyes, Columbia Heights*

In my life, the nicest gifts I have are my children. My beautiful children make me feel happy. They are the biggest gifts for me. Before I thought a gift was like material things, but after I gave birth to my kids, my thinking totally changed. They give me happiness and love. They changed my life too. In my opinion, you can never have more than this kind of gorgeous gift. So today or tomorrow my feelings never change. The biggest and the nicest gift I received was when I had my children.

## **The Movie Theater**

*Ka Chang, Mounds View*

When I was an adolescent, I lived in Wat Tham Krabok, Thailand. It's hot, but not sticky. There are two seasons in Thailand. The rainy season starts in May and lasts until August, and the dry season starts in September and lasts until April. Let me tell you about Thailand. My family was poor, so we couldn't afford any air-conditioning or electricity. We used only candles for light in our home. During the summer, it was hot at night, but we could sleep without air-conditioning. Some nights, we slept outside until midnight. In the day time, it was hot too, but we stayed outside our house more than inside.

One of our favorite things to do was to go to the movie theater in our village. Inside the movie theater, there were no chairs and no cover on the top. When we went to watch movies we had to bring our own chairs. Some people brought newspapers to sit on, and other people just stood. It rained sometimes while we watched movies. We didn't complain at all because it

was so fun during the rain. Some people huddled under an umbrella and some people let the rain fall on them.

We used to watch two movies a night, two days a week. It was on Wednesdays and Fridays. For me, the movie tickets were free every time I went there. The man who owned the theater always waved to me and let me enter for free. He was a nice person. When my friends came with me they could see the movie for free too, no matter how many people went with me. Sometimes, I didn't go and all of my friends who went there without me had to pay money for the tickets. The tickets were 10 baht, but if the movie was a good one, then they'd charge 5 baht more. I always enjoyed the movie, whether it rained or didn't rain, whether it was hot or cold, I liked it. We left that movie theater and our village to come to the United States because the Thai government didn't want Hmong people living in Wat Tham Krabok.

I wish to have that place again and I would go back to watch Jackie Chan and The Shutter in that theater in our old village. I'll take my lovely husband with me to watch a movie without chairs, without the top cover, rain or shine.

## **Family Journey**

*Maribel Martinez, Minneapolis*

I came to the U.S. from Mexico when I was 10 years old but I didn't want to come. I was forced by my parents to do so. It was hard because my family and I came to the U.S. as immigrants. We had to cross a big fence and it was scary. We ran for a few minutes but we made it. We crossed it and suddenly we were in the U.S. My family and I were happy then and we cried at the same time. We all hugged each other because it was a dream.

Finally we did it, but then it was difficult because the language, the food, and the people were so different. I was frustrated. I just felt like going back to Mexico and living all my dreams and my future.

*Maribel Martinez is originally from Mexico.*

# INTERESTS

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## **The Peaceful Yard**

*Cheng Liang Royer, Moose Lake*

If you are sitting at Chisago's library by the large glass window wall, a peaceful, organic small yard is in your view. I always enjoy sitting by the yard and having lots of thoughts.

In the yard, the plants are growing. Some of them are lower, some of them are higher. The near and far sides of the yard catch my eyes. It forms four classes of vegetation.

There is a wooden bird house, a few birdfeeders, and a few ornamental trees which are standing on the clean, green grassland in the front of the yard. Next to the grassland, some of the yellow golden reeds look like happy golden tails. They always wave to me and make me feel joyful. A row of bushes is lazily stretching behind the golden tails. The trunks of the bushes are leafless. They seem to ripple like water, but all the leaves are neat, tidy, dense, and thick growing on the top of the bushes. The row of bushes looks like a green bench. I wish I could sit on the green bench and wave back to the golden tails.

On the right of the yard, there is a clump of birches. One is without any leaves because it is dead. But the bough and twigs of the tree are still straight up. It obviously is standing up in the yard, and looks like a pretty statue. It is never shaking, even when the wind blows it. The background of the yard is full of the flourishing green birch trees. They are the highest of the plants of the yard. When wind blows the leaves, I can see a thousand eyes winking at me! The white clouds look like cotton candy as they float in the blue sky.

When I imagine the wonderful yard, there is a black bird with orange wings flying back and forth in the yard. There is a big black bird and a small black bird resting on the pretty statue. I think they are mom and daughter, and the mom taught the daughter how to fly. On the lawn, two rabbits are looking for their food.

The animals don't bother each other. They have their own territory. They are not in conflict and not at war. I feel this is a peaceful world. It is a serene and harmonious world. It is my hope.

*Cheng Liang Royer is originally from China.*



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My name is Cheng Royer, I moved to the United States from Nanning, China eight years ago. I am learning English. I enjoy taking pictures of nature to share with others and writing creative expressions of what I see. The Peaceful Yard is the one I wrote in English.

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## Picking Memories

*Sachie Heaton, Big Lake*

Minnesota is known as the land of 10,000 lakes. It has so much potential to explore. For example, you can swim, fish, and even hike around the shoreline trails. This time, I would like to introduce you to the most fascinating rock found here in Minnesota. When I moved to Minnesota, I found out this state has some unique minerals. I really got interested in one of them. It's called "The Lake Superior Agate."

You can find them in three different states and Minnesota is one of them. The Lake Superior Agate contains many different combinations of colors and markings. They contain stripes, dots, or multiple colors mixed like marble. If you are lucky, you may find an agate with crystal, smoky quartz, or amethyst in the middle. My kids and I have been collecting them for a while.

Individual agates have individual stories (or memories). Sometimes, we talk about what great experiences we have had to find the big ones or pretty ones. When we rearrange the rocks, we all reminisce and start talking about our great memories of picking agates. Picking agates is inexpensive and healthy. You just have to grab some water bottles and look for a dirt road or lakeshore. All you have to do is start looking. We spend hours on a dirt road, walking and looking for agates. It is great exercise — a lot of walking and bending your knees.

When we go to the lakeshore, sometimes we go in the water. Sometimes, we just sit on the gravel and enjoy the views. Picking agates has become one of our family hobbies. I have only a couple of more years to go agate picking with my kids, because they are growing up and will be out of my house. I will always remember the great times together and precious smiles.

*Sachie Heaton is originally from Japan.*

## Like A Bear

*Kevin Petite, Duluth*

I'm like a bear  
That roams around in the wilderness  
Over the covered snow  
Watching our ancestors fly by  
The black skies  
Underneath the bright stars  
That hang over us

## A World of Vibrant Modes

*Justin Pfannes, International Falls*

Change, nothing happens without movement  
From city lights to the blackness of the country sky  
Transition, moving into a deep darkness known as the unknown  
There is a light at the end of the tunnel  
It's green as the envy of the grass on the other side  
Freedom is blue where the sky is the limit  
I'm heading for open seas to meet the colors of the sunset  
I'm looking for brilliance but night falls fast  
There's always tomorrow

## My Past and My Goal Now

*Jose Molina, Apple Valley*

I'm Jose Molina, and I'm from Mexico. I went to the USA 10 years ago. I went to school in Atlanta, Georgia, and I like to draw roses, letters, cars and buildings. I like everything in black and white to make it look classic, and I spend a lot of time drawing. Now I'm back to school to get my GED. When I finish, I'll try to find a better job or go to a mechanic school to learn to be a mechanic, and later make my own business. At the CVLC school, Tina is my favorite teacher because she teaches very good and she is a good person.

*Jose Molina is originally from Mexico.*

## Blessed

*Tyrone Watson, Minneapolis*

The arts have been a part of my life for many years, mainly music. About the time of 12 years old, I started playing the guitar from six strings to bass guitar. I played with my own band for four or five years. It taught me to read notes and play sheet music.

But along with one talent came another. I won a scholarship in art drawing at the age of 12. I was too young to accept it. In 2001, I auditioned for a part in an Ice Cube video and got the part. This was one of my achievements after getting out of the correctional center in 2001. So the arts have played a big role in my life for many years.

I plan to achieve my G.E.D and apply to college and study music. I'm currently playing bass guitar for my church at the moment. I am enjoying being in school and playing music. It is one of my dreams in life. This essay is all about me. Wow! God has truly blessed me.

## Soccer in My Life

*Isaac Catalan Rebolledo, Burnsville*

Hello, my name is Isaac Catalan Rebolledo, and I love everything about soccer. I started playing soccer when I was nine years old. The first team that I played for was Deportivo Morelos in Mexico. We called my coach "Nino." I don't remember his real name. I love soccer because it makes me feel so good to play it. I had to move from Mexico to the United States because my family decided to, but I'm still playing soccer.

Right now I live in Burnsville, MN, and I have my own team. I call them Deportivo Catalan. Catalan is my last name, that's why I called it this. People asked me to take my team out of the league, because we are not good at all, but I'm still hoping to be a better team. I keep pushing the young people to play sports instead of getting any vice or bad addiction. My dream always was to be a professional soccer player, but I couldn't make it. Now I'm not dreaming of playing on a professional team, but I got something that I'm never going to stop.

*Isaac Catalan Rebolledo is originally from Mexico.*

## What Makes Me Happy

*Patricia Meija, Brooklyn Center*

I am an extremely sensitive person.

I am a person who pays attention to every detail.

I am a person who lives in reality and not in imagination.

I am a person who thinks about the reason of things.

I am a person who thinks that this world is smaller than the universe.

I am a person who thinks that every instant and every second go away fast.

I am a person who takes advantage of every moment.

I am a person who thinks that in one day I can do a million of different things.

I am a person that thinks life is very fragile.

I am a person who enjoys trips in a car more than in an airplane because I get a kick out of seeing new sites.

I am happy when I go camping with my family and see nature.

I am a person who sees the beauty of each animal that passes in front of me.

I am a person who is happy when I teach art to the students.

I am a person who has many acquaintances and some friends, but I enjoy everyone when I meet with them.

I am a person who likes to learn about different kinds of cultures.

I am a person who takes the opportunity to listen to every sound from the sound of birth to diverse kinds of music.

I am a person who wonders about innocence and ignorance because I am sad when something is unfair, but I am so very happy when I learn about the truth of something.

And I have learned to just enjoy the present and plan for the future.

*Patricia Meija is originally from Colombia.*

## **My Education**

*Muna Abdule, Waite Park*

Hi everybody, my name is Muna Abdule. I am from Somalia. I have been in the U.S.A. since 2002. I would like to take some credit classes at the college next year, in order to improve my education standard so I could compete in the work market or to improve my skills. Even though it is a long journey and rough road ahead, I can overcome whatever it takes to finish. On the other hand it's very important to me to help my children with their homework so they will enjoy their study at school. I believe learning English as a second language is a giant challenge. However, it is more fun to have better communication. I would have time to find a better job and to express myself if I am in trouble. In conclusion I would like to thank my teacher Laurie for helping me throughout my studies and all my classmates. Thank you.

*Muna Abdule is originally from Somalia.*

## **My Favorite Place**

*Mercedes Quiroz Torres, Richfield*

My favorite place is the park, because it has many activities to do. For example, exercise, play, and relax. The park has a lake, areas of volleyball field, basketball field, soccer field, trees, flowers, birds, playgrounds, a path, and much more to see. Also in the park of my neighborhood in winter they open a track to play hockey. I feel happy in this place and more when we go as a family and play with my daughter. I love the moments I spend with my family here and more when we have a picnic. The truth is where I feel free and breathe in calmly.

## **My Self**

*Bwae Htee, Saint Paul*

My name is Bwae Htee. I am from Myanmar. I have four people in my family. I have two children. I came to the United States on September 9, 2011. I have been here two years and months. My children and I go to school. That is good in the U.S.A. I am a student here. My teacher's name is Jessica. She is a very good teacher. I enjoy studying English with her. I am learning English. We are learning English. My children are happy to learn English everyday. We are living in the U.S.A. It is good for my family. This country is different from my country because we see the big buildings, houses, and lots of cars.

Everything we see this country is new for me. Food in the U.S.A. is delicious and tasty.

*Bwae Htee is originally from Myanmar.*

## **History about My Life**

*Daniel Zhicay, Minneapolis*

When I was a child, I had a big dream, which was to become a professional soccer player. I used to play every day since I was nine years old until I was 19.

But someone told me you have to be at least 6' tall, and then all my dreams came down. I felt so bad then I had been asking myself why I had to think like that. We all know that life is beautiful. Then I said I have to do something new.

Then I came to the U.S.A. to start a new life in 1992. When I got to Minneapolis for the first time I couldn't believe it was winter time and it was very cold. It was very hard for me to start to understand English. At that time there was no school for us like we have today. After 20 years I decided to start to learn English. Thanks to Minnesota for this opportunity. Thank you very much Nikki.

*Daniel Zhicay is originally from Ecuador.*

## Going to School in America

*Anthony Hines, Minneapolis*

Going to school in America is fascinating to me. I have tread upon new ground and stumbled upon new heights.

My first day in school in America began in February of 2012. It was a new experience for me. My first five months in school taught me a lot. It was during that time I learned about different cultures and a variety of teaching methods by different teachers. I was introduced to essay writing by a teacher named Mr. Jeff. Not long after, I realized that I had the potential to be a prolific essay writer. The reason I knew this is I have always come up with some good ideas to match the topic sentence. My only problem was how to structure my ideas into meaningful sentences and body paragraphs. My teacher was an inspiration to me. Whenever I showed my work to him he always encouraged me and advised about what I needed to do. He was very demanding; he always craved for more from me. He said I had the potential to be a good essay writer. Just as I was getting my act together my time with Mr. Jeff was cut short; I could no longer afford bus fare for school.

I began to search for a school much closer to home. I found one about two weeks later. I registered and I began to attend my new school a few days later. About a month later a teacher from my former school by the name of Mr. John, who was my social studies teacher, was transferred to my current school and was promoted to the head master position. This was no surprise to me because I always admired his teaching skills. I resumed my essay writing and I began to share what I wrote with him. He would make corrections and give me advice. This brought out the best in both of us. I was so inspired that I rode my bike to school through the bitter cold winter snow and bad road conditions.

I have gained a lot of experience in essay writing. My writing skill has improved dramatically. I am transfixed and spellbound. I have tread upon new ground.

## Lou Yang

*Lou Yang, Saint Paul*

Hello my name is Lou Yang  
I am from Lao. I speak Hmong and English  
I sell jewelry and Hmong shirts, Pepsi, and beer  
I like to eat Thai food  
I live in Saint Paul, Minnesota  
I work and learn  
I go to school in the morning  
I go to work afternoon every day  
I live in Minnesota in the summer and fall but I don't like snow  
My favorite food is rice, fish, mushrooms, cucumber, and zucchini  
I don't like celery and carrots  
Sometime I stay home. I listen to music and dance.  
It is funny  
I stay home I like study and learn English at home  
I am sorry I don't speak English very well  
I still don't speak English very much  
Linda and Andrea are my teachers. My teachers very good  
Speak English is different than speak Hmong  
I study English read my story difficult for me today  
I am student I happy my two teacher very good  
Thank you

## My Job

*Viengkou Thao, Brooklyn Park*

I am a driver for the Salvation Army. I like it, but sometimes it is very hard for me. They want me to drive many different places and I don't know how to get there. But, it will help me learn many roads and places. Also, I have only been in the United States for one year and everything is new. This is the first time for me to drive in snow and on ice and it is very dangerous. Every morning, I deliver the kettles to the people who ring the bells. The people who ride with me are very nice and help me learn English. I speak with them but, I don't know some words that they use and sometimes they don't understand me. Even though it's hard, I enjoy driving for Salvation Army.

Now the holiday is over and I'm still working for

the Salvation Army. I'm working with a partner; I help him take care of children and teach them. This is my first time working with children; it's not easy for me. I have to be patient with them because they don't listen when I teach them. But, I really like working with children.

## **The Known Unknown**

*Jeron Davis, Superior, Wisconsin*

Yeah, I know a lot  
But there's a lot I don't  
So, Mrs. Elna May has me writing poems  
Like Edgar Allen Poe  
Life can be dark like mud  
Or bright like white snow  
What God has in store for me  
Only my Lord knows!

## **Sunrise**

*Brett Sanko, Carlton*

The sunrise creeps over the hill  
Like the shimmering eye of a giant squid  
It opens the eyes across the land  
Of all the creatures and all the trees  
With binding rays from the inner soul  
In the depths of space stretching to infinity  
As it casually walks across the sky  
And fades into the opposing horizon

*Brett Sanko is 37 and originally from the U.S.A.*

## **I Wanted to Hold the Butterflies**

*Nanyia Thao, Saint Paul*

When I was a little girl, I liked to follow my dad to get water at the river. My family had a small farm. We had chickens and pigs. My dad and my sister went to the farm every day in the morning. I wanted to follow them because the farm had beautiful flowers and butterflies. I wanted to catch some butterflies and hold them. I liked their stripes and pretty colors.

*Nanyia Thao is originally from Laos*

## **Bittersweet Country**

*Mildred Visbal, Minneapolis*

I'm from Cartagena, Colombia. My country is beautiful. I have travelled to many countries, but I have never seen one country so beautiful like Colombia.

Studies show that Columbia is the happiest country in the world. It has more festivals, more beauty queens, more parties, and all the people like to dance. But we also have many problems in Colombia. I was working with people displaced because of the violence—Colombians that have had sad experiences in their lives, and they needed to move to other places inside Colombia that they were not used to. Some people still haven't gotten used to life in the big city, but they are happy because they know that the life is good, and God saved them another opportunity to life.

Because I like working with people with hardships, who have experienced traumas, I formed an NGO called "Fundacion Crece Colombia." We worked with kids, teenagers, and parents in different ways. One of them is teaching topics like parenting. We gave gifts to kids and clothes for women. I'm very proud about that, and I want to continue from here helping people, especially kids in Colombia.

*Mildred Visbal is originally from Colombia.*

## Big Ship Haiku

Alberta Valerdi, Minneapolis

A big ship and a  
lift bridge in the afternoon.  
It is beautiful.

*Alberta Valerdi is originally from Mexico.*



## Logan and Sheila

Julie, Coon Rapids

Logan is my third cat. She is orange and white tabby. She is so playful. She loves to play with my other cat, Sheila. They play fight, they run after each other, they like to cuddle up and sleep together. Logan can run so fast, she loves to jump. Logan likes to get Sheila going. One time Logan was back at the bedroom door and waited for Sheila to come so she could jump on Sheila and she did. It was so funny. Sheila jumped back at Logan and they fought it out. When I first got Logan she captured my heart. I fell in love with her. Logan was sitting in the bathroom sink. It was so funny. I

was so surprised, she was so comfortable and she was up on the refrigerator. I was so surprised. She likes to be on the TV. She loves to cuddle with me on the couch. She is a one of kind cat.



## Recycling

Cecilia Garrido Alcara, Austin

When I came to The United States, I learned to recycle. This is something I didn't even know about before. Since then I have realized that recycling is a very important thing to do, and that every one of us should recycle.

I found out about recycling when the garbage truck didn't take the trash from my house. It was because I put the garbage sack in a recycling container. My neighbors explained to me that the big container was for the trash and the small bins were for recycling. Since then I recycle.

I invite you to recycle. You'll notice that by recycling we even save money, because the amount of garbage we put outside is cut in half. We should teach our children to recycle by example. It's all about them. We ought to give our children a brighter future by saving the earth. We should do it because we want to do it. We shouldn't wait until government says "Recycle. It's the law".

*Cecilia Garrido Alcara is 44 years old and originally from Mexico.*

## **The Bus**

*Dahiro Hassan, Saint Peter*

I ride the bus to school. I call the bus driver at 8:30. "Hello! I am Dahiro." I tell the driver my address. Come bus, I go to school. I say, "Hi, good morning" to the bus driver when the bus comes. The bus driver is not talking. Sometimes the driver says, "Yep." I sit down. The bus takes me to school.

## **My Horses**

*Fadumo Adan, Saint Peter*

I like to ride horses. I had two horses at my home in Mogadishu, Somalia. One horse was named Lulee. The other, Loosa. Lulee was the man horse. Loosa was the girl horse. I rode horses with my father and brother. We rode far away. I miss my horses.

## **My Story**

*Maria, Saint Peter*

I love summer!  
Because I enjoy going out  
To the parks and look so much  
Like flowers, trees, animals  
I love to spend beautiful  
Days with my Family

## **My Journey Around the World**

*L.Y.C., Andover*

I have traveled to China (Fujian, Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou, Chengdu, Xian, Sichuan, Jiuzhaigou, Huashan, Zhengzhou, Guangzhou, Guilin, Shenzhen, and Macau), Hainan (Sanya, and Hainan Island), Taiwan (Taipei), The United Kingdom (London), Thailand (Bangkok, and Phuket Island), Australia (Sydney, and Melbourne), and America (Las Vegas, Chicago, Wisconsin, and Minnesota). This is an especially unique world. The geography has trees and plants, marine life, zoos, the beach, a mall, clothing, a restaurant, the market, seafood, meat,

vegetables, and fruit. I am so optimistic about the beautiful world. It is so comfortable! I like to think of the places I want to travel to. In the Future I will go to China (different places), The Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, America (different states), and Canada. I think I would like to see things, especially different places in the world and different people. Yes, I am interested in worlds of fun!

## **Group Home Activity**

*Linda Sanders, Brooklyn Park*

Every Tuesday and Thursday I went to the YMCA. I went to CSD school on Thursday, and then I worked. I did cooking and shopping at night. I work hard and rise every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I will go to the dog park every Sunday afternoon. I took my dirty laundry this morning. The staff and I will budget my books every two weeks for activities and shopping. The staff picked me up at a sleep study yesterday morning. I will go with DMHS to a movie tomorrow night. I will drink hot chocolate every afternoon. Staff will pick me up with Scott. We will go get our toenails polished on Tuesday. Staff will ask me to go shopping someday. We will buy a new bra someday. We want 20 panties at Walmart in St. Paul, and then I went to the sleep study last Tuesday night. I will give a bath to my dog, Sharpie, pretty soon. I am excited: soon it will be spring. I will go to Dr. Zanders in February at Region Hospital. We get presents on Christmas Eve. We each had one present. We ate food at Penn's house on Dec. 25, 2012. We went to a restaurant for New Year's, 2013. We will party on Valentines Day 2013. We will watch a movie at DMHS tomorrow night. We will go the MOA at DMHS next week on Friday. We will go to the ice castle on Saturday afternoon. I will buy a belt and t-shirt, to work at Rainbow, from Old Navy at MOA next week on Friday. We will go to the restaurant at MOA next week on Friday. I need shampoo and conditioner at Target in two weeks Thursday night. I will buy laundry soap, soap, mouthwash, some bottled water, candy, and gum this Thursday. Staff and I went to Pearl Vision to fix my glasses last Tuesday. We will go to the Harmar Mall next Saturday.

We will go shopping and to a restaurant once every month.

## **The Importance of School**

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

School is so important for me and everybody. School is light of life. A person who had education is better than a person doesn't have an education. School is part of life. In my idea everybody needs go to school to get a better life and a better job.

## **Uniforms**

*R.G., Minneapolis*

I like to go to an academic school because they use uniforms. I like how they wear hijab with white scarves and long skirts. I know uniform because I am used to them. I used to wear uniforms when I was young. I wore a blue skirt and white shirt when I was in middle school.

# STRUGGLES

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## How and Why I Came to the U.S.

*Moua Thao, Minneapolis*

I came to the U.S. with my family from Thailand because my father was a refugee soldier who had helped the Hmong General, Vang Pao, on the side of the Americans fighting in the Vietnam War in 1970. The war was bloody and terribly miserable. Americans retreated soldiers to move from place to place in the jungles for survival. Then, General Vang Pao was deported to the U.S. Many of his soldiers got left behind, including my father. My father couldn't stay in Laos anymore because of the impact of violence, sympathy, and the misery of hunger.

He migrated with many other Hmong to Thailand for peace, which was not an easy task. A lot of our Hmong people got ambushed and killed. Many died on the way without a burial, got separated from their family, were orphaned, or were forever disabled from chemicals that the Vietnamese used to track them down. It was horrible, but my father made it to Thailand with my mother and some other Hmongs. Every day, they faced trouble to seek a better life because the Thai people didn't like the Hmong people. They always insulted the Hmong and forced them to live in squalid, shabby places where nobody wanted to live. Luckily, General Vang Pao had a great heart and made it a top priority to send reinforcement money for temporary shelter, food, and schools for the Hmong in Thailand.

He eventually integrated individual Hmong families to the U.S., including us. We were the second to last of a large group that came in 1997. My parents still have bad dreams about their previous life. General Vang Pao is the reason that Hmong people live in the U.S. today. Even though he got exiled, he always helped the ones that were left behind. General Vang Pao was as important to us as President George Washington to the Americans and as Martin Luther King Jr. to the Africans. On January 6, 2011 he died of pneumonia. It broke the Hmong peoples' hearts. Many Hmong people in the U.S. and other counties gathered to pray to show their respect to him during the bereavement ceremony. His legacy will live on with the Hmong. May his soul rest in peace, and be set free from the misery when he wandered lost in this world of struggle!



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My name is Moua Thao. I was born in Thailand. I came to the U.S. 15 years ago. I got married young and have two little boys. I never graduated from high school. Even though it is challenging to maintain my full-time job and study, I decided to come back to school to get my GED, and then go to college so I can continue achieving the American dream for a better life. I want to thank my great teacher Corinne at the Osseo School for her help.

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## My Transformation

*Prabhavathi Radhakrishnan, Woodbury*

I was born in India. I am the eldest in my family. I grew up in a middle class background. I have one younger brother and one younger sister. My parents were very nice and took care of the family very well. While I was in India, I had a very reserved character. I didn't have any problems in India. People that I knew were well aware of my character. After I got married, I had my first daughter in India. My family and my neighbors were there to help me to take care of my newborn baby. I had no fear of raising my child up to three years old.

After that my husband got a job in America. We were the first ones who moved to America from both sides of the family. Until I had my second daughter, we were sailing smoothly in the U.S. When I was pregnant with my second child, I had to go through severe abdominal pain. When I found out it was yogurt that was causing the pain, I stopped having yogurt. After that I delivered my second daughter. I got discharged on the fifth day because I had a 'C' section, and also we asked the doctor to stay longer in the hospital until I could stand up on my feet. On sixth day, I got severe back pain that I couldn't tolerate. Six months passed, again I had that pain and we went to emergency room in local hospital. From there, they transferred me to a well-known hospital in Minneapolis. I was monitored by a medical team for 3 weeks. They found out that my pancreas was destroyed by a gall bladder stone. The doctor told me that I got a second chance to live. Only then I realized how important it was to communicate and to have a few best friends in your life. It is very important to live around family and friends to go through the toughest time in your life. Now I am hanging around with a few friends and trying to build new friendships with different age groups. Especially when you live in a different country that is not your birth country, you must have friends to socialize and to help out each other.

This is how I transformed myself from being reserved to an outgoing person.

*Prabhavathi Radhakrishnan is originally from India.*

## Miracle in a Moment

*Azar Sharafshahi, Woodbury*

My sky was cloudy  
My stars were lost  
My happiness was gone  
But a miracle happened  
Chance knocked at my door  
Everything changed  
My sun became shiny  
My starts become became twinkling  
My garden blossomed in winter  
My God sent me hope and happiness again

*Azar Sharafshahi is originally from Iran.*

## The Struggle

*Tyler Woinarowicz, Duluth*

Waiting for that day to come  
The fourth month is and and I'm finally done  
On my way to Duluth, afraid of failure  
Hoping I never go back to see that damn jailor  
I'm trying my best, but it's not enough  
I'm feeling empty inside  
I look rugged and rough  
The stress is building, I'm trying to play tough  
I pull into work and what do I see...  
It's a guy doing heroin right next to me  
I sit there and wonder how could this be  
I was doing so good, Lord, are you testing me?  
The devil's in sight, and I'm tired of the fight  
The voice in my head says, "do it,"  
But my heart says, "No, it's not right."  
I fall into relapse, and I start evil deeds  
The tree of life that dwelled inside me grows weak  
And it withers back down to a seed  
It was another relapse everyone saw  
And now I'm back in court, in the hands of the law  
That was then, and this is now  
I'm done with that garbage that put me in the clouds

## **My Disguise**

*Andrew Woltjer, Saginaw*

Do not look into my eyes!  
You will not see past my disguise  
My eyes are cold and black  
Warmth I will never get back

My disguise hides me well  
What I have to tell  
It shows I've been through hell  
Torture, rage, hate, anger

Do not look into my eyes!  
You will not see past my disguise  
Only what you see you shall despise

What hides me well is my disguise  
Sadly you will think it is all lies  
Only until you realize that  
A rain or pain is yet to come and  
It is only part of what has made me numb

Do not look into my eyes!  
You will not see past my disguise  
If you saw the real me you'd be in for a nasty surprise  
Hideous, immoral, and indecent

My disguise hides me well  
It is for my protection  
It keeps me hidden from all of the disgust and distrust

Do not look into my eyes!  
You will not see past my disguise  
It is mine and only mine

My disguise hides me well  
You may think it's phony  
Maybe sometimes it's lonely  
But it is for me and only me

Do not look into my eyes!  
You will not see past my disguise

## **If You Knew...**

*Patrick Stone, Duluth*

If you knew the answer would you ask the question  
If you knew it would take over  
Would there still have been an infestation  
If you knew the end would you have ever begun  
If you knew the consequence  
Would it have still been fun  
If you knew there was lightning  
Would you have entered the storm  
If you knew the result, would it still take form  
If you knew the battle  
Would you have grabbed your sword  
If only you knew you could have followed the Lord

## **Road to Fame**

*Fannie Kinsey, St. Cloud*

The road I walk was lonely, and no one was there but I.  
As I ran through my riches, everyone wanted to share.  
But when the time and trouble came and I really needed them there,  
They all turned their backs and walked away.  
They acted like they didn't care.  
I had a thousand and one friends until the day I went down,  
And suddenly I had no friends, they all stopped coming around.  
They were only playing a game.  
As soon as I hit the streets again, my friends will all be back,  
But I will not let them play on my intelligence because in brains I do not lack.

## Never Ending

*Bradley Ray Curtis, Union*

Out of the dark into the light  
Together or alone  
We fight the never-ending fight  
Some will cry, some will lie, too many will die  
But together or alone  
We fight the never-ending fight  
This is our life, one that is filled with strife  
One that cuts like a knife  
But together or alone  
We fight the never-ending fight  
Time and time again  
We tried all in vain  
And it all seems so insane  
But together or alone  
We fight the never-ending fight  
But in the end we all know to never let go  
Just hold on tight  
Because together or alone  
We fight the never-ending fight

## My Name is Maung Ngo

*Maung Ngo, Worthington*

My name is Maung Ngo. I'm from Burma and Thailand. When I lived in Burma I just ran with my family in the jungle because the Burmese military were fighting with our people. They burned our village and they tried to kill our people. My mom and dad were worried about us. Then they took us to the refugee camp in Thailand. I studied there for many years, but I couldn't improve my English because the English language was too hard for me. I wasn't interested in my studies anymore. Before that I was married. After I got married, two years later I moved to Forthworth City. But I missed home very much. I lived there for three weeks. I moved to Minnesota. I was in Saintt. Paul for three years. I'm working and I'm studying now in Worthington. My English has improved. I have two children. Just girls. I've been here mostly for four years. But I still miss home.

*Maung Ngo is originally from Burma.*

## My Broken Wrist

*Janet Schleper, St. Cloud*

Early one morning on September 27, 2012, I went to the bathroom and I hit the bathroom door and flew with my hands in the air. I tried to get up but I could not get up so I pressed my Lifeline. So they asked me if I needed help and I said, "yes." I told them that I fell and broke my wrist and I need help. They asked me if my door is unlocked and I said, "No. My sister, Julie, has the key." So she tried to call me but I could not get the phone, so I pressed my Lifeline again and then the caretaker opened the door and in 15 minutes the ambulance came and helped me. They asked me, "Do you need some help?" I said, "Yes." So they brought me to the emergency room. They took x-rays to see what was wrong and the doctor came in and said, "It's broken." I could have told you that! So I had to stay overnight at the hospital for one night. Then they next morning the nurse came and said, "I am looking for a nursing home for you. Let's see here, I am looking at St. Benedicts Center, Good Shepherd, or Talahi." And I smiled. She asked me, "Why are you smiling?" I said, "I used to work there." "Then we will go to Talahi," she said. And I said, "Good." I took the Care Cab to Talahi Center. But now I am at home and living by myself and going back to school.

## My Name is Fadumo Osman

*Fadumo Osman, Minneapolis*

My name is Fadumo Osman. I am from Somalia. I came to the United States in April of 2004. When I came here, I studied English class, because I couldn't speak any English even if I needed a doctor. I needed someone who spoke two languages. If I didn't get the person who spoke my language, the doctor could not help me, because I didn't understand anything. But now I feel proud because I understand and speak English. I also read and write English.

*Fadumo Osman is originally from Somalia.*

## Reaching My Dreams

*Elia Ducharme, Big Lake*

My name is Elia and I came to the USA when I was 13 years old. I came with my father and my sister. My father worked in construction at that time. My sister found a job and a house to live in, so my father decided to move in with my uncle. My father left for work at 4:30 a.m. I was supposed to be in school. When my aunt gave breakfast to my cousins, I came to take some breakfast too, but she said, "You have to go to the school without breakfast because there is no more breakfast for you. The teachers can probably give you something to eat." I don't remember exactly how long it was like that, maybe two months, but I knew that I couldn't attend school anymore because I was hungry all the time. My father went back to Mexico and I stayed with my aunt. I decided to look for a job. I found one and I made three dollars an hour. I saved money and I rented one studio. I worked seven days a week, 12 or 13 hours a day, and still I didn't make enough money to pay my rent. So I invited one friend to move in with me. I was excited because it was somebody to help pay my rent. Right now I have time to attend school. I love to be in school because someday I want to get my GED and attend the university because my dream is to be a psychologist.

*Elia Ducharme is originally from Mexico.*

## My Life in Another Country

*Cristian Gamboa, Rosemount*

I miss my family a lot. My family lives in Veracruz, México. My family is my mother, my sister, and my grandmother. I have lived here in Minnesota for 6 years. I am from México. The reason why I decided to come to USA is to look for good opportunities, but it is hard because looking for a job is sometimes difficult. For many reasons it is hard for me to live here. The first problem is communication, because people speak English. For me, it was difficult to learn a second language, but now I can speak English maybe 60%. I think it is not too bad.

The second reason is winter. I like the heat in Veracruz a lot because it has nice temperatures. When it is cold in Veracruz maybe the temperature is between 65 or 60. However, here winter is very cold for me. Now I think I can tolerate it a little because I have lived 6 years here.

The most difficult time for me was when my grandfather died, because I couldn't travel to México because my situation in this country is hard. Sometimes I think I'm living in a golden cage because I live a little better than my country, but with a little fear.

I have hope that someday things will change for many people who are in the same situation as me. The time that was the happiest for me was when my mother visited me after not seeing her for six years. I love my mother because she is my dad and my mother at the same time. I talk to her by phone, by computer or text messages, but it made me very happy when she visited me.

I hope to be with my family in México soon. I hope God will help me with this.

*Christian Gamboa is originally from Mexico.*

## Hope

*Miriam Ortiz, Minneapolis*

So much drama happened in my high school life. Having F's and fighting along.

I had to decide whether I kept it that way or leave everything behind and move on.

I had no choice but to drop out.

Stayed home and helped out as years and months went by.

Returned back to school, working hard day and night.

I will get my diploma to make my parents proud.

*Miriam Ortiz is originally from Mexico.*

## **My Family**

*Lisa Suda, Minneapolis*

My family history is that we came to America from Norway a long time ago. My dad's side of the family came from France and moved to America. My mom's side of the family came from Norway to America a long time ago. We like living in America.

I have two parents, one nephew, a sister-in-law, and two brothers. My family lives in North Dakota. Before I lived in North Dakota, then I moved to Florida for mental health reasons. I stayed in the National Deaf Academy for four years, from 2003 to 2008. I moved to Minnesota in 2008. I moved into West St. Paul Apartments, but messed up and was kicked out for one year, and then I moved to a deaf group home. I stayed there for one year. I messed up and they kicked me out. Then I moved to an apartment called, Deaf Serving Life Group. It is more independent and makes me happier. I live with 12 deaf adults.

## **My Daughter, My Friend**

*Yonnie*

I lost my daughter in 2009, in Africa and I'm still going through the pain and emotions every day. It is so hard when you as a mother leave your child and they get sick. My daughter had no person around to care for her. This is one of the devastating things in the world for me. My daughter had no shower or food to eat. I know I could not stop the hand of death, but at least being there would have eased my pain. There is a void that can never be filled; I don't care what I do. She lives in my mind. God knows it all. I'm thankful she has a grave that I'll go to at when I return to Africa.

## **Abuse**

*Kristina Peterson, Burnsville*

Strong with broad shoulders,  
he stands tall to her.  
Just another long night,  
getting drunk 'til a blur.

His eyes are bloodshot,  
his face is all red.  
He's gotten so drunk,  
he's not using his head.

He makes her feel worthless,  
and full of fear.  
Sometimes she can barely  
look herself in the mirror.

He's screaming at her,  
words she can't understand.  
His breath reeks of booze,  
as he raises his hand.

He pushes her hard,  
and she hits the floor.  
She gets back up  
to run toward the door.

She thinks to herself,  
no more pushing me around.  
As she pushes him back  
and watches him fall to the ground.

She stands there and cries, tasting the salt of her tears,  
saying "I'm done with this abuse, after all these years."

## The Day I will Never Forget

*Der Lee Xiong, Brooklyn Park*

My name is Der Lee Xiong. I was born in Vientiane, Laos. My parents and I moved to Thailand in 1986. We lived in Thailand for about three years and then we migrated to Colorado in 1989. In 1991 I got married to my husband, who was living in La Crosse, Wisconsin at the time. We lived there for eight years and then in 1998 we moved to Minnesota with our two sons and one daughter. I worked the night shift while my husband worked the day shift, we would have to take turns watching the children.

On a typical day, my husband would have to take our oldest son and daughter to go to the bus stop that was two blocks away. My youngest son would go along with them, since he was not attending school yet. One odd morning, my husband was called in to go to work early. He woke me up to tell me that I had to send our two children to the bus stop. After he told me I fell back asleep. I happened to sleep through my alarm so my youngest son, who was five years old, sent his siblings to their bus stop. When I finally woke up an hour later, I had asked my youngest son where his siblings were. My youngest son told me that he had already sent his siblings off to the bus stop. In response, I felt frightened that someone would have kidnapped my son and was really thankful that no one did.

*Der Lee Xiong is originally from Laos.*

## What is Your Dream in America?

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

I am 40 years old.

I am from Laos.

I came to in America 1989.

I came to America because of the Vietnam War.

My dream is to be relieved from war.

Have an education and have freedom in America.

I want to learn English.

## My Story: The Untold Struggle

*Shaye, Brooklyn Park*

I was born September 19, 1990 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. When I was about two or three years old, my mother gave me away to the state of Minnesota, along with my other three sisters. I also have a little brother, which my mother kept. After the entire state situation, I moved to Memphis, Tennessee with my foster mother and three sisters. My life was so full of hurt, pain, sadness and depression that I stressed myself night and day, to try to figure out "why me." There were many days I stayed awake crying myself to sleep because I was so hurt. It seemed like I had no peace even at the schools I went to. I was bullied as a child, and I was punished for it every day that I was suspended from school. However, I never understood why the abuse was happening to me because I was defending myself. Still until this day, I struggle with my life and the issues from my past and making the right decisions for me. The decisions I have to choose from are to either be involved with my family or not be involved with them. Consequently, I believe I can overcome my struggles to make better decisions for me in the end. My struggles just help me to be an improved person in life.

*Shaye is 22 years old and originally from the U.S.*



*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

## Embracing Reality

Michael Barner, Saint Cloud

Pain and misery were realities in my life. I was unwilling either to accept my living situation or to change what was unacceptable in my life. I attempted to escape life's pain by drinking and taking drugs, but using only compounded my trouble. My altered sense of reality became a nightmare. Through living the spiritual life I found, I learned that my dreams can replace my nightmares. I grew and changed. I require the freedom of choice. I am able to give and receive love. I can share honestly about myself, no longer magnifying or minimizing the truth. I accept the challenges real life offers to me facing them in a mature, responsible, way. Although recognizing does not give me immunity from the realities of life, in the spiritual fellowship I can find the support, genuine care, and concern I need to face those realities. I need never hide from reality by using or drinking again, for my unity with other spiritual people gives me strength. Today, the support, the care, and the empathy of being clean gives me a clear window through which to view, experience, and appreciate reality as it is.

## Refugee Camp

Jamal Hamid, Minneapolis

My name is Jamal Hamid. I am from Ethiopia. I went to Kenya in 1999. The Refugee Camp in Kenya. I lived five years in this camp, because my country was civil war, that's why I went to Kenya. The camp was difficult for all people because there was no food, water, and medicine in the camp.

*Jamal Hamid is originally from Ethiopia.*

## My Great-Grandma

Pamela Chatras, Edina

My great-grandma, Gleena Olsen, was born in North Dakota. She could hear. When she was two years old, she was really sick with a temperature of 108. Her hearing was lost. She watched her sisters and brothers, but had no sign language. She went to school until she graduated and worked. She met a soldier named Alfred Ansbomb. She married Alfred. She got pregnant and had my grandma, Cora Ansbomb.

Grandma Cora had her hearing. She graduated in 1932. Then she met a soldier named Hugo Lind. She married Hugo in November 1932. She had three boys. My parents met at school in Rush City, Minnesota. After graduating, my dad, Harold Lind, married mom, Yvonne West, in 1958. A few months later, I was born deaf in Rush City, Minnesota. My grandpa Hugo told my dad that I am deaf and my dad said, "No, I can't believe that". They took me to the University of Minnesota for Audiology. The doctor took me to the room for a hearing test. He told my parents that I was deaf. My parents were amazed. The doctor gave them a list of schools in Minnesota. My relatives were shocked and sad that I was deaf. I went to school, practiced lip-reading, and learned speech, no sign language. I went to a different oral school in Minneapolis and started finger spelling in 1971. I went to Minnesota School for the Deaf as new student in October 1972. In the spring of 1975, I transferred to Rush City High School, an oral school with an interpreter. I graduated and went to Technical Vocational Incorporation in St. Paul, Minnesota from 1980 to 1981.

I met Michael Chatras at my friend's house. He took me out to eat at a restaurant on Valentine's Day in 1991. The next day, he was down on his knee on the floor to me and asked, "Will you marry me?" I said, "Yes, yes!"

In September of 1992, I married Michael Chatras. My husband and I have two boys, both hearing. My boys can use sign language for me. My husband is hard of hearing and uses sign language. I taught my babies early, around seven or nine months old, to start using sign language little by little.

## **We Often Need Help From Others**

*Cynthia Thurman, Minneapolis*

That we often need help from others is very true. But what is hard is the asking. There was a time in my life when I needed help. I didn't know where to go, or who to ask. More importantly, I needed the courage to ask for help.

My problem was drug addiction. I was completely out of control: I didn't care about anyone or anything except for the next high. One day I received a call from child protection. I had been reported for child neglect.

My help came from a simple phone call. I ended up in treatment. My children were removed from the home. Although I wanted the help, I was angry because I wanted to continue getting high. After I thought about it and calmed down, I knew this was the right thing to do.

With the help and support of my child protection worker and addiction counselor I got my life back. Through it all, this was a blessing. We worked together to get my sobriety and children back.

Today I have been sober for over five years. I live from minute to minute, not day to day, because relapse can happen at any time. I thank God every day for giving me the opportunity and for the support I received from child protection and addiction counselor. I also would like to thank the person who called child protection.

May God give you the courage to ask for help when you need it. Just remember a hungry mouth does not get fed if you don't speak up.

## **My Family**

*Yee Vue, Saint Paul*

My name is Yee. I am from Laos. I have two brothers and two sisters. My mom lives with my younger brother and his wife. My younger brother and his wife have no children in their house. My older brother has eleven children. I have two sisters. My second sister has five children. My last sister has no children.

My father was a soldier in the war and he died in 1969. In Hmong culture we are farmers. I helped my mom do farming after my father passed away. I didn't have time to go to school because I was too busy helping my mom in the gardens. My family came to Thailand in 1974. In 1987 my family came to the United States. For the first time I went to school to learn English. It was very hard to learn English and also hard to speak English. I am a single mother and I have only one son.

*Yee Vue is originally from Laos.*

## **What Surprised Me in the U.S.**

*Annie Vang, Saint Paul*

My name is Annie Vang. I am originally from Thailand. I have two countries right now.

I came to school and didn't speak. I was very surprised. In the United States it is very cold for my family, but we have lived here many years now and it is okay. I was very surprised for the United States because the people are very nice and I like everything in the U.S because children and older people can go to school. In my country we have schools, but I need to pay money for school. My mother and father don't have money and I can't go to school because we don't have public schools in my country. If we don't have money, we can't go to the hospital because we don't have health insurance cards in my country.

*Annie Vang is originally from Thailand.*

## **A Time I Was Afraid**

*Anab Jibril, Minneapolis*

I was in Kenya, me and my friend. The police in that country are bad. We are afraid of them. Every person that doesn't have documents of their country they put in the jail, and they have to pay a lot of money. So if you don't have documents you must have money to give them when they catch you. You must save your peace. When you want to go out of the house you must put some money in your pocket because if you don't have it they will kill you or you will have to walk with them all the night.

One day it was raining. Me and my friend went outside. We wanted to buy milk. It was evening and it was dark. We wanted to cross the water from the rain, then we saw the police in front of us. We tried to go back. Then they saw us and said, "Don't go back." And they caught us. They said, "Give us your documents." We felt so scared because we didn't have them. But we lied to them and said, "We forgot them at home." The police said, "Why did you forget? You must carry them every time when you want to go outside. Give us some money." We gave them the money that we had to buy milk and they said, "No, this is too small." We said, "We don't have any other money." They said, "We will take you to the jail." And we were scared again. Then we called someone and she brought some money and they said to us, "Go away and don't forget your documents again." We felt better and ran into the house.

## **Why Am I Sad**

*Mar Mar Zin, St. Paul*

I'm from Myanmar. I was born in 1978 in a small village. Then I came to Thailand in 1991. I stayed in the refugee camp in Thailand for 20 years. I arrived in Minnesota on November 12, 2012. I started living in my apartment in November 2012. I have six children.

At first, I was happy. But a few days later I became sad. Because many things are different for me. Especially the weather, the neighbors and the conditions around us. There is more snow and ice in winter. This is very difficult for me because my right leg can't put

on shoes. I can't walk on the snow and ice without shoes. I have many problems. When I want to wash clothes I don't know where to go and wash them. The other one is I don't understand the letters that I received in the mail. I don't understand all of the words. What do they mean in the letter? On January 15 there was OPT meeting at my childrens' school. But I have miss it because I don't know how to get the bus. I have never ridden the bus when I lived in refugee camp. So I'm very sad for every thing.

I think to be happy it will take a few years.

*Mar Mar Zin is originally from Myanmar.*

## **Out of Darkness into Promise**

*Daniel Kim, Edina*

I am alive  
Because I have promise.  
I am dying  
Because I deny myself.  
Hope is shining  
Through darkness.  
Progress is pain  
Because it gives me goodness.  
Because I am dying every day.  
Patience comes through progress  
Because it gives me wisdom.

*Daniel Kim is originally from Somalia.*

## **My Life**

*Diahann Davis, Minneapolis*

With everything that flows,  
I always find ways to make them grow.  
I may stumble. I may fall.  
But God always see me through it all.  
So I must continue the fight,  
With all my might.  
And at the end of it all,  
Everything will be alright.

*Diabann Davis is 33 and originally from the U.S.A.*

## My Life

*Mai Wenz, Brooklyn Park*

My name is Mai. I was born on October 12, 1984 in Vietnam. I have two brothers. On one side of my hometown is the vast Pacific Ocean. On the other side is a forest. It is beautiful. My hometown also has waterfalls. They are soothing to listen to, like an old classical song

I was happy living in Vietnam. Mui Ne is just a little town, but it is a beautiful place to live. When I met my husband, and I came to the U.S., my life became totally different. Everything was new to me. I felt like I was born a second time because I had to start learning everything over again. I think everyone has a challenge in life, that is my thought. The more you see and do the more you learn.

My biggest challenge is understanding the English language so I started going to school. I want to speak like an everyday American. When I talk I want to be understood the first time. When people talk to me I want to understand them the first time too. I remember my parents telling me when I was younger, that if you are willing to learn, you will learn something new every day. Each day of travelling gains you wisdom.

*Mar Mar Zin is originally from Myanmar.*

## Storms

*Brad Eisenzoph, Hibbing*

Storms are in the skies  
Storms are in my eyes  
Anger will arise  
Through the course of my life  
Windy days and rainy nights  
In the forecast of my life

## My First Job

*Soeun Chhorn, Woodbury*

One day in 1969, I was talking with my family when I received a letter from my brother describing that I passed the exam to be a teacher. My whole family was delighted!

I needed to study pedagogy for one year before I began my career. After completing the vocational school, I volunteered to work at the countryside and was separated from my family.

I was teaching for about three years. It wasn't hard to teach, but the problem was it was hard to manage so many children: 55 to 60 students in a class! I was helping with correcting student papers. I was also giving students different games to play during the break time.

At home, I played basketball, and at night loved to sleep outside with the stars! They were so beautiful and they were winking at me!

On a dry season day, I fell sick with the Malaria! My disease got worse with each day! My nurse was giving me a lot of medication, but I still didn't feel better. I was beginning to get sad, and I got homesick.

Finally, in 1972 I decided to return to the city. The airplane ride took 45 minutes to get to the destination. Two weeks after, I felt better and I could do everything!

## My Name is Kye Moo

*Kye Moo, Saint Paul*

My name is Kye Moo  
I am from Burma. In Burma I was a farmer.  
I cut the trees, I grow the plants, and I reap paddy.  
I wove Karen dress.

In Burma, I had livestock. Animals, the dog and cat live in the house.

Buffalos, goat, chicken, duck live in the garden.

In Burma, I wear wrap skirt. I wear Karen long dress and Karen skirt.

I carry Karen bag, Karen scarf. The Karen clothes is very beautiful.

In Burma, I ate rice every day. I ate porridge, fruit soup, fried chili, and vegetable.

In Burma, I like river in the river. It had the prawn fish and crab. I like the hill valley.

The mountains and I saw the tree always green all time.

In Burma, I didn't like Burma soldiers. Fought back by torturing and killing the

Relatives of the KNU Soldiers. I running the from Burmese soldiers

I, sleeping in the wood.

In Burma I worried about family safety.

I'm sad my family is sick but I don't have

Any medicine I didn't see the doctor I worried about no school.

*Kyee Moo is originally from Burma*

## **My Life**

*Shirlie M. Straub, New Hope*

When I was a girl, I was very, very sick. My mother took me to the hospital. I was hot with fever. All my hair came off. They knew I couldn't hear well. The doctor sees that I have hearing in my right ear that is going and my left ear was also going and that I look at people to understand them. I will have a hearing aid that will help sometimes. I am in the deaf ABE class until I can go to a hearing class so that I can know how to speak very well. I can learn how to speak back to people in sign language.

## **Untitled**

*Beronica Vasquez, Landfall*

In my country, the people don't have a lot of money. They need to farm for their family and they don't have schools. They only farm. My friends came to the U.S. because they heard that it can change their life. Too many people died in my country before. They didn't have food. There were no more jobs. It did not rain. So they could not farm.

One time in the United States, I went to the hos-

pital with my son for two weeks. It was very hard for me because I don't speak English. For two weeks in the hospital, the other children cried because they didn't like the hospital. They said "Jesus let my brother go home please." My son said "thank you Mom. You love me because you stayed with me everyday when I am sick."

*Beronica Vasquez is originally from Guatemala*

## **My Self**

*Corina Khin, Saint Paul*

My name is Corina Khin. I lived in Burma. I was born on April 14, 1972. When I was six years old, I started to go to school. I passed Grade 12 in 1991. When I left high school, I started to go to another school. It was Karen Teacher Training College (KTTC) for one year. In this school, there were four teachers. Two were Karen and two were American. After school, I have taught since 1992 to 2012.

When I lived in my village, I faced many problems. When the Burmese soldiers came to my village, they burned the houses, killed animals, and burned the rice in the farms. So I couldn't live in my village. Sometimes I thought, "Oh! It is very difficult for my life, what shall I do?"

Since May 2, 2002, I had moved to Refugee Camp in Thailand-Burma border. In that camp, we had to stay in the camp, we couldn't go outside. It was difficult to look for vegetables and other fruits. We got only food from the TBBC. That foods were not enough for our family. I got 700 per month for teaching. The money that we got for teaching was not enough for our family. Finally our family decided to move to USA.

Since October 8, 2012, I have left camp and moved to USA. On October 16, 2012, we arrived to USA and resettled here. Now we are new family in USA. Everything are different for us. We can't do anything in USA. I don't speak English and don't understand English. It is difficult for my life, but first we must learn English. Now our three sons go to school and our youngest son goes to daycare. Me and my husband have gone to school at Arlington Hills School

for one and half weeks. I will try hard for my study. In my class, all of my teachers show me the smiling faces always.

*Corina Khin is originally from Burma.*

## **Once Upon a Time in the Soviet Union**

*Alan Usenov, Maple Grove*

Once upon a time in the Soviet Union (USSR), during a chilly winter evening four close friends met in a small dark room. Nine years were left until the collapse of the most powerful socialist country, but those people could not foresee and imagine for even a moment the possibility of the fall of the communist power with its cruel security service (KGB), total lies and horrible terror.

That evening, those four friends, of whom I was one, made a final irrevocable decision to escape from the USSR. What could be more sorrowful than the decision to escape from the mother country – the land of your ancestors, childhood, first love and glowing dreams. The reason was in our incomprehension of the divided world, when officially you were living in a free and prosperous country, and the reality absolutely contradicted it. We had relatives that traveled to Western Europe and whispered in kitchens to their closest friends that it was a lie that Western society was dying and we were the best. Almost every night we listened to the “Radio of Freedom” and “Voice of America” trying to understand why the Moscow Olympic Games were boycotted; why our elder friends were dying in Afghanistan. A couple of months before, we sent letters to the U.S., Canada and some other countries’ Embassies applying for political asylum. That step turned into horror for our families with the KGB on our doors giving notice that only because we were minors, we would not be sent the long way to the terrible Siberian camps.

That incident did not clip our wings, despite it we decided after high school to become sailors and to escape in foreign ports or waters one day in the future. Still I had to change that plan because of my sea-sickness, and my decision was to study to be a Diplomat with the same idea of running away literally. How-

ever, times changed before our plans came true. The wind of change gave us an opportunity to stay in our motherland building a new society similar to Western and our dreams. Destiny called again when I won the Green Card Lottery and I am happy to be in Minnesota full of new dreams and hopes. But... what about my friends? They are free and have their own “Minnesota”, but that is another story.

*Alan Usenov is originally from Kyrgyzstal.*

## **Struggles and Decisions**

*Angela Gregory, Brooklyn Park*

First, I would like to take a moment to tell you a little about myself. As a young girl, going to school was a struggle for me; it was either fight to stay alive or hang out and be cool. I have never been a fighter, so I started hanging out which led me to dropout. Then I fell in love and started having children. I had to find a job that would get my children the things they needed. As my children started growing up, they needed more of my help with school projects and reading. With people that were involved in my life, I was able to get them the help they needed. I have three children that have graduated with two more left to go. Currently, I am back in school. Even though, school is still a struggle, I am more determined to get my education. I want to walk across the stage at Graduation. I am more confident and with the support I have today, I will complete this journey.

*Angela Gregory is originally from the U.S.A.*

## Escape From Death

*Thao Naocha, Saint Paul*

At midnight on June 27, 1981, my village was burned down by the army. My family and I were so frightened our legs were shaking! We decided to get out of the village quickly by walking quietly into the forest. It was raining when we got to the forest. My family didn't have any shelter. We didn't have dry clothes to replace the wet ones. We slept next to each other on the grass in our wet clothes, but my mom had a little blanket to cover my younger brother. We couldn't sleep well, and my little brother was crying. We were afraid of getting caught and killed by the army.

Early the next morning my parents decided to take us to Thailand. It took us a couple of days to walk through the forest to the Mekong River. The weather was very hot, and we didn't have any food to eat. We were so hungry, tired and thirsty during this long trip. Even though we were exhausted, we didn't want to get killed by the soldiers who lived in the jungle. After three more days passed by, my family got to the place near the Mekong River where we met some of our relatives. We slept one night there. At four in the morning, my family and our relatives walked about two hours more to reach the shore of the Mekong. At this point, each family had to pay money to ride a boat across the Mekong River to Thailand. Our family of six people paid about 1200 in Lao money for the boat.

On July 8, 1981, my family arrived in a Thai refugee camp called Long Lake. We were still hungry, but we had no money left to buy food. We were told we could have food a week after the registration date. My parents knew that without food the children would die. They took us to the temple next to the refugee camp. My parents couldn't say any words, but tears ran down their faces, begging for food to help us survive. A Buddhist gave us some rice to eat. It was a special meal that kept us alive. This was the most challenging experience in my life.

## Health Issue

*Dajuma Ali, Minneapolis*

I was born in Somalia and I was sick. But medicine is not the same in Africa. I moved to America from

Somalia. I was in a shock because it is very cold and icy with snow. I had muscle pain and body weakness. I went to the clinic. The doctor explained everything to me. Since 2006, the doctor's advice to me was to exercise but I was confused. I said, "What does exercise mean?" The doctor explained to me about health, medicine, and vitamin D. We need sun for our body to get vitamin D. The doctor encouraged me to use vitamin D but I don't like medicine. I was patient and the doctor didn't explain to me about medicine. Also, I misunderstood. There was a lot of stress and frustration. I still didn't understand and was overwhelmed by the medical English because of the very hard words. My first language is American Sign Language. An explanation is very difficult because I must pay attention to the doctor and still look at the interpreter who is signing. I felt bothered because I must look at the doctor or the interpreter because I am deaf and can't hear what the doctor said. The doctor encouraged me to use an exercise bike. I never used an exercise bike or swam in America or Somalia. I walked normally and was in the hot sun. When I was in Africa, there was no pain in my body.

*Dajuma Ali is originally from Somalia.*

## My First Day Using the Phone

*Ahmed Maryam, Minneapolis*

When I used phone I was very nervous. Because I didn't know how to speak English or understand. One day I called company and I didn't know if that voice who speak was a computer or person voice. I listened more than three minutes. After that I said, "Hello." The person told me, "how can I help you." Four or five times I told him, "Yes," I needed someone translator for me. He told me many times the same question. Sometimes it's hard to hear on the phone. When you talk in the person, you can see actions and facial expressions to help you to understand. Now when I use the phone, I feel comfortable. I enjoy making phone calls, and I like it when people call me.

## My Family History

*Mya Zu, Saint Paul*

I was born in Burma, but we are Karen. Two thousand years ago, Karen and Mon were the first groups to settle in Burma. Most Karen people such as my grandmother and grandfather worked in the rice fields their whole lives. They were peaceful people.

Before the British came to Burma, people were very peaceful and didn't fight with each other. In 1824, the British came and colonized Burma. At that time, my grandfather's parents lived in villages, and my grandfather's father was also a leader. The people started to learn English. The British didn't kill people, but they did control with their power and colonized Burma until 1948. After that, Burma got its independence. My grandfather said all the people who lived in Burma asked for their freedom but especially the Karen people.

In 1942, the Japanese came. All the people who lived in Burma had a hard time. My mom said at the time she was eleven years old. She remembered a lot of what was going on. The Japanese killed people and took the people's land and animals. My mom said their family didn't have enough food. My grandmother made clothes by hand because they didn't have money to buy clothes. All of the people who lived in Burma had a terrible situation when the Japanese came.

After a couple of years, the Karen people started their revolution on January 31st because they didn't have self-government or freedom. At that time, some Karen who lived in Rangoon moved to villages, and some moved to the border of Thailand. My family still lived in their village because they didn't want to leave their land. Mom said the Burmese soldiers were doing terrible things to our Karen people.

In 1988, hundreds of thousands of people took part in protests across the country because they wanted democracy. At that time, one of my sisters joined that pro-democracy party. Later the Burmese military found our family. We had to run to Thailand and cross the border and settle in a refugee camp called Shoklo. Most Karen people who lived in Burma came to Thailand and started their lives in a refugee camp. I asked my mom why Karen people ran. Mom said Karen people didn't want to fight with other people. That's

why we are in America today, finding a safe place to live.

## Freedom

*Chansophy Smitham, Brooklyn Center*

Freedom is the word to use and practice as humans go through life. Years ago, I was lonely, homesick, homebound, and imprisoned. I imagined how difficult it must be to be near the end of life and struggling to hold on to mobility, vision, hearing, and well-being. I had a worthless life. I had only oppression and insults because he was not happy if I was out. Then I was unhappy, frustrated, and anxious. I became unhealthy. My heart skipped beats, and I started taking Atenolol to calm down daily. Through those situations, I didn't see anything, just dead trees and snow from the windows. I appealed to mercy many times because he talked false words with his sister behind me. He had antagonistic ideas all the time.

Here! The United States of America! My anticipation is I will go and help wherever it is needed. I am kind to the need. I don't care that he and his sister are two-faced with me. I will do it anyhow. I don't want to be anticlimactic and die. Meanwhile, there is a corner of the universe with its many needs, and some of these are surely within my reach: half my sandwich to a person standing near the freeway ramp with a sign; a weekend of helping my friend to move; a monthly visit to the sick, homebound, or imprisoned. It's a privilege to honor God and some others by extending my compassion in person.

Freedom is important and connected to a comfort that is not ours alone. It is to be shared with those we encounter each day. Sometimes looking back over my shoulder brings me hope for opportunities that are surely ahead of me. Thank you for second changes and spreading my love everywhere I go

*Chansophy Smitham is originally from Cambodia.*

## The Dope Flows Like Rain

Scott Denardo, Angor

The dope flows like rain  
As it flows through my veins  
As I smoke and I blow  
Clouds as thick as humidity  
And I can't get away from it  
Because I feel like it's heredity  
As my body moves in a tornado  
Of circles as my brain gets frosted  
As the blizzard sets in  
I'm out of control; set in my mind  
And I realize I'm too high  
Please keep away from this for the rest of my life

## Why I Can't Forgive You

Raleon Moore, Bovey

How can I forgive you when your presence still hurts me?  
I don't think about the circumstances, just that you didn't want me  
Our relationship isn't grown, it never existed  
You wouldn't have to ask about my childhood if you hadn't missed it  
To never be anything like you is at the top if my wish list  
Cause thanks to you, I'm legally a bastard and a society misfit  
I stopped playing the victim when I realized you'd never show  
Decided to use my hate for you as motivation, since I refused to let it go  
You were responsible for teaching me the things in life I didn't know  
But you gave that responsibility to the street so the addicts and hustlers watched me grow  
Do I despise you? Yes, but I'm mad at you longer  
With you being absent in my life, daily I grow stronger  
I instilled in myself a will to survive my any means necessary  
When it comes to my priorities, family is never secondary  
If I was asked to speak at your funeral my words would

be short, without an ounce of sadness  
My thoughts of revenge for you almost drove me to madness

I do forgive you for who you are, but not for what you did

I do thank you for one thing, father

You taught me how to never treat my kids

*Raleon Moore is originally from the U.S.A.*

## Emotional Confusion

Louis Kingbird, Cloquet

Creating the mind, defining my lines  
Boundaries are set and people know mine  
Waking up mad, irritated and sad  
Need me some help then inside I'll feel glad  
Finding my purpose feels harder than courage  
Mixing my motive with anger, just stir it  
At the end of the day I analyze and pray  
Closing my eyes and telling God I'll stay

*Louis Kingbird is originally from the U.S.A.*

## My Dream

Esther Chapa, Gaylord

I was 13 years old when my family and I moved to Minnesota. We lived with my mom's sister for about a year. I was scared to go to school because I didn't know how to speak English. Luckily, I had a teacher who helped me. It wasn't easy, but I had to try in order to understand. My teachers were nice to me, but I only had one friend through the whole year. Kids from the bus always made fun of me because I didn't know how to speak English. They said mean things to me until my parents decided to move to another town. All I wanted was to move back to Mexico, but I knew that wasn't going to happen.

In 2006, we moved to Gaylord, MN. I went to school there in 10th, 11th, and 12th grade. I suffered from bullying because I still didn't know how to speak English very well. I never told my parents about it. I only had two friends at school. There were times when

I wanted to give up but never did because I wanted to be a better person, finish high school, and be someone in life.

Since then, I haven't cared what people said about me if I knew how to speak English well or not. All I knew was that I was trying my best. Today I have a three-year-old son, I'm a single mother, and I'm trying to get my GED. It hasn't been easy for me, but I'm trying my best so I can get it. My dream has always been to go to college and be a pediatrician, and I'm going to work so hard to get there. It won't be easy, but I'll never give up because one day I want my son to be proud of me and no matter what has happened to me in the past, it shows that I never gave up and I never will.

*Esther Chapa is 21 and originally from Mexico.*

## **Strong Black Woman**

*Lashaunda Cohen, Minneapolis*

Strong Black Woman  
Why are you crying?  
Pick yourself up and stop acting like  
You're dying.

Strong Black Woman  
Do you know what our ancestor endured?  
And went through?  
This ain't nothing new.

Strong Black Woman  
Don't let that man see you down.  
See that he has beaten your spirit  
And self esteem into the ground.

Strong Black Woman  
Get yourself together  
Things will get worse if you don't  
Make it better.

Strong Black Woman  
Tell them no weapon formed against  
Me shall prosper  
Strong Black Woman

Tell the devil he is a liar

Strong Black Woman  
We weren't built to breakdown  
Tell the devil this is  
Just a rebound  
Strong Black Woman  
Look in the mirror and tell me  
What do you see?  
I see a strong black woman looking  
Back at me.

## **The Great Prophet**

*Peter Saint James, Saint Joseph*

To lose a child in any way is the single hardest thing anyone has to go through. I gave up my daughter for adoption. By no means am I trying to compare this to the loss of a child to death; as my parents did to their first son at only twenty. Because of this, I've seen the pain and the change of life. You're really never the same. A piece of you will always be missing. Having my daughter going to adoption, a piece of me will forever be missing. I constantly wonder did I really do the right thing. I wonder, is she happy? Is her name still Kiley? Are they ever going to tell her about me; if so will she understand the circumstances upon why this heartbreak occurred? Will she ever forgive me? How was her first day of school? Did she go strong or did her dad have to walk her on in. How does it feel to see her smile light up a room, as though she was the sunshine herself? Does she have her mom's eyes or mine? What were her first words? How does it feel to be able to remember the first time she said dad, or how about the first time she was scared and daddy made it all go away? Is she healthy? If they do or when they do tell her is she going to come find me? If so, how do I make it easier for her? I could've given her all the love she needed, all the support and encouragement in the world; maybe not the best financially, but is that what really matters? I have to live with this the rest of my life, until the day I hopefully get that letter or phone call, and I'll have to let her be judge and jury. May she and God forgive me.

## Separation

*Freddy DeJesus, Red Wing*

I was born in the Dominican Republic. I didn't know my father, that is why I lived only with my mother. One day, my mother moved to Venezuela and I began to live with my grandparents. I waited many years to live with my mother again. That time came, but my mother and I split up again. Then she moved to Puerto Rico and I stayed in Venezuela. One more time we were separated.

Then I began to wait to come someday to the United States and meet up with my mother. Fourteen years later that happened, but time has passed and I'm no longer a child. My mother continues living in Puerto Rico and I live in another state. Time passed and my life changed. Now I am an adult. I got married and I have my own children and my own life.

Anyway, I thank God, because my mother is still alive and I can go to Puerto Rico when I want. I thank God because I'm in the United States where my children have a better future and where we feel safe.

*Freddy DeJesus is 48 and originally from the Dominican Republic*

## Sadness and Sunshine

*Olga Gonzalez, Minneapolis*

I had mixed feelings when I came to the U.S. My first day was so exciting because I saw my aunt and cousins in California for the first time in approximately 12 years. But at the same time, I was so sad because I left my country, my mom and youngest sister. I cried day and night for them.

I worked in California for a couple of months and then I moved to New Jersey and lived with another cousin. I had a job and I met my boyfriend at my cousin's house. I am sure I loved him at first sight. We decided to live together in 2005 and by March 2006, I was pregnant. Everything was perfect for us. But one day problems came to our life and for that reason, I moved to Chicago. I had our baby son in 2006. My boyfriend moved to Chicago because he wanted to be with my us. Then we moved in 2007 and worked in the same store every night.

In 2008, my daughter came into our lives, thanks to God. Now, five years later, I am a single mom. My boyfriend's mom is a single mom, my mom too and now me? I just can't understand how this happened to me but that's my life. I have to live the way it is, with happiness and sadness. I have to be strong for my kids. They are my inspiration.

I can't imagine my life without my children. Now I have to sacrifice myself for them. When they are in school, I'm at home sleeping. When they come back from school, I just stay with them for two hours and then I have to go to my English class. After that, I go to my job. I work overnight from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. On Saturday and Sunday, when they are home, I have to work from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. When I come back home, they are sleeping. That's my routine every single day. I would like to spend more time with them but I can't. I have to work and study English. I want to get my GED because I want a better job and a better future for them.

In spite of everything, the sun shines every day for us.

## An Immigrant After 10 Years

*Julio Deleg, Minneapolis*

I had a terrible time when I arrived in Minneapolis, Minnesota from Ecuador 10 years ago. The hardest was the language. I spoke Spanish, so I was trying to communicate with people but they didn't understand. When I tried to watch the news, I had a difficult time. I always watched the news in my native country but here I didn't know anything about the news. I was completely confused.

When I took the bus to work, the system was different compared to my native country. One time I remember I was supposed to take Bus #18, however, I took a different bus that went to Crystal. I tried to return on the same bus to downtown Minneapolis. I felt sad because I couldn't help myself by speaking English. When I got back to my apartment, my roommates were concerned about me because I was two hours late. Can you imagine how I felt at that time? It was a very difficult time in my life.

Then I decided to go to English school. But when I came here, I never thought I would go to the

school because my priority was work. Finally now I can communicate with people at gas stations, grocery stores, in my neighborhood and my community. My life is dramatically different compared to when I arrived. I also have a wife and two children. Now when I see new immigrants, I understand how they feel.

## **Learning from a Bad Experience**

*Sister Rita Maria Victoria Salami, Minneapolis*

I will never forget my first working experience in the U.S., as a dietary assistant in Wisconsin. I trained for two weeks, and then I worked with a lady who disliked immigrants. She always wanted me to be on my feet, every minute of the day. She complained that I couldn't speak English but then had one thing or the other to complain about me. I was fearful of her and this caused me to make mistakes in my job. For example, I broke a plate and some glass cups. I was so sad because I tried to do my best in order to make her happy but all my effort was in vain. This experience affected my life for some time, in my ability to relate with other people at work. I withdrew to myself. However, it helped me to accept challenges and humiliation in life and to stand up for myself in any situations I find myself in.

## **In This Valley**

*Brenda B. Smith, Saint Paul*

Hello up there, can you hear me brothers and sisters... down here "echoes echoes" is there hope down here in this valley.

Tiredness, anger, and oppression aren't but a few of my adversaries here in this valley. They pull me down, taunt me to take away my pride. They belittle my strength. "Say" hello there. Can you lower my devotion to the law so that I may rise, sing, and chant with the fierceness of a lioness protecting her young.

Pierce this earth with the march of a million until thy rivers flow, and swell into the heights of my distinction. Now let us together practice peace because who knows my Shakabuku's it maybe you down there just below, in this valley.

## **My Life**

*Kieu Pham, Saint Paul*

My name is Kieu. I am Vietnamese. I came to the U.S. as a refugee in 1997. At that time, the U.S. government permitted Vietnamese people who worked for the Republic Government before April 30, 1975 and stayed in the Communist jail at least 3 years to come to the U.S. with their families. That is called the Humanitarian Offensive (H.O.) program. My family came with the H.O. program because my husband was a military officer of the Republic Government in South VN and stayed in a Communist jail for seven years.

On April 30, 1975 the communist government in North Vietnam took over South Vietnam. Many people who worked for the Republic Government had to go to the Communist jail. At first in the U.S., I felt that I was dumb, deaf and blind. I couldn't go anywhere. I couldn't hear and understand English. I was very miserable. My husband and I went to school for ELL. We studied English for a few months, then we got jobs. We had to leave school for work. We had a really hard life at that time. We had to go to work by bus in the winter. It was colder and snowier than now. We worked from 3:30 p.m. to midnight. We had to wait for the bus at the bus stop in cold weather for about 1 hour. We worked very hard so that I wouldn't be laid off even if our new job was different from what we did in our country.

I tried to study English every day at work by talking and listening to my American co-workers and read the paperwork. Sometimes I didn't understand the words, so I wrote in my notebook and looked at the dictionary. My dream now is that I would have good English because it's important for me to know English when I live in the U.S.

I have really liked to travel since I was a student in high school. I went to Paris one time in July 2007. In 2000, my husband and I visited Canada with our friends. I went to New York in September 2001. We stayed in the Marriott Hotel; it's near the World Trade Center buildings. I left New York on September 7th, four days before the attacks.

*Kieu Pham is 63 and originally from Vietnam.*

## Shame

Aaron DeGuire, *Richfield*

Shame, for me, has been a huge black rain cloud that seems to have been constantly hovering above me. It has persistently followed me to and from wherever I have gone, constantly pouring down on me it's overwhelming pain and heartache. I have been drenched in its grief for the better, or should I say worst, part of my life. Although the cloud of shame may, at times, recede, I still remain cold and wet from its downfall. Alcohol was the cure and my relief. Alcoholism was the result and an alcoholic was born.

So began my downward spiral of insanity. The more I drank to temporarily numb the pain of shame, the more problems I incurred. And, so that cold black cloud re-accumulates and even more alcohol will be required to sustain the coming storm. Though, in time, that cloud may recede as did the last. I will always be left with its aftermath. A time comes when I must exchange my wet clothes for clean, dry, warm ones. I must change in order to change the vicious cycle. I must humbly accept all the mistakes I have made and honestly admit all of my wrongs. I must realize that my life is, from her on out, of my own making. I must constantly acknowledge this. I must have faith and come to terms with my life as well as life in general. A day will come when I am comfortable in my own skin. Therefore, I will break out from the fog I have been enveloped in as I search for the promise of clear, bright, sunny days.

God Almighty created me and has continually loved me unconditionally. Therefore I know there is nothing to be ashamed of and that I am not a mistake.

## Possession

Jolene Pukarski, *Little Falls*

As I sit by my  
Window sill at night  
Staring out into the dark sky  
I pray this time I get right.

The judge sentenced me to probation  
And has set me up to fail  
For if I mess this up,

I will end up back in jail.

Now, as a product of society,  
I have been labeled,  
With regards to them,  
I'm just another file number on the D.O.C. table.

Nobody knows how exhausted  
And run down I feel  
Knowing the judge has given me  
The raw end of the deal.  
My mind races consistently  
And wonders "why?"  
And in one short breath  
All I can do is cry.

For I know I can't change  
A wrong to a right  
But I know I can to it without all the lies  
And within my own mind the truth lies tight.

I've tried for a long time to pick up the pieces of this  
broken life.

## Picking up the Broken Pieces

Kyle Sheldon, *Cokato*

People act like they know me, then why am I sitting  
in this cell so lonely?  
You don't have to tell me. I can see everybody is so  
phony.  
I don't have true love and care in my life, waiting for  
the right person to show me.  
I hope that person comes soon because I am wasting  
my life getting high; surfing to the moon.  
Soul searching all my life I feel doomed, tears flow-  
ing like a river at times,  
Everything in my life is torn apart like a monsoon.  
I know it's a ruined heart ripped to pieces. I need to  
start over, pick up the pieces  
And being putting it back together with love and care  
as my adhesives.

## Untitled

Jessica Napler, Minneapolis

Plato says, “The life which is unexamined is a life not worth living.” At first, I want to disagree. In other words, is he saying that some people are living worthless lives? Just because you have not yet examined your life doesn’t mean you’re worthless, or don’t deserve to live. To me, it just means you may need time.

When I hear that statement, “The life which is unexamined is not worth living,” I think of the regular people with real jobs living wealthy, without a care in the world. Their heads held high not expecting anything because they already have it all. Then I think of those who have been through it all and are still going through troubles and struggles. They live life as if the world owes them something. Looking for love, help and direction in all the wrong places. Then there’s me. I’ve only been alive a little over 24 years and my life has surely been a rollercoaster. For instance, I’ve been through a ton of things in my life (same as many people I know), but not compared to what’s happening now. I’ve had my life examined once or twice, maybe even three times (at least I’m led to believe). I mean I’ve seen therapists and psychiatrists, even some counselors, but that’s all. I wonder does that even count or what? I don’t know but I feel that a life unexamined should be examined. Therefore, it is worth living. Life should be examined, and maybe it should be examined by who is living it. So if you think you’re wasting time and space by living, you should surely take some time and examine your life and the love of the people around you.

## Why and How I Came to the United States

Natalia B.V., Maple Grove

I never dreamed about moving to the USA. They say, “There is no place like home.” It was my husband’s dream to move to the United States. When he won the Green Card Lottery, he was very excited. As for me, I was worried. My husband was full of determined optimism. We balanced all pros and cons and made up our mind to change our life and immigrate. We had to go through certain procedures. We had to visit the American Embassy twice for interviews and paper work. The Embassy was situated 250 miles away from our city. To be on time with the counselor, we woke up at 4 o’clock in the morning. Our son was asleep, so we covered him with a blanket and took him in the car. It was winter time. When we arrived, it turned out that we had forgotten his boots at home. He entered the Embassy’s building sitting on my back. Luckily, it was so nice inside that he didn’t care being bare-foot and nobody paid attention. We got our visas. The next step was to enter the country within six months. That was a real challenge. We had to sell our house. But the situation in Kyrgyzstan was unstable and insecure. They overthrew the president and there was a bloody conflict between revolutionary forces and pro-government forces. Nobody thought about buying or selling houses. People were so frightened that many escaped and left their houses behind; we had to act fast. We looked at the map, and the distance between Kyrgyzstan and the United States was huge. There was no difference whether we entered from the West or from the East, so I chose the West. The nearest point was Hawaii. You cannot imagine how happy my son was when he saw the ocean. We stayed on the island almost 5 days, and then we moved further to Minnesota. Recently, I asked my son whether he would like to go to Hawaii again. To my surprise he said, “No.” He loves Minnesota most of all. “There is a volcano on the Hawaii islands and it may burst any time. I prefer Maple Grove,” he told me. Isn’t he smart? Two years have passed and we are on the way to getting our American citizenship.

*Natalia B.V. is 52 years old and originally from Russia.*

## **I am Nhia**

*Nhia Xiong, Brooklyn Park*

The world is very beautiful; I am one of those very lucky enough to see it as a human because of the unconditional love of God. I was born as a very healthy baby. However, I was in the wrong place and at the wrong time, which caused me to be a disabled person. I was born in a refugee camp in Thailand and there was not any medical help. I deeply believe that it was not my great mother's fault and I do not blame her for my disability. By the age of one year old, I was very sick. I almost died due to a lack of vaccine available there. When I was three, my parents noticed that I was shaking very often days in and days out. They took me to the big city to see a doctor and the doctor did some tests on me. He told my parents that I have cerebral palsy; I could not talk and walk. I have a very difficult and sad life by having cerebral palsy. Luckily, when I was nine or ten years old, we moved to a new place and my parents put me into a hospital. The doctors there gave me medication and taught me to speak and do exercises; then I started to walk and talk. I have been getting better every day since. Now I can talk, walk, and think as well. In life, we should not give up hope because in the end we will get great rewards of what we have a desire for.

*Nhia Xiong is originally from Thailand*

## **You're a Woman of Worth**

*Anonymous*

Ladies, you are beautiful inside and out with a heart that is so strong. Your life has been through many trials and you're still here. As a woman, it comes naturally for us to be caretakers; always wanting and needing to take care of someone or something. Who is going to love and take care of you better than yourself? It took me loving a man more than I loved myself; living in his dreams and not achieving my own dreams. After ten years of being in a relationship unmarried, he walked out my life. I never thought that he would ever leave me and he did. I had no career or a plan to fall back on. I was devastated. I could have turned to

abusive behavior and things because of my pain, but instead I decided to put my trust in a higher power that gave me comfort...and that was God. After trusting in God my whole life has changed, I am a happily married woman, grandmother, and now an ordained deacon. I am now achieving all my dreams and goals to finally go back to school. So if you haven't gone through the trials of life, how would you now know your worth and value to others and yourself? You're a Woman who was just a diamond in the rough who now shines so brilliantly. Wholeness does not lie in a person or thing, but the precious Woman God created you to be...A Woman of Worth!!!

## **Getaway**

*J.S., Minneapolis*

It was December 1990. Everybody was waiting to see what would happen next. The government army was attacked by armed oppositions in Hargeysa, the big city in north Somalia, and also in central regions. Many people moved to Mogadishu because of war. They came there without anything. This event was warning to people in Mogadishu, "That bad situation is beginning".

On Sunday evening December 23, 1990 we heard the first abnormal cannon. Everyone was shocked and the calamity had begun. Students got out of schools, laborers stopped working, everybody wanted to reach his home and know the safety of his family. The streets were crowded with people walking. I was worried because my two kids were at school at that time. The older one was ten, and the younger was eight years old. Could they find their way home?! It was very hard to stay home watching until they come. So I went out quickly to their school, but it was terrible to find them. There was no one in the school. I looked for them in many places where I expected that they can go. Finally I returned to my house, desperate in the dark night. But I was very lucky to see them coming one after the other. The older one could reach home by himself and the younger one by the help of someone, after crying many hours.

I decided to protect my family the next day by sending them with a bus to my hometown, which was 200km. away from Mogadishu. I stayed 12 days after

that to keep my house and my fortune, but the war was increasing every day, and the life was going bad, so I had to get away from my favorite city by walking through Afgoye, a small town 30 km. away from southern Mogadishu to start the long trip.

*J.S. is originally from Somalia.*

## **The Barrier of Language**

*Barrios, Austin*

When I came to the United States I did not speak or understand a word in English. That caused me a lot of problems in the work place, because I could not communicate with English speakers. I wasn't able to follow my boss' directions or even asked for what I needed. But the biggest problem came when my daughter started school. Because she learned Spanish first she was not able to speak or read in English. So when her teacher started giving her homework, I had to help somehow. I bought a dictionary, I spent hours looking at it for one sentence, but soon I realized that would not work.

Later that year I decided to go to school. On the following year I started studying, but at the beginning the classes were very hard. After three years of classes I have learned more than I thought. Now I help my daughters as much as I can.

Actually, I'm still taking classes, I am doing this because I want to improve my skills and also I want to continue helping my kids, because as they get bigger they need more and more help. Also I have been helping others like me who have the barrier of language.

As a result I started to learn English to help my children. But instead of that I helped myself. I have broken the barrier of language to help me to communicate with others like my children's teachers, and others like my kids. Now wherever I go I do not have to wait for an interpreter anymore unless the meeting is very important or hard to understand.

## **Challenges**

*Dajella, Austin*

My difficult challenge was a war I grew up in different places, I had no permanent address. I was born in South Sudan and moved to Ethiopia, I live there for little time, and then moved to Kenya.

I stayed in Kenya for about two years, and then moved here to the U.S.A.

In Sudan I was in primary school at level six. But when I reached the Refugee Camp, I had to start over again from the beginning in the primary school because in Sudan people spoke an Arabic Language, not an English Language. English was the language spoken in the camp.

Now, I am looking forward to continuing my study until I get better knowledge in future. I would like to help my people in South Sudan. They are still way behind. They are not even third world. I believe my education will help them get a little bit better. I want to go back for a year and teach.

## **Life**

*Dylan Olson, Hibbing*

Life is like a roller coaster

You get ups and downs and scary turns

At times you want to run

But you're stuck in that seat

You just want to scream at times

But when it's all done you know you'll be fine

## **Untitled**

*Beronica Vasquez*

In my country the people don't have a lot of money. They need to farm for their family and they don't have schools. They only farm. My friends came to the U.S. because they heard that it can change their life. Too many people died in my country before. They didn't have food. There were no more jobs. It did not rain. So they could not farm.

One time in the U.S., I went to the hospital with my son for two weeks. It was very hard for me because I don't speak English. For two weeks in the hospital the other children cried because they didn't like the hospital. They said, "Jesus, let my brother go home please." My son said, "Thank you Mom. You love me because you stayed with me everyday when I am sick."

## **My Journey from Nicaragua to the United States**

*Ninoska Arostegui, Columbia Heights*

My name is Ninoska. I am from Central America, Nicaragua. I came to the United State of America in 1991. I traveled from Nicaragua, to Honduras, and Guatemala. Also, I passed through Mexico.

While going through Mexico I experienced fear, hunger, cold, and many things. Also, I did not have a visa while going through Mexico, so I have to hide from the authorities. I traveled on the top of a train for seven hour in the company of my daughter, sister, other relatives, and people who were trying to reach North America like us. We were cold, hungry, and with the fear of what could be ahead of us.

We reached a town in the morning, and people could see us on the top of that train, but a lot of them knew what we were trying to do. People threw food at us, for the children because they knew how difficult it was to travel that way. When we finally reached the frontier we crossed. We stayed in a place that called "Casa Romero" This place was run by nuns. They fed us, but also we had duties to do.

The next step was to get through Houston and then to Miami. Because we did not have a visa to be in U.S.A., we had to hide. Going from Brownsville, Texas to Houston, Texas there is a check point that we have to avoid. We have to get in the forest to go around the check point, so we would not get caught by the authorities. We walked for a few hours and sadly we got lost. We slept in the forest.

When we woke up, I told my stepdad that I can't do it anymore, that we should turn ourselves to the authorities. Everyone agreed. We got out on the road, a truck stopped and the driver asked us what happened to us. We told them about what we been through. They brought us to their house and they fed us. Next day we try again and luckily we made it to Houston. Then we when to Miami, Florida where's my mom and brother live. Coming to U.S.A. wasn't easy, but I don't have any regrets. I've been in this country 22 years now, and I am always going to be grateful.

*Ninoska Arostegui is 44 years old and originally from Nicaragua.*

## **Succeeding**

*Anonymous, Fridley*

I remember a problem. I've been struggling with it for years. But later it was solved and I accomplished it with success. After many mistakes, I finally got the hang of it. I will tell you about the time where my biggest struggle was in America. It was in education.

I'm currently 22 years old and this is my 11th year in the USA. Going back to the country I'm from, it is called Somalia. It is in east Africa. It was a very peacefully civilized country until the war happened which was around the early 1900s. We fled the country because of war.

It was 2002 when we fled to America. America was very different. Everything was something new for me to learn, especially education. Education was my number one priority, to learn. If I succeeded in education, I always dreamt I could be anything I wanted.

Entering high school was a tough year, because I didn't know anything. I didn't know the language but I learned and never gave up on my dream after many trials, practice and support from my family and friends, teachers. I noticed I improved with the year by the time I hit junior year. I felt my math skills and English improved. I graduated from high school in Minneapolis. I was extremely happy. This has been a start to my life. I made it. I successfully completed my school.

Fulfilling my goal inspired me to become a better person in life. And to achieve more goals. I live not only by changing mentally but spiritually. I've used my learning. I will teach others and will be a major help to them. I will not stop here in my education, but will go to college. My dream is to become a nurse in life and I will not give up that dream. I will succeed. I will help my country. Since it's still struggling to be arable with droughts and money and things going on I will help them out majorly.

## Living with ADHD

*Tieria C. Kemp, Minneapolis*

My 10 and a half year old son has severe ADHD and was diagnosed at 5 years old. Since then, we have traveled many paths together to reach a peaceful kind of life. We have conquered Day Treatment programs, balancing and finding the correct medication, individual and family therapy, plus countless articles, books, or even seminars on this disorder. I cringe every morning at 7:00 am when I must medicate him for his long school day; an active 5th grader needs his super hero powers to conquer his day. Through doctors whom I have learned to trust and therapists right alongside of his teachers I now fully understand and accept the fact that without medication my son simply cannot hold it all together. He excels in academics and even gets named Student of the Month at least a few times a year. Our world may be very different than most but it is a happy life that we now live due to acceptance and the honest hunger to live to fight another long challenging ADHD filled day!

*Tieria C. Kemp is 40 years old and originally from Minnesota*

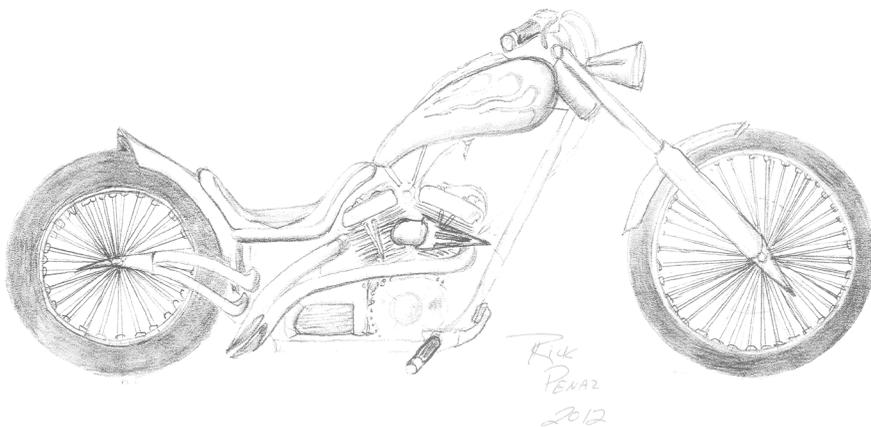
## I Grind

*Harold Ford, Minneapolis*

I grind, for all the struggles and hard times  
For everything on the line  
For my time to shine  
That's why I grind

I grind, for the children in the street  
Who ain't missed a beat  
But can't even eat  
That's why I grind

I grind, for brokenness on the mind  
For trying to hustle a dime  
These streets are mine  
That's why I grind



*Rick Penaz, Plymouth*

# FAMILY

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## My Lifetime

*Seyfu Berhane, Apple Valley*

I was born in Ethiopia. I grew up in a big city, Addis Ababa, with the best family in the world. After those beautiful years, something terrible happened in my family. It was the first time I remember being unhappy around my parents and all my family. My dad, he passed forever when he was 64 years old. His whole lifetime he was healthy and happy. After just two days of sickness, he died.

The situation broke my heart, but at the same time it helped me to grow up faster. My mom, she didn't know what to do for work because she always stayed home and took care of our family.

I started work to help my mom and brother and sister because I am the first born in my family. My mom wanted me to go to school, but there was no one else to help my family survive. Sometimes my mom cried all night. I was helping my family, but it wasn't enough, so I got the idea to go somewhere else to try to find a better life and make more money for my family. So, I went to Kenya as a refugee and applied for a visa to America. I was in Kenya for two years and during that time my mother passed. When I was 24 I left for America. After I came to the U.S., I was excited and happy. Also I was not comfortable enough to talk with people because I was afraid about English because I stopped school when I was in Ethiopia.

After a couple months I started to find a job, but I couldn't speak English so I started ESL school in St. Paul. Now I am comfortable staying in the U.S., and I feel happy and excited with my life. I have a wonderful family and very good friends. Life is important for me and for my family. I have four kids right now and I am a different now person now than when I was 17 years old. I have a dream one day I will be successful.

*Seyfu Berhane is 32 and originally from Ethiopia*



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Seyfu Berhane came to Minnesota in 2003. He and his wife have four beautiful children. Seyfu has been attending the CVLC, ABE program for three years. He enjoys playing outside activities with his children and spending time with friends. Although Seyfu already has a high school diploma from Ethiopia, he is working toward his GED and would like to continue with a college education and start a career in the medical field.

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## **My Family**

*Edman Abukar, Minneapolis*

My name is Edman Abukar. I came to America from Syria. I was born in Somalia. I lived there since I was young. I got married in Syria. Right now, my husband still lives in Syria. I have a little daughter named Rimaas. She is my everything. I love her so much. She is 2 years old. She hasn't seen her dad yet because I was pregnant with her when I came to this country. She still misses her dad. I also miss my husband every night when I'm going to sleep. I think of my family back home. My mother and father live in Somalia. The only reason I am worried about my family is because they live in a place where there is always a fight going. Oh I miss them more than anything. I hope to see them again one day, Inshallah.

*Edman Abukar is originally from Somalia.*

## **Life in Cambodia When I was Young**

*Sopheap Keo, Richfield*

I was born in the small village in Cambodia. My parents were farmers. I have seven siblings including me. They worked very hard to raise their children. My family was so very poor.

When I was seven years old, I started school. It was far away from my house, about four kilometers. I walked to school with my friends that lived near my house. Since I was young, I loved to study. I never missed class except when I was sick. After class, sometimes I stayed home to help my mother take care of my sister. Sometimes I went to the field to watch my cows, or ducks. At night, after I ate dinner I picked up my book to read, write, or do homework. My village didn't have electricity. My mother made a fire in a can for me to use as a light at night when it was dark. Several times, she didn't have gas to make the light, so I went outside to learn under the moon's light. My life was very, very hard in my homeland. Thank you for taking the time to read my story.

## **An Angel Touched My Life**

*Vicky Klecker, Stacy*

When I was five years old, I got lost. This is the story about what happened. Every Saturday my grandma and Lolita would watch a TV show together. Lolita was our neighbor. One Saturday around 4:00 pm my grandma told me to go get Lolita because it was time for the show. I went out of the building, but I never went to see Lolita.

I remember I started to walk and walk, until I didn't know where I was. When it was almost time to be dark, I was scared. I cried and cried. I sat down on the sidewalk. Then I felt that somebody was talking to me, and I turned around to look. I saw a beautiful woman with golden brown skin wearing a long white skirt. She told me it is time to go home. I was scared, but she said your grandma is waiting for you. She took my hand, and she walked me home. Close to my house I saw my grandma running towards me, and grandma asked me a lot of questions. When grandma tried to talk with the beautiful woman, she disappeared. I never saw her again. My grandma asked me, "Who was the lady?"

And I said, "I don't know grandma. I never saw her before in my life."

Later on that evening grandma and I were talking about what happened that day. Grandma was telling me my family and the neighbors were looking for me. My grandma went to church and prayed for me. Kneeling before the Virgin of Guadalupe she was praying and asking for me to come back home safely. Grandma told me, "When I finished my prayers, I left the church and I saw you and the beautiful woman."

At that moment I believe I was touched by an angel that day.

*Vicky Klecker is 50 and originally from Mexico.*

## **My Life With My Parents**

*Saw Nyunt, Saint Paul*

My name is Saw Yel Nyunt and I'm from Myanmar. I came to the U.S.A in September, 2012. I would like to share about my childhood life when I lived in my country. Then I would like to tell you why I appreciate my parents.

I have five siblings and we were a very poor family. When I was young, I was sick and often had an illness. At that time my parents were very disappointed about their business and my health. I needed to eat expensive foods and healthy foods. It cost a lot of money. One of the problems is we don't have health insurance in my country. We need to pay a lot of money if we need to go to the clinic or hospital. If you don't have money you can't go to the hospital. When I was five years old, I was very sick and almost died. My parents were very worried for me and even though they didn't have money they tried their best for me. They borrowed money from a neighbor and they sent me to the hospital. I'm here today because of my parents. I am grateful. Nobody thought that I would be healthy when I grew up. I want my parents to see me healthy like that. I believe they will be very happy for me. But I'm not lucky. My parents passed away when I was ten years old. I grew up with my older sister and older brother. My parents loved me and I want to be together with them again. I saw a lot of my friends, they have Mom and Dad and they went somewhere together or ate together. I'm very happy for them. Sometimes I was sad and my tears fell down. I cried in my heart. They are very lucky to live with their parents. I wish I would have been lucky like that.

I would like to thank them and I wish I could meet them one last time. But I know it never will be. Even though I never see them I'll always remember them and they will stay in my heart until the end of my life.

*Saw Yel Nyunt is originally from Myanmar.*

## **My Loving Grandmother**

*Pa Vang, Saint Paul*

Have you ever loved someone so much that you could not let go? I too, have that one person that I wanted to keep close to me forever, and that was my grandmother. She was always there for me when I needed someone to talk to. She was my best friend and the one person besides my mother that loved me unconditionally.

My grandmother was one of a kind. She was kind-hearted to everyone in our village. Most of all, she was there when I needed someone to talk to about my daily problems. She would sit quietly, listening to my problems whether it was about boys or just gossip. She tried her best to help me with my problem even though sometimes she didn't know how to help. But I was happy to just have her by my side listening to me. I had a lot of friends in our village and at school, but my best friend has always been my grandmother. There were times when I had no money to pay for school or no time to cook a hot meal. She would give me money for school and make sure I got a hot breakfast every morning before I left for school. Also, I loved to share my secrets with her because I knew she would keep them secret.

My grandmother loved me very much. She helped my mother raise me since I was a baby. She never complained about babysitting me when I was younger. Sometimes she would wait for me to come home from school so we could eat as a family. All the little things she did for me told me that she loved me a lot.

My grandmother was the most important woman in my life. Unfortunately, she passed away last year due to illness. I have not been the same since, but I am slowly learning to let go. I will cherish her kindness, and I don't know how I am ever going to repay her. I do believe that she is in a better place now and that she will continue to watch over me. I am so thankful to have such a loving grandmother in my lifetime, and I will never forget her.

*Pa Vang is originally from Laos.*

## My Baby

*Tata Moua, Corcoran*

When I first saw my baby boy, he was so cute. I didn't know if he looked like me or my husband. I was very happy. For the first time, I didn't feel so alone in the U.S. All of my family is back in Laos. When I married my husband, I moved to the U.S. My son is my first baby. In the beginning, I didn't know how I was going to feed, protect, or take care of him. It only took a few days for me to learn everything I needed to take care of him. I still was not used to being called a mommy. Now, my son is 2 years old and is learning to speak. He can do most things by himself. He is also learning a lot of new things. I am now pregnant with my second baby. I am about 5 months now. I found out my second baby will be a girl. I can't wait until she's born. I'm excited to see if she will look like me or my husband. I know my second baby will be easier to take care of than my first. I will be the best mother I can.

*Tata Moua is originally from Laos.*

## What If There Was No Electricity

*Manoloth Phothirath, Brooklyn Center*

Even though electricity is an important thing in our life as for me I can imagine what I would do if there was no electricity.

When I lived in my country, my family didn't have any electricity. We didn't have warm water to take a shower in the winter; however it didn't cause any problems to my family. We used to listen to a rooster to wake us up in the morning, and my grandfather knew how to make a fire for our house.

If there was no electricity, I would like to use my experience that I gained before. If there was no dishwasher, I would do dishes by hand. I would dry my clothes in the sun if there was no dryer. As you can see, I wouldn't worry if there was no electricity.

Some people like to video everything with a camera, then use a computer to view it and show it to other persons or a person who will be born in the future. For me, I would like to video everything that I see in my brain so that I don't have to spend a lot of money

to buy electronics. I could have a lot of memories and I would like to show and tell my future kids or any persons who want to know about my life.

I think electricity is amazing. I have heard many people talk about electricity when I lived in my country, but I didn't have it even once in my life. Since I came here, I have seen a lot of electricity. I use it every day, even in the store, houses, and restaurants, on the road or everywhere I go. It makes me feel and think about persons who live in my country and still use cold water to take a shower. Even my sisters still walk to their school every day. I want to buy something electric that would help my family in Laos. I want to buy a microwave for my mom to help her cook food faster than before.

I know if I want to buy something electrical, I have to have a lot of money. I don't want my family to have everything like families here, but just some electricity would be enough.



*Tata Moua, Corcoran*

## **The Park**

*Dwight Lambert, Minneapolis*

I went to Pittsburgh to my Aunt's house with my family when I was four years old. I heard from my 14 year-old cousin that a lot of violence went on in the area. My cousins took me to the park to play.

When we got to the park I felt uncomfortable. I was afraid of being there. I felt scared with goosebumps. I wanted to cry because I felt I was in an unsafe place. It was 36 years ago, but nothing really has changed. My cousins say it is still the same way it was when I was four years old. It's an unsafe place with people getting killed and doing drugs. I still feel scared about that park in Pittsburgh.

*Dwight Lambert is 40 and originally from the U.S.A.*

## **My Sissy**

*Abbey Jean Ingvaldson, Grand Rapids*

Not many have what we share.

There are people longing for it everywhere.

Unconditional love is hard to come by for some.

It was easy for me, two years old and here you come.

A bond that will forever bind us together.

Hand in hand, we can make it through whatever.

I know at times life gets to be really tough.

Never give up; I'll be there to fight when you've had enough.

We have had to get through a lot of challenges thus far.

Some said we wouldn't make it, yet here we are.

When apart our weaknesses may shine through,

But together we can get through anything, me and you.

I regret times in the past when I have done you wrong. I hope we can grow from it, and our relationship will remain strong.

Out of all the beautiful things in this world,

There is nothing I love more than you, my girl.

Thanks so much for forever being my best friend.

I love you sissy, sisters till the end.

## **A Time I Got Lost**

*Hifaa Al-Shukaili, Waite Park*

Muscat festival is a big celebration in Oman. When I was a child, everybody in my family was ready to go there. It was the best idea. One Friday, we went to Muscat festival. I usually waited for this moment. In the evening, we packed everything we needed. At the festival, my parents sat in the park and I went to ride the roller coaster with my brother. It was my favorite exciting game. First we played, then we bought something to eat and everybody was ready to eat together. After that, we went to the circus. It was very funny and interesting, but there were no lights in this place. Thus, I couldn't see my family when we left. It was dangerous to walk and run, because it was too dark. I said to myself that I lost my family. I went out of the circus to find my family, but I couldn't find them. I cried, looked around and ran like crazy and tried to find anyone from the family. I said to the police, "can you help me?" The police helped me find my family. Finally, I felt very happy when I saw them. "Thank you for helping me," I said to the police.

*Hifaa Al-Shukaili is originally from Oman.*

## **The Birth of My Nephew**

*Karolina Esquivel, Waite Park*

We were all very excited when we heard the news that my sister, Ana, was pregnant. This was back in November of last year. My mother and I helped to take care of my sister during her pregnancy. I was very interested in learning as much as I could. In June of this year the baby was due so my sister had to go stay at the hospital. The St. Cloud Hospital is very big and very nice. My sister got a nice room with a view of the Mississippi river. The baby was finally born on June 5th. The name he was given was Yared. He came out a handsome and healthy baby boy. I love my new nephew Yared, especially because I was there when he came into this world.

## **My Grandmother**

*Sika Allou, Waite Park*

When I was young, I used to walk home after school by myself. One day after school, a man came to school and told me, "Your mama wants me to bring you to the market." I followed him, but he didn't take me to the market. He took me to the place that was like a desert. I felt scared. Suddenly an old woman came and said, "Give me the child." And she took me home. No one saw her because she left. Two or three years later I saw a picture of her and said, "Who is this?" My mother said, "That is your grandmother, but she died years ago." I knew then that even though she was dead, she was still watching out for me.

## **Thanksgiving Day**

*Karely Gil, Waite Park*

Last Thursday, my husband and I were preparing to go to a friend's house. He invited us to eat at home with his family at 7 p.m. When we were ready we went to our car, but that day it was snowing since noon and the streets were full of snow. Since we didn't have experience, my husband drove very slowly, but when we crossed the street the car started spinning and sliding. I was very scared and started to scream, and my husband tried to control the car. When he could control the car, we continued on the road slowly and we could get to the house of my friend. Before dinner we thanked God for not crashing the car. The next day we went to look and buy winter tires so as not to have more scares with snow.

## **I Miss My Sister**

*Adriana Lanfiesta, Saint Paul*

When I was girl, I did not understand my older sister because she always told me to clean the house, don't quarrel with my other sister, do the dishes, and study. I always wanted to play outside and go swimming with my friend. But now I'm a mama and it is hard for me with my four children. It's difficult. I try to make the best for them. I think I need her to help me and give me advice. I love my sister.

## **I Miss My Mother**

*Naw Paw Htee Lah, Saint Paul*

When I was a little girl, I didn't understand my mother. There were nine children. She taught me the best things and a lot of rules. Sometimes I thought my mother is very crabby person. At the time my country, Myanmar, was having difficult times. Government was very bad. Many people couldn't find jobs and food was very expensive. My father didn't care enough about his family. Now I understand my mother. She was worried and it was difficult to take care of nine children. I want to tell my mother I am so sorry, and I miss you. I will come back to home country and meet you soon.

*Naw Paw Htee Lah is originally from Myanmar.*

## **My Father**

*Gloria Avila, Saint Paul*

When I was five years old, I lived in a little town in Sinaloa, Mexico. We didn't have school there. Every day my father rode his bicycle and took me to the nearest school in another town, approximately three miles away. He always told me about education. He said, "Education is very important around the world." He worked very hard to help us to go to school. I have five siblings. We finished school. Now they have their own family. They worked hard too. My father is helpful, generous, and patient. I feel proud of him.

## **My Mother**

*Hanaa Chouman, Lakeville*

My name is Hanaa. I am from Lebanon. I have been married 27 years. I have eight sisters and one brother, and my mom and my dad passed away about 27 years ago. My mom took care of who stayed at home after my dad died. She was a good mom and she was so nice. She worked so hard to raise my siblings until they finished school, got bigger, and got married. I see it was so hard for her, but God helped her. I miss her after I came to the USA, but I feel good now because my sisters are taking care of her.

*Hanaa Chouman is originally from Lebanon.*

## My Life

*Susana Quintero, Minneapolis*

My name is Susana. I am from Morelos, Mexico. I came to the United States twelve years ago for a better life. I want to learn everything. I want to learn English for my future.

I have a husband and two children, my daughter Brenda and my son Kevin. They were born in Minneapolis. It is a beautiful city, but it is cold. I like to play outside with my children and to shovel snow. We dress very warm. I'm happy that my family can live in this country. I miss my family in Morelos, but we talk on the phone every two weeks.

*Susana Morelos is originally from Morelos, Mexico.*

## Unbelievable Story About My Great Grandmother

*Afia Geleto, Minneapolis*

I want to talk about an interesting story of my great grandmother, particularly about her childhood life. When my great-grandmother was born she wasn't wanted because, during that period of time in Ethiopia, female-born children were thrown away because of long practiced tradition. Before she was born, two of her sisters were thrown away and eaten by animals. But there was her uncle who didn't want this tradition to continue. So when my great-grandmother was thrown her uncle couldn't let it happen. He fought the tribe's tradition and the animals that were trying to eat her. For this reason, the next day he took her out of the town. She lived with her uncle until she turned 15.

At a family wedding her uncle introduced her to her parents. They said she looked like them so they asked her uncle where she came from. He said she was their daughter. Her family was so happy they cried.

My great-grandmother lived more than 110 years. She had many children and grandchildren. This may not be believable, but truthfully she told me this story by her own words.

## To My Daughter

*Melissa Urbano, Saint Cloud*

What can I say in the short time we have together?  
What can I give to you to frame and hang up on your soul like a memory?

I'm not trying to show you what life is all about, as I am learning along with you.

But there is something I'd like to say for when the time comes when you would fly away.

Say what you feel, follow your dreams,

Give all that is in you, and always forgive,

Don't judge by the image, for what's important is within a person.

So when the time comes and you are ready to fly

Say what you feel, follow your dreams

Give all that is in you, and always forgive.

Don't limit yourself for what others might say.

When the journey seems long, don't get discouraged

You can be as big as your dreams.

## My Visit to Cambodia

*Sokunthea Hean, Burnsville*

Last May, I went to Cambodia for a couple months. I was very happy to stay with my family. When I arrived, my parents, my three brothers, my sister-in-law, and also my cousins came to pick me up. Everybody came to hug me and say "I am very happy to see you."

The next day, the whole family went to breakfast. Afterwards, we had a small party at my house.

A few weeks later, we had a national ceremony in Cambodia that was a chance for my family to plan to go somewhere. So we decided to go to Sihanok Ville to rest for a few days. I took a lot of pictures at the beach of seashells. I had a lot of fun over there. Finally, my time in Cambodia was over. It was time for me to go back to the United States, back to school, and back to work again. However, I still have fun with my class and every thing around me in the United States.

*Sokunthea Hean is originally from Cambodia.*

## My Favorite Free Time

Amy Stevens, Minneapolis

I would have to say that going out of town with my two kids is my favorite free time activity. We go up to my daughter's dad's place up on the other side of Saint Cloud, Minnesota. We also go up to Willmar, Minnesota where his cabin in the woods is, out in no man's land.

When we get to her dad's place, all my kids want to do is ride the four wheelers. I make them first put their stuff in the house and say hello to the grandparents. Cody, he likes when Jasmine's older brother is there, so they can play video games all day and night. Jasmine likes going down the road on her four-wheeler to go see the horses with me or her dad.

When we go up to the cabin in no man's land, all they want to do is go fishing and boating. After that two-hour drive, all I want to do is take a nap, and so does her dad. To me, there is not really much we can do here, but we make the best of the time there.

So I would have to say, in all, this is my favorite free time with my family. We get to do things that we can't do in the city. Jasmine gets to see the horses, and Cody gets to stay up all night playing video games with her brother. I get to spend time with her dad and his folks. I enjoy riding the four wheelers with my kids. I really enjoy the quiet up there.

## Monrovia, Liberia

Tannah Ketter, Roseville

My two sisters live in Liberia with my aunt. It is very hot in Liberia. I see many cars and taxis. They speak English. I went to the schoolhouse when I was nine. I woke up and went to school. They use African sign language. I had a very good teacher. I went to a school near my house. The school clothes were green and yellow. My father and mother and I came first to America. We came to Minneapolis when we to came to America. It was cold here. We moved to live in Staten Island, my mother and three sisters. I have six sisters and one brother.

*Tannah Ketter is originally from Liberia.*

## The Woman Who Gives Me Strength

Tanya Russell, Rosemount

The woman who gives me strength in my life is my favorite granny Maria. She is one of the most important people in my life. She raised my sister and me when both of our parents were working. Granny probably spent more time with us than our parents when we were babies.

My grandma Maria's life wasn't sweet and easy. She was born in a tough time. She passed through the famine in 1933. In that time Stalin headed the Soviet Union and the Ukrainian SSR. His purpose was to destroy the people's spirit in the Ukrainian National Liberation movement.

At that hard time my grandma was a small girl. She had a big family consisting of three sisters and a baby brother. When she told me this story about famine, her eyes were full of tears. From her memories: "Government officials came to each house and took all the food that families had. They didn't leave anything for the people." To save the lives of her children my Granny's mom tried to hide some food from those people. Her mom put wheat seeds in bags and put them under her children's heads in bed like pillows, but those mean people took everything including the wheat seeds. My granny Maria was the only child who survived the famine; in her family, she lost all her siblings.

The second tough time in my granny's life was the Second World War. She was a teenager when the war came to her land. My granny stayed with her family, they didn't take her to battle or a work camp, because she was the only one child in the family. So she helped like a nurse for wounded soldiers in her town. It was a really hard time. But my granny survived; thanks to God for that.

Later my granny lost her mom. She stayed with her father. My granny never had a husband so she was a lonely mom, who raised her child alone and took care of her old father. However, I am proud of my granny Maria. She went through all that difficulty in her life and she raised my sister and me. Now she is 89 years old. She is my ideal, strong woman, which gives me strength in my life. I love my granny very much and appreciate everything she has done for me.

## **A Father and His Sons**

*Bee Yang, Saint Paul*

On February 4, 1985 I was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota at Regions Hospital. When I was four years old, Dad would take my brother and me to his work place in Bloomington. I still remember he worked at the airport.

After my brother and I went to my dad's work-place, he would take us around the airport and watch airplanes fly up in the sky. My dad always cared for us; he would do anything for us. I remember my dad always took my brother and me hunting with him. He always was a good dad to us because we respected him and he respected us back. My dad wanted me to watch my brother when we were kids. My dad was always there when I needed him. This one time he protected me from a strange dog. Whenever my brother and I needed something from the stores he would always buy it for us, even though my mom said no.

I remember when my brother and I wanted to join a soccer team. He said that if you and your brother want to join the team, you and your brother need to respect each other. My dad loved my brother and I so much he bought us some stuff when we were kids. We lost our dad when my brother was in first grade and I was in second grade.

## **A Really Generous Person**

*Juan Fernandez, Minneapolis*

She is my older sister; her name is Socorro. When I was six years old, she was twelve years old. She was really young, but all the time she helped my parents. My sister cooked, worked, studied, and cleaned our home. In 1981, she married, and then she had two sons. When my brothers, sisters, and I were married, she was supportive of my whole family. One day I met her workmates; they thought like me. Sometimes I felt sad, because my sisters felt jealous of her, but when she looked something like that she only smiled and said, "They had a hard day." When I had any goal in my life, she was my inspiration. My sister is a very special person.

## **A Proud Parent**

*Rosa Chiqui, Brooklyn Center*

My name is Rosa. I am from Ecuador. I would like to tell you about my son. His name is Jedee. He was born in the United States, and he is 6 years old.

When I held him in my arms for the first time, I was so happy and the time passed. My second child surprised me, but I was so happy when I knew I was pregnant. A few years later, Jedee started preschool, but he didn't like going to school. Every morning he cried and told me that he didn't like school. He cried for two months and then he stopped. He was interested in drawing people, flowers, and animals. He also enjoyed movies like "Spiderman," "Superman," and "Toy Story." One day a teacher from an art program came to the school and saw his pictures. She really liked them and chose some of them to display at an art festival. His picture was put on a billboard around the freeways for everybody to see.

Now Jedee loves to go to school and is not shy anymore. He speaks English with his friends and loves drawing anything. I feel so proud of my baby.

## **A Sweet Gift**

*Maria Lozano, Newport*

My daughter Ashley was born April 14, 1998. She was born in Saint John's Hospital, in Maplewood, Minnesota. I felt happy. My husband and I went to the house with my baby. Ashley needed to take a bath, but the bathroom was cold, so we moved the bathtub to the bedroom. I was feeding the baby and my parents called Ashley, "Beba" because it was difficult for them to pronounce her English name. My parents came from Mexico to meet the baby girl. My other daughter's name is Delaina. She was born at Woodwinds Hospital. She was born June 12, 2001.

She was the one to remind me of the things that I forgot.

She was so special to me that I wish that I could have her today.

## The Important Person in My Life

*Laura Concepcion, Crystal*

I have had many important people in my life, but the one who is the most special was my mother, Tomasa. She was 98 years old when she passed away. Every day when I got up I thanked God for allowing me to have her for so many years. My mother and I had a lot of things in common. For example, when I had a problem, she was the person I had to talk to about it. She always said to me, "Daughter, don't worry. Life is too short and you don't solve problems by worrying." Once I communicated my problem to my mother, I felt better. Without her I would have been very confused. She was the only person I could trust.

My mother was a very strong and healthy woman. At the age of 98, when we used to go food shopping, she was the one that pushed the shopping cart. She lived a long life and rarely got sick. Even though my mother was an old woman, her memory was very good. She was the one to remind me of the things that I forgot. She was so special to me that I wish that I could have her today.

## My Life

*Lourdes Torres-Hernandez, Brooklyn Park*

My mother passed away in 1998; at that time I came here to Minnesota. I arrived with my sister and her husband, and stayed with them at their apartment. It was here where I met my future husband. He is a brother to my sister's husband. I felt so sad for a long time. After that we lived together, and my little child I left in my country came to me. Now I have three kids, and my father came to Minnesota in 2007, so I don't feel alone because now I have my father close to me. When my sisters and I were children, my father never stayed with us because my parents were separated, I think when I was seven years old. We are four sisters and one brother: Socorro, Araceli, Olga, Lourdes, and David. My sisters sometimes visited my father, but not me. But now I have the opportunity to live close to him so I have more communication with my father than my sisters now.

## Something of My Life

*Agustin Huerta, Minneapolis*

I was born in Mexico City, but after finishing college I got a job at the Mexican Petroleum Company, so I had to move to Tampico Port, located in northeast Mexico, not far from the border of the United States. I lived in Tampico 20 years until I got a job in Delphi Electronics Corporation in McAllen, Texas.

I am married and have three sons who grew up in a little house in Mercedes, a small town near McAllen. In 1993 my first son got a scholarship to study computer science engineering at the University of Minnesota. One year later my second son did the same, and finally, the last one began his studies here in 2006. My wife also moved to Minnesota to support my sons. I lived in Mercedes until my retirement in March of 2012 when I also came here.

My first son is working at the Supercomputing Institute at the University of Minnesota. The second and last sons live in Amsterdam, working as engineers in data networks for two German companies. Now I am very happy living with my wife and sons.

*Agustin Huerta is originally from Mexico City.*

## My Life Story

*Luis Canar, Minneapolis*

I am Luis Canar and I live in Minneapolis.

I came from Ecuador.

I was born in Cuenca, Ecuador.

We had a difficult life. I was married in New York City. Then we moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I have two daughters.

I will never forget how they have affected me.

The first daughter has Down's Syndrome. She is a special daughter.

She is in the public school in Sanford. She is in 8th Grade.

I hope things are better for her.

We will be a happy family.

*Luis Canar is originally from Cuenca, Ecuador.*

## How and Why I Came to the U.S.

*Badria Ayub, Brooklyn Center*

I'm from Ethiopia. I was born in a small village called Hica. I grew up in the capital city of Ethiopia, which is called Addis Ababa. When I moved to Addis Ababa with my family, I also continued my schooling there. My elementary school was called Heyot Elementary School. I graduated from high school from a school called Shemalise Habite.

My brother and his friends lived in America and used to send money so that my other brother who lived with me could send it safely to their families. Not only did they send money, but people also made phone calls from my house to their families. Of those families, one of them was my husband-to-be's family.

My husband, who lived in the U.S., sent money to his father so he came to my house to get his money and to speak with his son on the phone. After a couple of his father's visits, he then asked my brother if I could marry his son.

My brother who lived with me then asked my other brother who was in America with my future husband what my husband's life looked like in the U.S. The answer was, "He is doing well; he's a good person and a hard worker."

My father-in-law also asked his son the same questions they asked me. His son said, "If you think it's a good marriage, I will accept it because you are my father and you aren't going to choose something bad in my life, so I accept it."

One year later my husband came to Ethiopia. After he came, one month later both sides of our family gave the wedding ceremony for us. We stayed there together for two months after our wedding. Then he went back to America.

Right after, he filed the papers for me to start the process to come to the U.S. Six months later, the U.S. embassy called me for an interview, medical exam and finger prints.

Two months after that, they called and told me that I was going to fly to America. I was shocked, and cried because it was not easy for me to go and leave my family, friends, and my homeland.

*Badria Ayub is originally from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

## How and Why I Came to the U.S.

*Chong Moua, Brooklyn Center*

My name is Chong N. Moua. I lived in Laos near the Mekong River. I lived in Non Hai village. I heard that my father lived in the U.S. My mother told me that it was true. I then asked her why he was there and why I didn't have a father like everyone else? My mother told me a little bit about her story. A civil war had been going on in Laos which was why my father moved to the U.S. When he left, they had just been dating. They hadn't married yet. The reason they couldn't get married was that they lived on opposing sides of the civil war. If they had gotten married, one of them would have been killed. When I heard this I felt sad because I didn't have a father and my life was very challenging. Children in my village were always against me because I didn't have a father.

When I was seven, my mother got married to my stepfather. They never had any children together. One day, she told me the reason that she got married was because she wanted me to have a father and people to respect us.

Later, I remember the exact day that I received an envelope from my father in the U.S. It was a dream come true. I had been waiting so long to hear from him.

Additionally, I was so proud that I now had two families. I hoped to fulfill my dream of going to the U.S. However, my father wasn't a U.S. citizen yet, so he couldn't sponsor me to enter the U.S.

I have known my wife since 2008. She came to visit me in 2009. The first time she met me, we liked each other immediately and she could sponsor me. I came to the U.S. on a perfect summer day on June 8, 2010. I came to get married, to have a better life and because my father lived there. The first time I met my father was when he came to my wedding. I was so happy that I couldn't hold back my tears. That made me very happy and he was so happy, too. We cried with each other for one hour. It made everybody cry with us.

*Chong N. Moua is originally from Laos.*

## **My Favorite Winter Activities**

*Ana Lemus, Brooklyn Center*

My first thing I have to tell you is that I have never experienced winter before. In my country, El Salvador, we only have two seasons, which are the hot season and the rainy season. I have only lived in Minnesota for eight months, but I can't imagine my first winter because I have never seen snow before. My favorite winter activity will be to stay in my house and watch the snow through the window. Snow makes me think about the amazing things that God gives us. Sometimes we are not thankful to him.

I would also like to drink a cup of hot chocolate during winter.

In addition, I like New Year parties because my mom and I cook a lot of food. My family comes to my house and we have a lot of fun together. My cousin brings a delicious chocolate cake and cookies. My mom cooks turkey and other foods from my country. I like it when we stay at home and celebrate the New Year as a family.

*Ana Lemus is originally from El Salvador.*

## **My Name is Ezizti**

*Ezizti Araya, Columbia Heights*

My name is Ezizti Araya. I am from Eritrea.

I came to the United States on September 17, 2008. At that time, I didn't know anything about America. But I arrived at my sister and her husband's house.

I was excited to see my sister and my mother. I didn't have any connection with other people because I didn't speak English. My sister showed me places in Minneapolis, so I am happy for my sister. Now I am happy for Open Door School because they helped me learn speaking and writing, so I appreciate this school.

*Ezizti Araya is originally from Eritrea.*

## **About Hospital**

*Ye Ye San, Saint Paul*

My name is Ye Ye San. I am originally from Burma. My family moved to the Thailand refugee camp for nine years.

One day, my daughter had a big problem. Her name is Soune. She was born in Thailand refugee camp on November 2nd, 2006. Then when she was one month old she was very sick. I was so scared and I took her to the office to see the doctor. The doctor checked her body.

She was crying, I was crying too. Then I held my baby and I helped her eat food. I washed her body and I washed her clothes. I took care of her for 15 days in the hospital. My husband brought food for me. I did not eat their food.

One day the doctor checked her body again. The doctor said your daughter is feeling a little better. I was happy. The next day, the doctor talked to my husband. He said the baby is feeling okay. I was so happy. Then, I carried my baby to my house.

*Ye Ye San is originally from Burma.*

## **The History of My Life**

*Guadalupe Mesa Ibanez, Minneapolis*

I came to the United States in May of 1999. The first months were very difficult for me because I didn't understand English. I didn't know the streets. I also didn't know the states of the United States. In this city God gave me a new baby. Now my husband and I are really happy. My family thanks God. My oldest son is married. He has two boys. Now I have two grandsons. And I tell God thank you so much for my life.

## **My Nephew**

*Shukri Farah, Minneapolis*

My nephew is Hamza. My nephew snores when he is sleeping. One night, he was so tired and he went to bed. He snored like I never heard or seen before. He sounded like an old train honking. Hamza's younger brother Hudafi woke up said, "Where the heck did that sound come from?"

## **My Name is Fadumo Farah**

*Fadumo Farah, Minneapolis*

My name is Fadumo Farah. My country is Somalia. I came here from a refugee camp in Kenya. During my first weeks and days in the U.S. there was snowfall. I couldn't find work for three or four months. I am a mom of five children; they are all grown up.

My first-born is married and she has two children. Therefore I am a grandmother, too.

My second child is a nurse and she makes me very proud. I've lived in this country for several years but still the cold weather is very tough to adjust to. During the winter, waking up in the morning is very challenging sometimes but still I wake up to go to classroom so that I improve my writing and reading skills. During my free time I read and write to improve my language and my children help me when I am stuck with hard vocabulary.

*Fadumo Farah is originally from Somalia.*

## **My Life**

*Felipa Vasquez, Austin*

I was born in Oaxaca twenty-seven years ago. I'm in the middle of seven children. I went to school in my country. I finished elementary school in Oaxaca. I stopped going to school because my parents didn't have money to continue. I started to work so I could help my parents with my sister and brother. The time passed, I got a boyfriend, and he told me his plan to come to U.S. and I thought it was a good idea. We came to the U.S. and started to work and send money to my parents. That made them happy. Now it's been

ten years and I don't see them. When I call them they tell me they miss me a lot and they want me to come back to them.

*Felipa Vasquez is originally from Oaxaca, Mexico.*

## **My Mother**

*Tighisti Berhe, Woodbury*

I remember when I was a young girl. I was very young at that time I was married, just 22 years old. I became pregnant very soon. My husband moved to Germany 3 months after we were married.

My baby boy was born on April 10, 1994 in Asmara, Eritrea. I was happy for my baby, but I cried because my baby needed me so much. My husband was far away, and couldn't help me. I had no experience to take care of a baby, so my mother had to help me very much. Now that my mother is not alive any more, I remember her all the time, and always with my heart.

*Tighisti Berhe is originally from Asmara.*

## **Far Away From Home**

*Hirute Ayana, Woodbury*

I am a young Oromo lady, 5.5 feet tall with short black hair. I was born and raised in a small village in the extreme western part of Ethiopia called Wallega. I am Oromiya and we speak Oromo.

I went to school from 7 years old to the end of 8th grade in my neighborhood school. Then I moved to Addis Ababa with my older sister to study. We moved there to attend better schools. Before I finished high school, I came to America. After nine months, I got married to a man I knew back home. Now I have three children and I am happy with my family.

*Hirute Ayana is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Hidalgo

*Victor Vargas Palma, Austin*

I feel good in Hidalgo, Mexico  
With my grandparents.  
The breeze meets me in the mountains  
All the time  
I feel like a bird  
Free.

I feel good in Hidalgo, Mexico  
I love my grandparents.  
The breeze is magic in the mountains  
Walking along the riverside  
Makes me  
Free.

*Victor Vargas Palma is 32 and originally from Mexico.*

## When the Going Gets Tough

*Abdirizak Wako, Saint Louis Park*

When my father left us, I was five years old. Every single day, I asked my mother, “Where is my father?” She said, “He went to the United States of America, and I don’t know when he will back.” After my father left for the United States of America, this changed my life. For example, my father used to help me out with school fees, but after he left us, my mother had difficulty paying my school fees. However, she did not give up on my education because she was still paying my school fees

When I was eight years old, my mother put me in boarding school. This challenged me because the only days that my family visited was weekends. The boarding school was far from our house, so if I wanted to go home on weekends I had to walk at least one hour to see my family and there was no bus around. After five years my mother came to see me while I was in Boarding School. She told me that my father had sent me a visa to go to the United States of America. I left so excited that day because I had been asking my mother for many years for my father.

After I came to the United States I met my father whom I hadn’t seen for many years in the airport. He took me to his house where located in south

Minneapolis. However, after one month I had difficulty getting used to the weather. I felt homesick. I hated that the weather was so cold that I had to wear a big coat.

Coming to the United States I had not expected there would be many people from different cultures. I felt happy because I saw some people who came from the same country as I. The school that I attended in Somalia was totally different than the school I attended here. In Africa I had to pay the School fees every month, back home my school did not have a whiteboard, We still used blackboard.

Thanks to Halima Abdullahi who is my intelligent mother who didn’t give up on my education. I really encourage people who read my story to always think positively way in your mind whatever is going on and don’t ever lose what you hope for.

*Abdirizak Wako is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Guerrero, Mexico

*Marisol Pineda, Red Wing*

Hi, my name is Marisol Pineda. I’m from Guerrero, Mexico. My country was a beautiful and peaceful place. But around four years ago, everything changed. Some people came from I don’t know where and they started killing people—for what reason, I don’t know. These people came and killed two of my brothers.

One of my brothers was killed in front of his daughter and my sister. My brother, my sister and my niece were in my brother’s store. Then these people came in and killed my brother. After those people killed my brother, they asked my sister and niece who he was. My sister told them who he was and they said to my sister that they had confused him with someone else!

My second brother was with the police when he was killed. I know how innocent people feel when they lose someone from those killings. Now, people from my country have to be in their houses at 6:00 p.m. Otherwise, if someone is outside, those bad people will kill without any reason.

*Marisol Pineda is 28 and originally from Mexico.*

## **My Grandma**

*Joy Beck, Saint Cloud*

My grandma's name was Marie Olson. She lived in Parkers Prairie Minnesota. She was my dad's mom. I used to visit her when I was younger. She made homemade butter. I helped her shake the cream in a jar until it turned to butter. We would eat it on bread and crackers. She made popcorn balls and peanut brittle. She would like to be outdoors fishing, hunting, vegetable gardening and flower gardening. She liked birds and she had bird feeders. She liked to sew, crochet, knit, and quilt. She liked to travel and collect items. She had dogs: yellow labs, black labs and poodles. She lived on a farm. She had cows. They always had fresh milk. My grandma had raspberry and blueberry bushes. I helped her pick berries in the summer and she made jam out of it. She has three sons and two daughters. They all worked on the farm when they were younger. She had 14 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren and 12 great great grandchildren. She died in 2009 at the age of 77.

## **My Mom's Friend**

*Bezaye Wondimu, Cottage Grove*

Friday I was busy. I cooked Ethiopian food because Saturday my mom's friend was coming to my home.

My mom's friend is Lansa. She is married. She has three sons. She is happy. Her first son was born in America. He is seven years old. He is growing up in Ethiopia, because it is hard to be raised in America.

Two more sons are twins. They are two years old; born in America. Her husband and first son are coming for one month.

*Bezaye Wondimu is originally from Ethiopia.*

## **Farm Boy**

*Fadumo Mohamed, Minneapolis*

This boy is a young boy and he was looking for something. He is a strong black boy. He plays sports because he has a good body and his stomach is thin. He has a camel and lives on a farm He has black hair and short hair. He lives in an African country, Somalia. His family, friends, and neighbors were not in the picture. I don't know why.

## **Arizona**

*Chelsea A., Wyoming*

My first trip to Arizona was to go see my grandma and grandpa. I took a plane ride down there with my dad and it was a few days before Thanksgiving. When we got down there it was night time and we still had to rent a car from the airport so when we got a car we still had to drive a long time. When we got to my grandma's and grandpa's house I was so excited to be there. Their house was so pretty, and I really liked the backyard because they have a view of the mountains. It was nice to spend Thanksgiving there. I hope to go back soon.

## **The Day He Came**

*Brad Maki, Nashwauk*

The day he came I couldn't wait  
The day he came I was hit with parental weight  
The day he came it was the look in his eyes  
The day he came made me realize  
The day he came nothing would be the same  
The day he came to the world and carrier of my last name  
The day he came now I know  
The day he came a little piece of started to grow  
The day he came I have help with this sobriety fight  
The day he came now I know  
The day he came I have reason to mature and grow

*Brad Maki is 23 and originally from the U.S.A.*

## **My Family**

*Kartoh, Brooklyn Park*

My story is about my family that is all over the world and in the great United States, too. It is hard when my family is not in the same city, state or country. We are all over the world and this country. We set a special time to meet every year and that is the weekend of July 26. If the 26th comes in the middle of the week, we decide to choose the weekend either before or after. July 26 is an important date to all Liberians. It is our Independence Day. We used that to come together, from Friday through Monday. On that Friday night, the host community will have a welcoming party. At this party, the host will introduce themselves, and then announce the agenda for the weekend. The guest will each in turn introduce themselves and tell where they came from for the gathering. On Saturday, there is a meeting where everyone will tell what their contributions will be for the coming year. On Sunday, we will come together and celebrate with a picnic. We have been doing this for about ten years. This year we are going to Canada, in the Toronto area. We do this to raise money to help other families back home in Liberia because if you forget where you come from, you will not know where you are going.

*Kartoh is originally from Liberia.*

## **My Wonderful Dad**

*Marco Tulio Procopio, Coon Rapids*

I think about my dad all the time. He was born in San Lucas Toliman, Solola, Guatemala in 1930. My dad's name was Marco Tulio Procopio Corzo and he was my best friend, mentor doctor, spiritual counselor and teacher. He was my hero. My dad went to school to be an OB/GYN doctor.

When I was born I was the first child he attended. So he gave me his name. When I was 12 years old my dad and I would go see the coffee plants he owned. He passed away on September 26, 2012. I saw my dad for the last time on June of 1999. I miss him very much, but I know I will see him in eternity with God. Thank you God for my dad. He was a wonderful dad.

*Marco Tulio Procopio is originally from Guatemala.*

## **For Those I Love**

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

I'm from Mogadishu, Somalia. I come from a big family of eight boys and five girls. I am the 11th baby in my family. I was three years old when a civil war started in my country. My family and I migrated to Cairo, Egypt, where we lived for six years. The first three years life was ok. I have the best parents in the world. They fed us first, even though they hadn't any food for days. We spent all the money we had and we went hungry as a result. My 18 year old brother filed lottery forms without telling anybody in the family. One day he got a paper in the mail and the paper indicated he was one of a million who won the lottery. He had an opportunity to choose which country he wanted to go to Canada or the United States. He chose the United States and a year later he came to Nashville, Tennessee. Imagine an 18 year old boy who does not have anybody in the U.S. to take care of him. Fortunately, my brother was a tough boy so we didn't have to worry about him. He started to work to support us; I'm so proud of him. He took on such a big responsibility and he fulfilled what he promised. He filled out paper work for us to come to the United States to join him. Five years later we came to Nashville. I admire him because without him we would not be here. I'm going to thank him and say, "I love you with all my heart."

## **Untitled**

*Ka Gah*

When I was little girl I didn't listen to my mom. But now I have two boys and I really love them. Sometime when I am working hard and was tired, I think back my boys smile and told me what they need. So I felt ever in love with them and won't tired no more and I can work overtime. It's like I can give them all my life. One day ago I didn't understand my mom but now I know mother is good influence for children. And children are important to mom. Keep smile every time. You will have a long life mom said.

## **My Family**

*Anonymous*

I was a little baby and I have my father. He liked me so much. He was so nice to me in my life. Everywhere he'd go, I'd go with him. I had my mom, but she does not like me because everywhere I go with my dad. My little sisters and brothers, my mom did not like us to play together, because my dad chose me to go with him everywhere, only me. I don't know why my mom hated me so much. When I was eight, my daddy died. I stayed by myself. My mom did not like me all my years when my daddy died. I was so sad because my mom did not like me and my sisters did not like me. Sometimes when I think about what happened, I cry. Now I feel fine because I'm not with my mom. Now I live with my kids and my husband. I feel good with them.

## **Skills My Father Taught Me**

*John Kier, Austin*

The skills my father taught me are to work on the farm, watch the cows, and goats. He also taught how to protect the corn from the birds. I stood on the table in the middle of the corn and had a whip to scare the birds away. Now I use those skills here in the United States to help myself in the future. My father was a responsible man.

He worked on the farm because he liked to be his own boss. Every season my father and I grew different crops. When we finished growing the crops we would fish in the river.

Finally working with father taught me to have my own responsibilities. He wanted me to learn it his way.

Even now I use that experience, I'm not good like my father because he worked for more than 62 years. I'm grateful because my father taught me many different things.

*John Kier is originally from Southern Sudan.*

## **My Wonderful Parents**

*Jeimer, Brooklyn Park*

Growing up for me has been easy. My mom and dad always took care of my brothers and me. I never knew hunger nor need for clothing and shelter. My family was poor but thanks to my father's extremely hard work we always had what we needed. I never realized until now how much he and my mother sacrificed, what I admire more about my father however is that ever since he was just a child he had to make decisions only an adult should have to make. His father and mother were not always there for him and he didn't get much advice on what was right and what was wrong, yet he always made the right decision.

My father would hang out around bad influences but never did what they did. He was a man even when he was just a little kid, he worked hard for what he wanted and needed. My father worked 16 hours a day with little to no food and it was hard labor, lifting buckets of cement and bricks.

Meanwhile my mother took care of me and my brother and sisters, while washing clothes by hand in a river. She had to walk a mile with a load of laundry on her head and another on her hand. On a few occasions my mother would not eat so that my brothers and I would not go hungry.

After we got a more financially stable life from my parents working all day at a grocery store; we lived a happier life. My parents bought us nice toys for Christmas and always had enough food to makes us happy. They always gave us wonderful holidays and family time. And all thanks to my parents hard work and dedications to our family.

*Jeimer is 21 years old and originally from Mexico.*

## When I was Little in School

*Fauzia Shawich, Andover*

My name is Fauzia. I was born in Khartum, Sudan. When I was a little girl it was rare for kids to attend school. My father and mother wanted me to get an education to better my life. At the age of seven I was fortunate enough to attend an elementary school. My family didn't have enough money to buy me shoes. I would walk miles barefoot to school. My family had no means of transportation so I had to walk hours with a few friends in order to get to school. I was extremely determined to do well. So I always sat in the front row and made sure I did everything the teacher asked me. I would observe many students getting spanked with a ruler because of not doing homework or acting up. When school ended I would walk back home get something to eat then started on homework. We did not have any electricity in the hut I lived in, so as soon as the wood would stop burning I would have to wait until the next morning to finish it up. My dad loved how determined I was to succeed in life at such a young age.

My father had 23 children including me and 6 wives including my mother. My dad and I had such a strong connection and relationship. He told me how different I was from all of his other children. He would always make sure I was happy. Most Sudanese girls would be married by the age of 12. When I had reached 11 years old my parents had arranged a marriage and husband for me. They really like the man they picked out for me. My father made sure he was top notch because he didn't want anyone hurting his little girl. Many men were known for abusing their wives, so before I got married my father had a long talk with my husband telling him never to put his hand on me or hurt me in any way. Kamal and I got married and are still together today with seven healthy children. God bless me for all this.

*Fauzia Shawich is originally from Sudan.*

## My Parents and I

*Meina Chang, Austin*

For many years, I have confused feelings on my parents. They are most closely related to me, but we have never been very intimate. There always seemed to be an invisible gap between us.

When I was young, the memory of parents was very vague. They worked very hard to support the family. They were not expressive, or maybe they were exhausted; they never expressed their love to me. I even thought only my brother was their child, and I was not, because I never slept on the same bed with my parents as my brother always did. My brother had the chance to learn painting and calligraphy, however, I learned nothing. My parents even never discovered my deep love of music. How I wished they could even asked me about my dream once. All I got was disappointment.

One thing happened in my first year of college, which made me change my mind. At that time, I just entered college and took military training for almost a month. So I could not go home and contact my parents. It was my first time to separate from them for so long. One day, at the entry of my dorm building, I spot a familiar face, and tears were in his eyes! That was my father! My parents missed me and he came to see me! At the moment I saw my father's tears, I realized that they loved me as I loved them, and I couldn't live without them.

After I became a mother myself, I experienced the difficulties of breeding a child and the hardships of life, not to mention the life in the old times. I understood my parents more. They often give me advice on life, work and raising children. Mostly I won't listen, but I know they care about me. They hope me and my family for good. They love me. However, since I don't want my daughter to have the same regrets as I have, I give twice as much love to my daughter. I have realized I should spare more love to my parents. Unfortunately, with my daughter grows up little by little, they are getting old. From now on, I won't waste any chance to express my love to them: I love you mom! I love you dad!

*Meina Chang is 38 years old and originally from China.*

## I Miss My Dad

*Phuong Green, Wyoming*

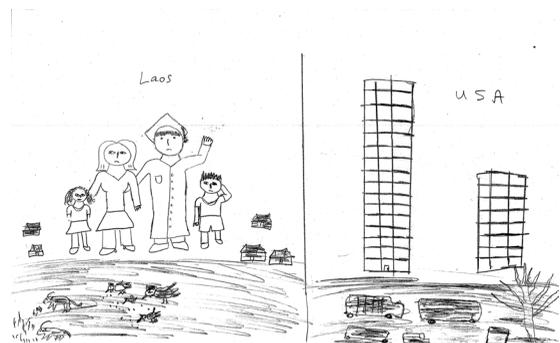
When I was young, I hated my dad because he was a very strict person. I only could watch television on Saturday. I had to do the chores after school and I didn't have much time to play. He taught my siblings and I to be tidy and responsibility people. For example, when I left my hat, shoes and backpack everywhere on the ground when I walked into the house, my dad called me firmly back to put them on the shelf. We had to put things away in the right places, so when we needed to use them we knew where to get them. He taught me that I shouldn't blame others if I did something wrong. He also helped us to be independent. I had to try to do something first before asking for help. He spent time with us if he had the chance. He taught us to love each other and play well together. I also learned to help others if possible. He always corrected me gently when I said things wrong. For all of what he did to help me I never got into any problems when I lived on my own.

When I became an adult I understood that he just wanted us to be strong and independent. I thought to myself that I had to do the best to thanks him for what he did for me. But I didn't have a chance to show him because he died two days before my wedding day, eight years ago. He had a heart problem and he was in the hospital for many of his last days. On the day he died, my dad went back home to prepare for my wedding day. He loved me very much and was so happy that I was marrying a good man. The excitement of seeing all of his relatives on his daughter's wedding day made his heart work hard. He passed away before joining my important day. I miss him very much. The older I am the more I love my dad.

*Phuong Green is 39 years old and originally from Vietnam.*



*Minsoe San, Saint Paul*



*Tousue Yang, Saint Paul*



*Rose Blia Yang, Saint Paul*

## **I Miss my Grandmama**

*Mu Moo, Saint Paul*

When I was a girl I did not understand my grandmama because she always told me to clean the house, do homework, and study for tests, but I didn't like doing those things. I always wanted to play with my friend. She taught me how to cook, but I still don't like to cook, and I don't want to cook. But now I'm a mama, and it is so hard for me with my one kid. I try to make the best for them, but I miss my grandmama because she stayed in Thailand. I think I need her help and advice. I love my grandmama.

## **Happiness**

*Justin Thatcher, Superior, WI*

Happiness is smiling  
Happiness is laughing  
Happiness is fun  
Happiness is good  
Happiness is seeing my family  
Sadness is being away and unable to share these things

## **When I First Fell in Love**

*K.L., Minneapolis*

In 1999, my teacher, Fuost, spoke in English to me. I heard Cheng talk to the teacher through the interpreter in sign language. Cheng went out with friends. I called. He heard me say, "I love you." My boyfriend, Cheng, told the old lady bus driver to kiss me, to say, "Happy Birthday." I was embarrassed that people were looking at me. My boyfriend, Cheng, brought me to his mom's house. My social worker, Dawn Blankenship, called the police to come to his mom's house. They knocked on the bedroom door. My parents said to go home. My parents were cooking for my family and for me. I was not hungry. I didn't want my parents cooking for me. I was broken in heart and cried a little. I listened to Hmong music when I fell asleep in my bedroom. From 2001 to 2002 Cheng wrote a lot of letters to me, but did not tell anyone. Cheng picked me up to go to the restaurant Buffet Moon King. He said, "Happy Birthday" to me. Cheng asked to see me

at my mom's house in 2001. I was 18 years old. Cheng stole me and brought me to his mom's house. Cheng's mom asked to talk to me. If Cheng asked, I should marry him. I did marry Cheng after I was pregnant with a baby. I asked the doctor if the baby was a boy or a girl. The doctor told me it is a baby boy. He was born in 2003 and named Steven Meng Lee. In 2007 I was pregnant again. I asked the doctor if the baby was boy or a girl. The doctor told me it was baby boy. His name is Johnny Jack Lee.

## **Adopting Baby**

*Desiree DeVlaeminck, Gaylord*

I was adopted. My mom was 15 when I was born in Winona. My new mom and dad lived in Gaylord. Mom and dad had three sons named Phill, Chad, and Kyle but no daughter. I went to school, kindergarten and first grade, in Gaylord-Sibley. I went to Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf in Faribault from 3rd to 12th grade. In 12th grade, I joined the Close-Up program and went to Washington DC. Then I was done with school. Then I went to live in Shoreview for one year. I went to school at the Mall of America for six months. I lived in a group home in Gaylord for two years. Then I moved in with my parents in Gaylord.

## **My Home Country**

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

In 1995, I was born in the U.S. I started school. When I was a child, I liked to draw a picture of my country. I was the youngest of our family. When I was three years old, the great civil war had started, and people started fleeing from the country. I remember one day my mother went to work. My brother and sisters were away from home.

## **My Daughter and I**

*Ubah Mohamed, Waite Park*

Hi, my name is Ubah Mohamed. I am from Somalia. I was born in Kismayo. I have been in the U.S.A. for seven years. When I came to the U.S.A. I had four children. Now I have seven children, six boys and one daughter. When I had my sixth son, my daughter said, "Mom this is not fair." She is number three. When I asked, "What is wrong?" she said, "Why don't you give me a sister? We would be two sisters. Now I am alone." After that I told her, "I am not able to do that, it comes from Allah." She said, "It is okay mom."

*Ubah Mohamed is originally from Kismayo, Somalia.*

## **Memories**

*Rosario S., Brooklyn Park*

I am from Peru. Two years ago I returned to my country after 10 years of absence. I never thought I spent so much time to get back to see my mother, my aunt and my family. Especially to see my mom and my aunt Rosita more old ladies, I felt very sad and I was glad to see them again. My trip was very special because we got to celebrate Mother's Day, a gift for them and for me. My sister, my brother-in-law and my nephews were very happy, we gathered the whole family and we had a nice time, danced, and cried. We had lunch in a restaurant near the beach, was returning after 10 years to try Peruvian food. It was a beautiful day because we enjoyed us all again. The following day, I was visited by my cousin Karin. She welcomed me and invited me to a restaurant where I enjoy typical dances from the regions of my country. Something that is never forget to visit my cousins and aunt Zelmira by father's family, some of my cousins did not know and did not see other for over 30 years, it was exciting for me because all I expressed love, affection. Today all of them are in my heart, in my thoughts. We had very wonderful days, after 10 days of visiting. The saddest day came back to U.S.A. hoping to see them again next year. Today I have the memories that we all live, I returned the following year but it was a

a very sad farewell because my aunt Rosita was very ill, she died and I'll never see it because it is in heaven next to God. All my family is very sad today because my aunt Rosita was the mainstay of all of us.

*Rosario Solis is originally from Peru.*

## **I am Lupe**

*Lupe Naranjo, Chandler*

Hi. I am Lupe. I consider myself a simple person. I come from a big, humble, and beautiful family. I am from Tancitaro, Michoacán, from which avocado is abundant. Avocado is a good and delicious fruit. Arriving here in Chandler helped me value many things. I have had very good experiences. When I left my town I didn't know if it was going to be for good or bad. But, thanks to God things have been very good for me. Thanks to God I have a beautiful relationship with Serafin. I have two beautiful kids, Miguel and Fatima. God has also put in my path friends that have stretched to me an unconditional hand. I don't forget the friends I left in Michoacán either. As I have said, I come from a beautiful family I love very much although I don't have their support in my relationship with Serafin. If only my parents would know that Serafin is a good person. It is sad to not have the support of my parents; not hearing their saying "we love you, we wish you the best, daughter, how are you?" Everyday they are in my minds, in my prayers even though I don't have communication with them. Maybe no one has gone through this situation and I don't wish it to anyone.

*Lupe Naranjo is originally from Tancitaro Michoacán.*

# COMING TO AMERICA

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## How and Why I Came to the U.S.A.

*Hien Nguyen, Brooklyn Park*

Everybody has a dream. Some people wish to be rich or to have a good job. Nevertheless, we don't know what our future will bring. When I was young, I didn't think that I would live in the U.S. because it was far away from my country, Vietnam, and a different language is spoken here. However, I met my husband, who lives in the U.S., when he came back to visit my country, Vietnam. One year later, I got married to him. That was the reason I came to the U.S.

Before I came here, I had to think very hard about my new life in the U.S. I thought it would complicate my life because everything would be new and I had to start over with everything. Luckily, my husband was always beside me and supported me. When I got a visa, I still felt nervous; I didn't want to go right away. I lingered to stay with my family for a month because I needed to live with my parents as long as I could. And I needed to prepare my mind, too. I had to think a lot about my father's job, which involved tax work for the city. For some reason and because of politics, he would lose his job if I got married to a Vietnam expatriate.

Anyway, my father didn't mind losing his job because of me. I knew he would be reluctant to quit. He sacrificed his life for me. I have never forgotten about that. Currently, in Vietnam it is ok to marry a Vietnamese expatriate. My father wouldn't lose his job under the current rules.

Luckily, a week before I came to the U.S., my husband went back to Vietnam because he knew I was afraid to go alone. The first day in the U.S. was so new for me and it was incredible. I didn't like my new life much. I felt bad because it was too cold for me (I came in February) and I tried to live with the brutal weather. That is how I thought of it at that time.

So far, so good; everything is running better in my life. Sometimes, I remember my past; this is the particular story of my life. Right now, I am enjoying my life and I am trying to improve it. If I have success in my life, I can control it. That means I will be optimistic and have happiness.

*Hien Nguyen is originally from Vietnam.*



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My name is Hien Nguyen. I am from South Vietnam. I came to the U.S. in 2001. I live in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota with my husband, two daughters and my mother-in-law. I like to cook and garden. Learning English is interesting to me and I am working on getting the GED in my future.

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## How and Why I Came to the U.S.A.

*Svitlana, Brooklyn Park*

My name is Svitlana. I am from Ukraine. My story of coming to the U.S. is very simple. Two years ago I didn't even think about the U.S.A. I worked in a shopping center. I lived together with my sister and took care of her three year-old daughter.

This was in November, 2010. One day, my sister and I went to a café to meet with friends. Our friends came to the café and brought a relative of theirs with them who was visiting from the U.S. That is how I met my future husband. After the café, we talked and I showed him my town. The next evening he came to my home with flowers and proposed to me with a ring. I was shocked. This was very fast for me. I needed time to think. Two days later I gave him my answer. After a year of paperwork, I finally got my visa for the U.S. I came to the U.S. with my fiancé, and a month later we were married.

My life here is very different from the life I had in the Ukraine. In the Ukraine, people live at a fast pace. Everyone is in a rush all the time. Life here is much quieter. I am studying English so I can find a better job. The U.S. is "the land of opportunity," and I like living here together with my husband, but I miss my family in the Ukraine.

## My Story

*Ali Afrah, Beaver Creek*

My name is Afrah. I came from Iraq. When I came to America, I was surprised. Everything is different from my country. I like the people; they are very good people. They have a good heart and they help everyone. They don't care about where people come from, they help everyone. Their religion or their skin color doesn't matter. I didn't know English at first and then I came to school and I learn from English class and how I talk and a little bit about how I write and read. I know a lot of different people from different countries. I learn a few words from Spanish too. And I became a citizen.

## New Experiences

*Paw Deliza, Saint Paul*

I was born on December 24, 1991 in Thailand. I arrived in Minnesota on November 27, 2012. When I arrived in America, everything was different. Nothing is the same in my country. In my country, we didn't see so much snow. We have three seasons. There is hot season, rain season, and cold season. I have never taken a bus but right now, I take a bus every day. When I saw the apartment manager she asked me but I didn't understand her because I can't speak English. This was an experience for me.

In the future, I want to learn more English because I want to get a GED and I want to speak English very well.

*Paw Deliza is originally from Thailand.*

## My Trip from Ethiopia

*Anisa Ahmed, Roseville*

The day I left Ethiopia in June, 2006 was the worst day of my life. I had never dreamed about life without my family. My family and friends came together, and we had a little party. That day was unforgettable. They gave me gifts of jewelry and cultural clothes. We took pictures, ate, and danced. My flight was at nine that night. I had to be at the airport two hours early. When that time arrived, I couldn't control myself. I cried out loud, and all the others cried with me. It was time for me to leave the house where I was born and grew up. Everybody came with me to the airport and wanted to be close to me. That made me cry again. I wished to say I did not want to go, but I had to go to make my life better. I kissed everybody good-bye and went into the airport. The airplane was ready to take off. It was a nightmare to sleep outside of the house for the first time.

I prayed, "Oh, God, would you please help me to see my motherland and my family again." I sat in the airplane, talking to myself, not eating or drinking for fourteen hours.

The plane landed at the Minnesota airport. I did not know where to go and who to talk to. I was

standing in the hallway, and one man came and asked me where I was from. He told me he was from my country, but he had lived in Minnesota for a while. He asked me if I had family here. I have a sister and four cousins, but to make it easy, I told him my sister's name and her husband's name. Because her husband sings in the Oromo community, the man knew him. After that, he took me to the place to get my luggage. He told me I could use his cell phone. After I called my sister, she came with her husband. I felt a little better when I saw them, but my heart was back home with the rest of my family.

Now, life has become easy for me. I can sleep and wake up outside of my house and away from my family in Ethiopia.

*Anisa Ahmed is originally from Ethiopia.*

## **Guns**

*Lan Thai, Shakopee*

I was so happy that I could come to the United States because I heard the United States is a free country. Almost everything surprised me. The biggest surprise is the guns. The United States has stores selling many kinds of guns. People can buy guns and put them in their houses. Some people think guns can protect them. In my country, I never saw guns. Guns are not permitted. I could not have the guns in my house either. So, what do you think? Is it good or bad to have the guns? For me, it is not good to have guns at home, so no one should sell guns. If the government lets people sell the guns, then someone needs to check the background and ask the buyer a few questions. For example, why do you want to buy a gun? And just sell small guns or simple guns.

## **My Story**

*Haweya Jibril, Minneapolis*

I am from Somalia and I have six children. When the war began, my children and I went to Nairobi, Kenya. We arrived in Kenya in July of 1991. We were refugees in Kenya for ten years. My husband died while

we were in Kenya. Then we came to Minneapolis, Minnesota ten years later. I worked in home care in Minneapolis for nine years. Now, I am taking an ELL Class to get better at my English.

## **My Story**

*Rabi Ibrahim, Brooklyn Park*

My name is Rabi. I am three children's father. I have two boys and one girl. I'm from east Africa and came to the United States in 1994, and I lived in Orange County in California for three months. After that, I moved to Minnesota with my family. After I moved to Minnesota, I found a job. My favorite things about Minnesota are I'm working and I help my family. Also I would like to improve my English. But it's not easy to improve English because I'm a full time worker, and I help my children after school and take them different places. I'm very busy with them but I will try to complete my GED program.

## **Coming to the U.S.**

*Maria T., Coon Rapids*

I came to the U.S. on June 13, 2011 from Moldova. Moldova is a small and beautiful country. The reason I came here is because work and life were difficult. I came here by myself. My brother was waiting for me here. My trip was 24 hours. I changed airplanes. First I went to New York. I waited for four hours for my next flight. I brought medicine, documents, clothes and gifts with me. I planned to come to the United States for two years. On my first day in the U.S., I slept all day. The best thing about living here is safety. The worst thing about living here is I can't have the same job as the training I finished in my country. I am homesick for my friend, brother, and relatives in my native country. I don't miss bad work or a bad salary because my government doesn't give a place for work in my country. I wouldn't like to go back to my country and live there. I hope I will have a good life and a good job.

*Maria T. is 24 years old and is originally from Moldova*

## **Winters in Minnesota**

*Marcia Leon-Baqueriza, Saint Michael*

“To Minnesota?”

“Yes, we are.”

That was the question and the answer when we said we were moving to live here.

“But, why over there? Aren’t the winters very cold?”

Yes, we’d heard it gets very cold, but we have family who like it, I explained.

It was summer time when my husband and I arrived here. It was sunny each and every day. Green fields everywhere. The weather was perfect. Soon it was fall, and the days were shorter and shorter and the cold nights longer and longer, welcoming the winter season.

As we started our regular activities like going to school and finding a job, we needed to buy a car. We looked in the paper and found what we thought was a “good deal.” Our family gave us a hard time when they knew that our good deal was not such a good deal. We had bought a Plymouth convertible! Soon we realized our mistake.

Every morning we had trouble starting the car, keeping it running, and keeping us warm inside the car. We even had to take some throws with us to be more comfortable. That was our first winter in Minnesota.

By the next winter, we had learned many things. We could not miss watching the weather broadcast every night. We knew how to dress accordingly and gave ourselves extra time to get places. A winter car tune-up was also important. The following winters were a bit better. By then we knew what it was all about.

I come from Ecuador where the weather is warm and nice. From my personal experience, I can say that winters are very cold in Minnesota, but the people are warm and friendly all year round.

## **My Life**

*Ibado Jama, Minneapolis*

I am a woman. I was born in Somalia, and I grew up in Somalia. I have five children. When my country was destroyed I moved to Kenya. I left from Somalia in 1991. I moved to Kenya and I stayed in Kenya ten years. Then I left to America, and I came to America on June 6, 2000. When I came they helped my family and me. My children got education in school and they help me with everything like MFIP.

## **My Experience Here**

*Francelia Lopez, Minneapolis*

I am from Mexico. My family came to the United States because the economy in Mexico is not good. There are no jobs in Mexico. That’s why I came to earn money. I came to the United States in June 1997. My family and I live in Minnesota. We are happy here. I like living in this country because I have better opportunities, more schools, and good jobs. I am happy to live here.

*Francelia Lopez is originally from Mexico.*

## **My Trip to America**

*Basra Hassan, Waite Park*

One thing that happened in my life is my trip to America. It was the first time I got on an airplane. I came here with my oldest son. In the beginning I was nervous, but I got over my fear because I was going to live a new better life. I got on the plane in Sana’a Yemen and we transited in London for one night. Then we got back on to the plane and we landed in Atlanta, Georgia. After that we went on Delta Airlines and finally landed in Minneapolis/Saint Paul International Airport. After that we met up with my husband and have lived here since.

## **My Life**

*Tara Chapagai, Minneapolis*

I was born in Bhutan and moved to Nepal. We lived in Nepal for twenty years. In my family there is a father, mother, husband, and two sisters, and they all live in Minneapolis. We moved to the U.S. on February 16, 2012, and at first we didn't know any rules or regulations of the United States. Today we know a little better. My interests are playing soccer and doing exercises daily by walking. In this time because there is lot of snow and ice, we can't run fast. Many people have broken arms and legs when they were walking. I am lucky so far.

In the United States my life is good because my husband and I are working and getting good knowledge from school. When I have all those things I will get a good job. And in the future we will all return to our own country, Nepal, and live a happy life.

*Tara Chapagai is originally from Bhutan.*

## **My First Day in the U.S.**

*Vanh Xay Her, Saint Paul*

The first day I came to the U.S. I was very surprised because I saw many people from different countries that spoke different languages. I heard all the people talking in English, but I didn't hear my native language Hmong, nor Lao or Thai.

When I sat by the table and looked around the airport, I was surprised and thought to myself, "How can they build this building?" But I knew that in the U.S. they have more education and more technology.

When I was on the plane, I didn't talk to other people except my family. They gave me some food to eat. I had never seen it before, but it tasted good. After that they gave me a snack of peanuts and water. The peanuts reminded me of home. Suddenly tears started running down my face because I missed my brothers, sister, friends, and my old country.

Five months later I felt better and everything was normal for me. Now I live in Minnesota. I love all the seasons in the U.S.

## **My First Day in the U.S.**

*Va Lee, Saint Paul*

I saw beautiful houses and different people. I saw a black person and he was very tall.

I heard car sounds and different languages.

I tasted different kinds of fish soup and American sausages.

I felt very happy, but I felt scared too because I didn't know how to speak English.

I smelled coffee and it gave me a headache.

## **My First Day in the U.S.**

*Amphone Thor, Saint Paul*

I saw many cars, my family, and many people.

I heard English, many people talking different languages, and police sirens.

I tasted hamburger, sandwich, and an orange.

I felt tired, happy, and cold.

I smelled food, coffee, and flowers.

## **My First Day in the U.S.**

*Mai Ger Moua, Saint Paul*

I saw many people, cars, and flowers.

I heard many people talking a different languages and I heard police sirens.

I tasted an orange and I drank coffee.

I felt happy, tired, and scared.

I smelled food, flowers, and coffee.

## **My Life**

*Erika Cardenas, Burnsville*

I am from Peru, and I live with my parents. I have one brother and one sister. My brother is eight years old and my sister is ten years old. I have family in Mexico, and I lived there for two years. After that I moved here because I have all my family living here now. I don't have family in Peru anymore. I like to live here because my life is different than Mexico and Peru. It is better because I have my family and I have a lot friends. I like the country.

*Erika Cardenas is originally from Peru.*

## **My Story in Cambodia**

*Pharo Dak, Apple Valley*

My name is Pharo Dak. I arrived in Minnesota from Cambodia on September 17, 2012. Cambodia is a small country, but it's a beautiful natural country. There are many interesting natural places for visitors like Angkor Temple, Bousrar Waterfall, Sihanouk Ville Beach and Rabbit Island. Even though it's a beautiful country, life there is not comfortable.

I have lived there for 30 years. After I graduated high school, my family had no money to send me to college. I needed to work hard to support myself and I wanted to save some money to go to the university. It is not easy to find a job in Cambodia. I changed jobs often before I got the last job because I didn't have skills that the job market required. After I had some money, I decided to study at the University of Puthysastra. Accounting is not my favorite subject, but many jobs required it. I couldn't choose the major I wanted because it's difficult to find a job. The first year I went to college, I still remember that I studied too hard because accounting was terrible for me. I spent too much time trying to finish it. Finally, I graduated from University of Puthysastra with a degree in accounting and I got a good job. However, I still had problems with health care, safety and security there. Crime occurs everyday and I could not find a good doctor. My life was in danger because of crime. That's why I agreed with my husband's idea to immigrate to Minnesota. Since I have been here, I feel more comfortable than in my country.

*Pharo Dak is originally from Cambodia.*

## **Choice**

*Rodolfo Catano, Minneapolis*

Hello, my name is Rodolfo. I am from Mexico. I came in this country in 2008. I came because in Mexico there is a lot a corruption and poverty. I like this country because there are a lot of opportunities. In USA my life changed. I am in school and my family has a better life.

*Rodolfo Catano is originally from Mexico.*

## **My Name is Mu Ber**

*Mu Ber, Worthington*

My name is Mu Ber. I am from Thailand. I was a student in Thailand. I had a job for a few months before I arrived in the United States. I worked with my older brother and another friend. We were very happy in Thailand. I arrived in the United States on December 14, 2011. I'm happy to be in the United States. I like the snow, but I don't want to go outside because it's too cold. When I came to the United States, I didn't know how to cook or how to lock the door, but now I can do it. I don't have a job either. I just come to school and learn more English. I am happy in the United States.

*Mu Ber is originally from Thailand.*

## **My Life in Minnesota**

*Gilda Jovel, Eagan*

I came to Minnesota in July 2006. Today, six years later, I'm thinking how my life has changed; before I came here I was managing a clinical laboratory and I had to drive almost 70 miles to go to and from my job. Now I'm living with my son, Rafael, Sarah Rafael's wife, and the baby girl Giana Marie, she is one year old and is the house's princess.

Three years ago, in 2009 I began to feel very sick, and nobody could tell me what was going on with me. At last, a doctor sent me for a blood test, and the blood values were so bad she sent me to the hospital as soon as possible. After many tests I knew that my problem was with my kidneys. I was so worried about the costs of my treatment, but a Social Worker from the hospital was my guide in this adventure.

Now in December 2012 I say, "GOD BLESS AMERICA" because America gave me a treatment so I could be a survivor in my beautiful Minnesota.

*Gilda Jovel is originally from El Salvador.*

## **My Life**

*Olga Escobar, Apple Valley*

I am from El Salvador in Central America. My country has tropical weather. I came from El Salvador to Minnesota in January. When I arrived to the Minneapolis airport, my family was there for me. I saw they used rare clothes like big boots, gloves, hats and coats, and I thought “ugly clothes that my family is wearing.” I know Minnesota has cold weather in winter, but I did not have an idea of how cold it is. I came wearing elegant high heel shoes, and the problem was when I got out of the car I fell in the snow. Then I could understand why they wore clothes very different from our country. Now I do not feel weird wearing such ugly clothes.

*Olga Escobar is originally from El Salvador.*

## **My Life in Two Cities**

*Nhung Nguyen, Minneapolis*

I grew up in Vinh Long, Vietnam, but now I live in a big city in the U.S. Vinh Long is smaller than Minneapolis, where I live now. Transportation is better here than in Vinh Long: we have buses, taxis, and light rail. Traffic is much heavier in Vinh Long, where motorcycles are the usual transport.

My life is different here in Minneapolis. In Vinh Long I lived with my family of five members. Here I live with my husband and our two children, his parents, and brother. The economy is stronger in the U.S. so I have a job, and I work hard. I do manicures and pedicures ten hours a day, six days a week.

Sometimes I feel homesick for my country. The weather here is dangerous in winter when I drive. The people seem polite, but are not friendly. My home city is crowded and noisy, but the people are very friendly.

## **A New Life**

*Phallin Keo, New Hope*

In 2005, when I was 23 years old, I wanted to leave Cambodia and start a new life in the USA, because I wanted to help my family and have a better life for myself. I didn't know how to use the computer, but my friend helped me. She taught me how to use the Internet and I met my husband online. He was from Minnesota and we talked on the Internet for one year by writing to each other.

In 2006, he asked me to marry him. I was very excited and happy at the same time. Because I didn't have any relatives in the USA, I was worried, but I still said yes to him. One week later, he flew from Minnesota to Cambodia to marry me on July 14. After we were married for a week he flew back to the USA.

After one year, in 2007, I came to Minnesota. When I arrived I was very happy that my dream had come true, and I realized there could be a lot of problems, too. The biggest problems were the language, not having family or friends, and the weather. The most important problem for me is still talking to people in public. My husband has helped my family in Cambodia a lot by sending them money to buy a new house.

Now I have been living in Minnesota for more than five years. I have two jobs: as a personal care assistant (PCA) and as a busser in a Thai restaurant. In the future I hope I can speak English better and get a better job.

## Part of My Life

*Rosa Anglada, Shakopee*

My name is Rosa. I am from México. I lived there for 20 years, but I moved to California in the United States in November of 2001 to be with my brother. My first month was hard because the United States is so different. My first year was very difficult because I never worked and I didn't speak English. After some months, I traveled to Minnesota and this state is very cold. I saw snow for the first time in my life. In this country I am learning so many things and after some years we are happy. I had my own family and everything changed for me. When I had my first son I was the happiest woman on earth! Now I have three children, Alexander, Alan, and Axel, and a wonderful and understanding husband. Thanks to his advice I am learning more English. Sometimes I miss my mother, father, and especially my sisters and brothers, the culture, holidays, Christmas, food, etc. But now my life feels complete. I want to improve myself every day. And at least I can move around by myself and help my children with homework.

*Rosa Anglada is originally from Mexico.*

## An Unforgettable Friend

*Abdi Omar, Minneapolis*

My name is Abdi Omar. I came from Africa four years ago. When I came to the airport in Washington D.C., I stayed there at least three hours. After that, my second trip was to the Saint Paul airport. After a couple of minutes I went to Saint Cloud. My journey was really very important because I am happy to live with my family. I did not see them for a long time. After that I searched for a job, and after three months I got a job. I started my first job on November 28, 2008. My second goal was to go to school. I started at McKinley Adult School. Now I am better and happier.

## My Life in the United States

*Sophorn Meas, Shakopee*

My name is Sophorn. I come from Cambodia. I came to the United States just two years ago. When I just came here it was so hard for me because I couldn't speak English very well. So my sister told me to go to school to learn English. After three months I could speak a little more English.

I never saw snow until I came to Minnesota. I really love snow! When the snow comes down it so beautiful at night and everything changes to white.

In October I started my first job. I was so nervous because I never worked before in my country, but I'm so happy to make my own money. I can buy things by myself. Now I'm so happy to live in the United States and I really love Minnesota!

*Sophorn Meas is originally from Cambodia.*

## How and Why I Came to the U.S.

*Luis Roman, New Hope*

My name is Luis. I am from a small town named Puerto Barrios, which is located on the west coast of Guatemala. I grew up next to the ocean with my brothers and friends.

When I was in school, my buddies always talked about immigrating to the U.S., but it wasn't a part of my dreams. It was not until I finished high school and started college that I realized how hard it was going to be to find a job in Guatemala. If you don't have connections like friends or relatives in companies or in government, it is practically impossible to get a job.

So, I desired to move on and look for a new start in the U.S. When I arrived in Minnesota, it was wintertime. My brother had told me to get myself a thick coat, which I had forgotten. I had never thought the winter was going to be so rough. This was twelve years ago. Now I am contemplating my next period in my life.

*Luis Roman is originally from Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.*

## **Coming to the U.S.A.**

*Ada Cabrera, Shakopee*

My name is Ada. I came from Honduras to Houston, Texas in the United States in March of 1988. I came here for a better life and to help my parents. I didn't have the opportunity to go to school. I was 20 years old. I got married to a man from my country, but I met him in Texas in June of 1990. Three years later we had twin boys in 1993. One year later we had a baby girl. In October of 1994, we moved to Chaska, Minnesota because my sister was living there. She found a better job for my husband, so we decided to move there. Three years later we had another girl in 1998. We always work together because I don't like to drive. Now we live in Shakopee, Minnesota and have worked in a great company for almost 13 years. We work five days a week, five minutes from my house. In the future we are planning to move to Chattanooga, Tennessee because my daughter is in college there and we want to be close to her. Otherwise we like Minnesota. Now I'm 44 years old and I'm learning English, and I think it's never too late to learn.

*Ada Cabrera is 44 years old and is originally from Honduras.*

## **My First Month in U.S.A.**

*Neyla Rodriguez, Waite Park*

When I arrived in the United States, I was very sad because I left my family. I was very scared because I did not know English. The weather was terrible. It was very cold and grey. It was going to be the first time in another country with different traditions. There are four seasons here that aren't in my country. In Venezuela there are two seasons, summer and spring. The food is very good. It's the same as my country.

Now I study English. I feel much better with the language. I like this country. The people are very friendly. Every week I call my family on the phone or Skype.

*Neyla Rodriguez is originally from Venezuela.*

## **My Life in the U.S.A.**

*Silvia Martinez, Shakopee*

My name is Silvia. I'm from Honduras. I lived there for 34 years. I came to Texas in 1990. I came from Texas to Minnesota in 1994. In the U.S.A. I've had bad and good experiences. Everything is really different: the people, work, weather, language, and culture. I have had bad experiences. One day I felt embarrassed because in my first job, the supervisor told me something in English, but I didn't understand anything. I had been in the U.S.A. for three days. I told her, "Please repeat what you just said." She said, "You came to my country, you need to speak English well."

Now I have a permit to work and live here. I hope someday to visit my country. I miss my friends, brothers, niece, and nephews. I wish to see them. I'm happy that I'm learning English and have my job. I'm healthy and my family is too. My daughter Astrid is studying at I.T.T. college. I hope to get my G.E.D. diploma. I need to have a better future for myself, my grandson, and my two granddaughters Suany and Elisua.

*Silvia Martinez is originally from Honduras*

## **Untitled**

*Dyna Sok, Waite Park*

Well, winter has come again. I know how cold December is in Minnesota. It is colder than ever this year. Yesterday it was five below zero. The snow was coming down fast, and the wind was blowing hard. By evening the roads were covered with ice and snow. It was not a good time to be driving, but I was coming home from my son's house. I followed the lights of the car ahead of me. Then I stopped to clean the snow off my windows. While I was on the side of the road a black car passed me. It was going fast. I was very scared! Finally I got home safely.

## **My Special Memories**

*Maria Arevalo Orosz, Shakopee*

My name is Maria Arevalo Orosz. I came from Bogota, Colombia, South America. As a baby my parents left me in South America to be raised by my grandparents. I remember not having a childhood. By the time I was four years of age I was cooking, washing clothes by hand, helping my grandparents with all the chores. We never had our own home. We were always moving, so I was always scared not knowing where we were going to sleep next. Soon I received wonderful news from my mother that soon I was to move to the U.S.A. I sure was very excited! I came in April of 1976, I was almost 15 years old. When I arrived in Minnesota there was a bad storm. It had snowed a lot and I was scared to get off the airplane. I was afraid I'd fall in the snow. My mom sent me to Edina High School to get my high school diploma. I was very excited to attend my new school to meet my new teachers and make new friends. I had wonderful teachers. My favorite teacher was Miss Shuslanger, my English teacher. While I attended school I worked in a nursing home as a waitress and also cleaned apartments for the elderly. I love working with old people so this is why I fell in love with the elderly. It reminded me of my grandparents. I really miss them. I am very happy to be here to have such a wonderful opportunity to grow in so many ways. I lived in Edina, Bloomington, and now live permanently in Shakopee with my three beautiful children and husband. My children were all born in Minnesota. The happiest times in my life here were the day I married and the days my children were born!

*Maria Arevalo Orosz is originally from Colombia.*

## **My Trip in U.S.A.**

*Samsam Yussuf, Waite Park*

My trip when I came to the United States started in Djibouti in East Africa. It was June, 2003. That day was a beautiful day and also hot, but I was excited. I woke up early to be ready for my journey to America. I began to tidy my clothes in my bags. After that I went to the airport. I said goodbye to my relatives and my relatives cried, and I cried too. After that one-hour we flew to the United States. It was a long trip and took two days. I was so exhausted when I came to California. I came into my brother's house. I hadn't seen him for a long time. We were so interested to see each other. We shared a long story about our family all night. I enjoy the life I live now. It was great and difficult. I went to start school and took the bus every day. But it was boring because I missed my family and my friends too. Everything was new to me. California was so beautiful. The sun was shining and the ground was covered with flowers and also it had tall beautiful buildings. After that I moved to Atlanta. I loved it because I worked in Atlanta. Also, I had wonderful friends. Later I moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin. It was February 2008. It was wintertime. I didn't see snow before and the temperature got colder. But I moved to Saint Cloud because my husband lived there. I like Saint Cloud because I have a good teacher and nice friends too. Saint Cloud is a nice place to live.

*Samsam Yussuf is originally from Djibouti in East Africa.*

## **My Life**

*Boukpata Balaki, Saint Paul*

My name is Boukpata Balaki. I am from Togo. It is a small country. I have one child who is a boy. When I came to the United States for the first time, I saw many different things. The United States is broad and beautiful; the people have good work. I felt very bad because I didn't understand English. If the people talked to me, I couldn't talk. I was not happy. Now I have the opportunity to come to school. I learn, read, listen, and write. After I finish, I will have a good job.

*Boukpata Balaki is originally from Togo.*

## How and Why I Came to the U.S.

*Chompheng Yang, Brooklyn Center*

Before I met my wonderful husband-to-be, I had never thought that I would come to America. All I knew is that all of my family and relatives lived in Laos. I didn't know anybody who lived in America nor did I have a connection to anybody here. I didn't know that my life would totally change the second I met my husband, who had traveled a long distance across the ocean.

One day, my husband came to my hometown to visit his cousin who lived very close to me. His cousin's family organized a party to welcome him. His cousin introduced me to him in Hmong, but I could not understand Hmong; I only spoke Lao. Unfortunately, he also couldn't communicate with me because he didn't know much Lao. However, he had another cousin who could speak Lao well, who then became a translator for him. That is how we could communicate with each other. I invited him to come to my house.

After I spent some time with him, I started thinking, "Uh, maybe I will get married to this man." However, I wasn't sure how I could live far away from my parents whom I had always loved and cared so much about. When he proposed marriage to me, I consented and said yes. Now that I got engaged to him, I knew that I really was going to go to America. When I thought about traveling to America, I was shocked. The airplane ride would take many hours; I was very worried about it, but I knew my husband would always be beside me, so that helped ease the frightful feelings I had.

A few days after I got engaged to my husband, I had to prepare for getting my passport so that I could travel to Thailand for a physical examination and to get immunizations, things required by the U.S. consulate before a visitor visa can be issued. Luckily, the results of my health check came out well. When I went to interview for my visa at the American consulate, they asked me a few questions and I was able to pass the interview to obtain my visa. I felt relieved and happy. I then made an arrangement with my husband to buy a plane ticket for me to come to the America.

*Chompheng Yang is originally from Laos.*

## My Life

*Mirian Carpio, Minneapolis*

My name is Mirian. I was born in Cuenca, Ecuador. I grew up with my grandparents. I had a lot of friends and animals. I had a dog and a cat. My grandparents had a cow. I liked to play with my sister and brother.

When I came to the United States I was both happy and sad. Happy because I came to meet with my parents and sad because I left my grandparents in Ecuador, but we call them twice a month. Right now I am working and I am studying English.

I am living in Minneapolis. I have more friends. In summer I like to go to the lake to swim, and I like to go to play with my daughter. I miss my country, but I am very happy living in Minneapolis because we have more opportunities to learn English. This city is a very nice place to live with my family.

*Mirian Carpio is originally from Ecuador.*

## Snow

*Mariam Abdullahi, Minneapolis*

The first time I came to the United States it was September 29, 2010. It was fall. All the leaves were beautiful. They had different colors. After one month all the leaves fell down. Day after day the weather was getting colder and colder. I'm from Somalia where the sun shines every day and there is beautiful weather. I never saw winter until I came to Minnesota and then it started snowing every day. One morning my nephew came to my bed and woke me up to show me the white snow on the ground. It was the worst snow Minnesota got in a while. My brother Mohamed and I went to the Somali mall the first time I walked in the snow. Anytime I tried to walk I fell down. I couldn't control my feet. I thought about how I couldn't get up with all the people looking at me. I felt full of shame.

*Mariam Abdullahi is originally from Somalia.*

## **My Background**

*Asad Mohamed, Minneapolis*

I was born in Kismayo, southern Somalia, in 1989. Two years later the civil war of Somalia exploded in 1991, and I fled Kismayo and went to the middle regions of Somalia. My family lived in the Mudug region (Galdogob) and I was brought up there and went to the Galdogob Elementary School.

Then, I went to Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia in 2001, to continue to study. I had to take four years of intermediate school in the Yaqshid district of northern Mogadishu. In 2005 I began high school at the Jabir ibn Hayyan school. I passed all my exams with an average of 85%, and I graduated in 2009.

After that I was confused by life in Mogadishu because of the war and explosions in the city. Most people fled the capital city of Mogadishu. I was thinking of university, but I didn't have financial aid, so I had nothing to do.

After that, I got a visa from Jordan (Urdun) to start my studies. Unfortunately when I arrived in Amman, Jordan, I learned that the private universities are very expensive, and I didn't have a scholarship. So I stopped thinking of education, and I registered at the UNHCR office in Amman, and they recognized me as a refugee.

In September 2012, I got married. Then in November, I came to the U.S., and now I am so happy here in Minnesota.

Eventually, I went to the International Institute of Minnesota, where I study English. We study in two different ESL classes. I have two English classes with my teachers, John and Christine.

*Asad Mohamed is originally from Kismayo, Somalia.*

## **My Name is Nuru**

*Nuru Delelegn, Minneapolis*

My name is Nuru Delelegn. I am from Ethiopia (Africa). When I arrived in Minneapolis I saw a lot of snow on the ground. I was wondering so much about this very white snow. Then just my feeling was to go back home. But at that time the political situation was very bad. But when I started to stay here, I loved Minneapolis so much. And I learned more about snow. And now I am learning in Nikki's English language class.

*Nuru Delelegn is originally from Ethiopia.*

## **My Name is Habout Akway**

*Habout Akway, Minneapolis*

My name is Habout Akway.

The first time I came to the United States, it was in November, a cold season. During that time, I didn't have a jacket. Then I felt cold at the airport in New York. During that time I was going to Fargo, North Dakota. Then I felt freezing in my body and I met with a social worker at the airport in Fargo, North Dakota. Then I was happy. I received everything at the airport in Fargo, North Dakota: snow shoes, gloves, jacket, everything for winter.

## **The Biggest Thing That Surprised Me**

*Farhiyo Shirelle, Minneapolis*

When I came to the United States of America, it was September. The first state I came to was Minnesota. I was living in Minnesota for two months. One morning I woke up at six o'clock then went to pray. After prayer I looked out the window. I saw the snow. It looked like sugar. I was amazed and asked, "What is that?" But nobody answered my question because everyone was still asleep. I looked out another window, it was the same. Finally, thirty minutes later, my sister-in-law woke up and I said, "What is this? Where does it come from?" Then she explained it to me.

## **My Family Stays Here**

*Htoo Wah, Saint Paul*

My name is Htoo Wah. I lived in Myanmar. I moved to Thailand for 18 years. I came to the U.S.A. in June of 2012. I would like to share about my family. I got married in 2012. I have three children. I lived in a refugee camp for about 18 years.

I am happy to come to the U.S.A. I get to go to school with my wife. My child goes to school. He is very happy. I am starting new learning. I come to school Monday through Friday. Sometimes I go to an appointment. School here is different than in Myanmar. Here there is very good English.

I have human rights here. In Myanmar, there is less human rights than in the U.S.A. Thank you to the U.S.A. president for welcoming me. I have freedom. I am happy because I come to school. I am enjoying learning English. My family enjoys the U.S.A. Thank you to the U.S.A president because they welcome my family in this country. Thank you to my teacher for teaching me.

*Htoo Wah is originally from Myanmar.*

## **A Travel to U.S.A**

*Maung Swe, Saint Paul*

My name is Maung Swe. I was born in the Karen state in Myanmar. My family was farmers.

I came to the U.S.A. in August of 2011. I want to tell you about my travel. I am married. I have three children. When I took a plane with my family to come to the U.S.A., this was my first time flying on a plane. I felt surprised because my family had never taken a plane. I saw my son was very happy to take a plane. My son wanted to drink orange juice. I didn't speak English. I didn't know what to call the orange juice. I talked to the workers on the plane. They did not understand me. I showed it with actions. They brought water for me. One day I hope I will speak English.

*Maung Swe is originally from Myanmar.*

## **A New Place**

*Pai Po, Saint Paul*

My name is Pai Po. I am originally from Burma. I have lived in three countries: Burma, Thailand and the United States. I like the United States because there are many jobs and the education is very good. In the United States they have some Karen foods. I went to the hospital. I didn't give money. In the United States we have a Karen New Year. In the United States we have freedom. I stay in United States. I have been studying English since January 5. In the United States I see many people. They speak different languages.

I am happy to write a story about new place in United States. I am happy in the United States.

*Pai Po is originally from Burma.*

## **Coming to the U.S.**

*Michael Teslaru, Coon Rapids*

I came to the U.S. in August of 2011 from Moldova. Moldova is a small country. I came here because life was hard. I hope here life will be better. I came here with my family. My wife and child were happy to come here. My trip was 12 hours from Moldova to New York. Then I flew to Minneapolis. I brought with me medicine, pots, and my Bible. I planned to come to the United States. On my first day in the U.S., I felt happy and tired. On my first day in the U.S., I went to a Chinese restaurant. The best thing about living here is safety. The worst thing about living here is that there are too many wooden houses. I am homesick for nothing because I like my life here. I don't miss the politics in my native country. I wouldn't like to go back to my country and live there. I like my new life in the United States because I have more opportunities.

*Michael Teslaru is 27 years old and originally from Moldova.*

## Things That I Love in Minnesota

*Gyohee Jin, Falcon Heights*

My name is Gyohee Jin. I had been living in Seoul, South Korea. I was born and raised in Seoul. I have five family members including me. They are my husband, daughter, son and I. My family and I came to Minnesota on July 26, 2012. I live in Saint Paul now. I came here because my husband came here to study Law at the University of Minnesota, and my children are going to Brimhall Elementary School. My daughter is in fifth grade and my son is in fourth grade. Meanwhile I am going to Minnesota Literacy Council Learning Center to learn English.

I like Minnesota in many aspects. I love Minnesota's summer and fall because my laundry dries very well. Not only that, but the sky is so blue and clear without clouds. Secondly, I am so happy to have one of the excellent libraries near my home. The library, Saint Anthony Park Library, has so many books that my children are able to read a lot of books. And my children and I may borrow books without any limitation on quantity and personal qualification. Lastly, I love the Minnesota Literacy Center so much because of its teachers Nikki, Sheri, Ritalee, and volunteer teachers. Thanks to them, I became familiar with English and my English proficiency has improved. Thank you very much, Nikki.

*Gyohee Jin is originally from Seoul, South Korea.*

### Minnesota

*Mi Say, Saint Paul*

Today is cloudy.  
I like Minnesota.  
I am from Burma.  
I like fall.  
I don't like winter.

### Minnesota

*Moo Ra Paw, Saint Paul*

Today is cloudy.  
I like Minnesota.  
I am from Burma.  
I like summer.  
I don't like winter.

## My Life Story

*Elizabeth Tot, Waite Park*

My name is Nyaret, which means a child without a mom. When I was born, on the day of my birth, a tragedy happened. My mother was having a hard time giving birth to me. As soon as I was delivered, my mom passed away. My aunt took care of me about three years. I was not told this story until I was a teenager. As I was growing up I thought my step mother was my biological mother. At age ten, before I was even told the story of my mother's death, I had a good time because I didn't know anything of my mom.

One day my dad asked me about what I wanted to do when I am an adult. I said I am to be a pastor. He said you picked a good job. At the age of 18 my father arranged my husband and I married David Gach who was a soldier. David and I had six beautiful children. David didn't stay home much because he was always traveling for war.

In 2004 my children and I moved to Kenya. My husband didn't come with us because of his job. When I stayed in Kenya about 4 years I got my dream from when I was ten years old. I became a pastor on January 2, 2007.

When I came to America in 2007 I was very scared. The first thing I saw was snow. It was very difficult for me. Also, American food was different. The first time I ate it I got pain in my stomach. I was scared of trucks. When I was driving with someone I thought it would fall on our car. This is my story.

## My Two Lives

*Fausto Loja, Minneapolis*

I am Fausto from Cuenca, Ecuador, where I used to live. My life was good when I was a teenager. I can say that my country is beautiful. Many people have been talking about my country, they say that it is good to travel there because it's quiet and nice. They can visit all of the country just in one week. They can get delicious food, and it's not too expensive.

I lived in my mother's house with my three sisters and two brothers. I had fun on weekends because I had a music band with my brothers. My sister had a

dance band group and sometimes I danced with them. Unfortunately, the economy was terrible.

I decided to come to United States to find opportunity. When I arrived here, I observed everything new and different. I started to see many people from the other countries. I never felt too cold in winter like here, but I liked the grand variety food that I have eaten, I'm very grateful for this country because I have learned many things and I still finding new opportunities.

After all, I'm very happy with my new life in United States. It does not mean that I don't miss my country. I miss my family, friends, culture, weather, nature, mountains, rivers, forest, and my home. I know that if I go back to Ecuador, I will miss everything that I found here.

## **Moving to Minnesota**

*G. Gonzalez Herrera, Minneapolis*

I am from Mexico and I was 18 years old when I moved to Minnesota. Back then, I had mixed feelings at first about this new place. I didn't know the language, the weather was very different and was extremely cold. When I saw the snow, I was excited to touch it. My father was the first person in our family who moved to the U.S. He helped me all the time with looking for work, supporting me in my day-to-day needs and everything else. At that time, school was not in my plans. Because I didn't speak English, communication was very hard. One of my jobs helped me out to go to school for ESL classes. Four years later, I went back to Mexico to see my family. When I saw my mother, I hugged her so tight because I missed her for so long. After two months, I returned to Minnesota. Now I have a family of my own. I work in the morning and go to school in the afternoon and my life has changed. I love it. Now I am accustomed to and love this country – weather, too! My mixed feelings are now gone.

*G. Gonzalez Herrera is originally from Mexico.*

## **Flying Without English**

*Rahma Jibril, Minneapolis*

I will never forget the first time I traveled to the U.S. It was the first time I rode in an airplane and I was scared. I came with my daughter to be with my husband. My daughter was only six months old. I changed three different planes and I didn't speak any English, so I understood only a little bit. I had only my baby and purse with me.

On the first plane, I saw some other Somali people who helped me. But when I was in London, I stayed in the airport for around three hours. When the people around me were talking, I didn't understand. Fortunately, when the people saw my situation, they helped me.

My first place in America was Georgia. The plane landed and I saw a man speaking Somali. He helped me until I arrived in Minneapolis. Then I met my husband and my brother and felt happy.

Finally, I arrived in the U.S. and nothing happened to me!

## **Road Signs, Vegetables, and Gloves**

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

When I arrived in the U.S. in 2008, life was hard for me due to the language, the food, and the weather. The first day, I went to the Mall of America. I was sitting in the car looking at the roadside. The sign was only in English. I was astonished and asked "what does that sign mean? How am I going to live in the U.S. without learning the English language?" Even in the mall, almost everyone spoke English. When I walked through the store, the guy who worked there told me something, however, I didn't understand anything he said. I didn't feel comfortable.

The food here was very different. It is processed and not the same flavor as in Ecuador, where I ate delicious fresh food every day. It took a year-and-a-half to get accustomed to the food in Minneapolis. Day-to-day I bought fresh vegetables but I didn't taste any flavor. I asked my cousin "where do all these vegetables come from" and he said, "they come from

California. They don't farm the whole year in Minnesota, just in the summer."

The weather in the U.S. is too hot and too cold. I arrived in Minneapolis during the summer and the temperature was 90 degrees. I was baking! I thought it will be just like this the whole year and after four months, the temperature started to drop down and then winter started. On a nice sunny day, I decided to walk a couple of miles. I wore a light jacket and jeans, no hat and no gloves. I walked a few blocks and my hands, ears and face were frozen. Since that day, I learned to wear a heavy jacket, gloves and hat. The weather, food and language make it hard for people who move to the U.S. from different countries to get accustomed to life here.

## **My Journey**

*James B., Saint Paul*

My name is James. I was born in London. When I was born, I was hard of hearing. My mum did not find out until I was three. When I was four, I went to the school in our village. I was in school for a short time. The teacher said she cannot help me and asked my mum to keep me at home. When I was 10, I got into some trouble with the street children. They said they were my friends but they just wanted me to steal food for them and other things. One day I got caught. And, because I could not speak or hear they took me to the state home for disabled children. There was many children there. Some could not see, some could not hear, and some could not walk, and some had funny faces that looked the same. My mum found out I was there and went to the police to take me home but it took some time. And after four years, they let me go home. They could not hold me there without my mother's signature. I got an asylum to come to America. My first time in America was in Los Angeles. Everything was different at first. And, I went to school there. After two years, my family moved to Minnesota because my mum has a sister in Minnesota. Today I go to school, I work, I drive a car, and I live alone. Life is good here. For two years, I have gone to Special Olympics and I love it.

*James B. is originally from London.*

## **My First Snow**

*Madina Omar, Owatonna*

My first time in America from Somalia, I came across a lot of things that were different than what I was used to. One of the things different was the weather. Sometimes it was hot and sometimes it was cold.

*Madina Omar is originally from Somalia.*

## **My Life in My Country and the U.S.**

*Gay Ler, Saint Paul*

My name is Gay Ler. I am 31 years old. I have four children. I am a Karen person. I came to the U.S. on June 28, 2011. Now I live in Minnesota, but I think about my people in my country. They have no place to live, no house, no food, no medicines, no clothes or anything because they are running in the forest. It is difficult for them. I was born in the forest when my mother was running from the Burmese soldiers. I remember when I was a child I was living in the forest and running like this until I was 12 years old. Then we moved to Mae La camp in Thailand.

Now I have a new life for myself. My children will get a good education. And then I hope one day my children will help their people in their country with education, health and other needs. Now many Karen people come to the U.S. and learn more about the education, and then one day I hope they will help to develop their country.

Now I'm learning English at VSS. I think one day I can speak the English language. If I can speak English I will get a new job. When I lived in the refugee camp I was a teacher, so I want to be a teacher again. I want to tell my country I can't forget you. I miss you always. Bye. I want to see you soon. I want you to stay free, to improve and be safe and have good schools like the U.S. This is my hope for my country and all of the people in my country.

*Gay Ler is originally from Burma.*

## Coming to the U.S.

*Mirsada, Spring Lake Park*

I came to the U.S. in April of 2012 from Bosnia. Bosnia is a small country in southern Europe. The reason I came here is because my husband lives here. He is an auto mechanic and works part-time in an auto shop. I came here with my daughter. She is thirteen years old. My trip was twenty-five hours because I waited for a long time in the Germany airport. First I went to Philadelphia. Then I flew for four hours on a plane to Minneapolis. I brought clothes, documents, and photographs with me. I planned to come to the United States. On my first day in the U.S., I saw many highways. On my first day in the U.S., I felt tired. On my first day in the U.S., I slept. The best thing about living here is a good school for my daughter and I can find a job when I improve my English. I am homesick for my family and friends in my native country. I don't miss the work in my native country, because my boss usually didn't give me any money. Sometimes, I waited for two months for the money. I wouldn't like to go back to my country and live there. I like my new life in the United States. I feel happy here.

*Mirsada is 39 years old and originally from Bosnia.*

## Somalia

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

I grew up in Somalia. My parents passed away so I was with my brother. My family never went to school there; war was going on at that time. Then I moved to Kenya. I lived with my uncle. I got married in Kenya. My husband and I came to the U.S. to Minnesota. We came to Minnesota because my family was here. I started school because I needed the education. Before I didn't know how to read or write. I learned how to speak English. It is difficult for me.

## Coming to the U.S.

*P.U.B., Coon Rapids*

I came to the U.S. in September of 1992 from Guatemala. Guatemala always has good weather. The reason I came here is to find a better life for me and my family. My family was very sad for me to leave. I came here with my husband. My husband and I were very happy on the trip. My trip was six hours. I was nervous because I never was on an airplane before. First I went to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles I stayed for two days. I brought clothes and shoes with me. I planned to come to the United States three months before we left. On my first day in the U.S., I saw many squirrels. In Guatemala we don't have squirrels, only in the zoo. On my first day in the U.S., I felt sad and tired, because I couldn't visit my family for a long time. On my first day in the U. S., I watched TV in bed. The best thing about living here is nice houses, life, schools, and jobs. In my country jobs are good, but the pay is not good. I made two dollars in one day! The worst thing about living here is my family is not here, only my husband's family is here. I am homesick for my family in my native country, because I never separated from my mom before. I don't miss the delinquents in my native country. I wouldn't like to go back to my country and live there. I have been here for twenty years and I like my new life in the United States. God Bless the United States.

*P.U.B is originally from Guatemala.*

## Story

*Anonymous, Eagan*

I was born into a big family in Eritrea. I went to school there until eighth grade. Then I came to the United States and I landed in Minnesota. I have been in Minnesota about nine years. I have made a family here. I met my husband in Minnesota but he is also from Eritrea. Life is good. We have four children and my husband has a good job. My mother-in-law takes care of my kids while I work part-time at United Hospital and attend school to learn English. Going to school is very helpful for learning English. When I first came to Minnesota I watched a lot of TV to learn English. Now, my English is better and I enjoy reading the newspaper and helping my children with their school-work.

## My Story

*Niemat, Eagan*

My name is Niemat and I am from Sudan. I came to America seven years ago. After we arrived here, we lived in New York for a couple of months and Virginia for one and a half years. After that, we moved to Minnesota. We didn't have a car and it was hard to get around during the cold weather. My kids had a hard time getting to school and I had a hard time finding a job. After all the difficulties, we made it through. Recently, my mother passed away in a bus accident. This was a very difficult time for me to get through it. I still think about my mother every day. Last summer was the first time I went back to Sudan since I moved to the U.S. seven years ago. I got to see my whole family and it was a good trip. Despite the initial difficulties, living in Minnesota has been great. I would not want to move to any other state.

*Niemat is 37 and originally from Sudan.*

## My Life

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

I was born in a small village in Burma (Kwee K Baw) and I grew up in Burma. When I was young, I went to study in Kya in Sick Gyi town. I passed high school in 1975. After that I went back to stay in my village and I was a teacher for two years.

Most villagers were farmers. With no education the villagers needed a teacher for their children's education. During that time I tried hard because I was young and strong.

Then I went to study about theology for four years in Insein. When I finished Bible school, I came back to my village again. Some villages needed a teacher and a pastor so I went to stay in Lay Poe Kee village.

Not a long time after that, Burmese soldiers attacked our region, villagers ran to the forest and my family also ran. We hid in the forest a month, but there was no good situation in our village. So some families and my family moved to a refugee camp in Thailand.

We traveled in the jungle. I lived in a refugee camp 22 years. I was a teacher there also. First I lived in Maw Ker refugee camp. After that the camp changed to Umphiem Mai. Umphiem Mai camp is a special place on the high mountain, very cold and very windy, but a very beautiful place.

At first we thought we would stay in the camp for a short time. When our places had a good situation we would go back to our village. But now there is not a good situation, so I came to America with my family in 2012. Now I live in Saint Paul. I am a student again. I'm studying at VSS. In the U.S. we don't worry. We try hard, we eat a lot, we are happy. We are improving. The U.S.A is very good. God bless America always. Now my native country and my village are far away. Bye.

## **My First Day in the U.S.**

*Mai Nhia Lor, Saint Paul*

I saw many cars, big buildings, and my family.  
I heard many people talking in different languages,  
many car sounds, and police sirens.  
I tasted pizza, spaghetti, and hamburger.  
I felt tired, scared, happy, and sad.  
I smelled food at the airport.

## **My First Day in the U.S.**

*La Vang, Saint Paul*

I saw the many cars, a stove, and lights.  
I heard many people talking in different languages,  
police sirens, and many car sounds.  
I tasted grapes and ate pizza.  
I smelled fruit and food.

## **Untitled**

*Rigoberto Garcia Bastian, Worthington*

My name is Rigoberto Garcia. I'm from Veracruz. My hometown is Papantla , a town rich in culture and folklore. I have two brothers and one sister. I'm very friendly with the people. My town is magic with tradition. I like my town. Everything is different in tradition and culture, but I like the U.S. because it's a better life. I came to this country in 2002. I have lived almost ten years in this country. In this country, my kids were born, Arum and Jessica. They are my love and my world. This is a little of my life.

*Rigoberto Garcia is originally from Mexico.*

## **Life in America**

*Maymuna, Burnsville*

I am from Somalia. I did not learn how to talk Somali. When I moved to America, I learned American Sign Language, and how to read and write English. My family moved to America because of the war. I like America.

## **I Like Minnesota**

*Evan Alem, Minneapolis*

Hello everybody, my name is Evan.  
I am from Eritrea.  
I have lived in Minnesota three years.  
Minnesota has bad weather.  
My country's weather is good.  
I like Minnesota because Minnesota is very cheap.  
All the country's administration is good.

*Evan Alem is originally from Eritrea.*

# WORK

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## The Path Of My Life

*Lakkhana Robinson, Big Lake*

“Courage to face the truth, not to dwell on sorrows.” Life is not easy without anyone. I lived with someone who brought me here, and it started with love and ended with hate. I had to live my life without happiness, but life has to go on and I had to deal with it. Six months after I moved, my English was a problem, and I tried to find a job. My first job was working at a Vietnamese restaurant. I worked in counter service, but did everything, even cleaning the bathroom. Even though it was hard work, I finished off my student loan from my college. Sadly, I was unemployed for two months because the restaurant closed. While I was unemployed, I paid for driving school because I wanted to buy my own car. My second job was working in the deli section at a big grocery store. It paid minimum wage and I thought it was not fair to work as hard as this. So, I was looking for another job.

Luckily, I got a job as a nanny. I took care of babies and I also did some office work using the computer, fax, and scan machines. I scanned law documents and did bookkeeping for my boss. I had learned to be patient, and my boss understood me and still loves me like her family. I was glad to know someone cared sincerely for me. I had to walk two miles, take two busses and a train to work. I had to learn about directions. Experiences made me stronger. I was confident talking with people. Finally, I bought my first car, but I had to sell it due to the divorce. I moved to Nantucket, MA and lived with my cousin. I lived in the same room with him and his wife. It was uncomfortable, but I had no choice. I got a job as a nanny, and my boss who I learned later is a famous writer. I also worked at a Thai restaurant as a receptionist. I worked there for five months, and I met my husband. Since then, I moved to Minnesota and now I am a mom with a beautiful daughter. I am thankful to live my life valiantly learning even if it tumbles hard. I was so proud that I got through it. “After the rain you will see the rainbow.”

*Lakkhana Robinson is 35 and originally from Thailand.*



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Lakkhana Robinson (Anny) was born in Thailand and has a degree in Statistics. In January 2005, she arrived in the United States; after four years of tough life she finally found her true love. She realizes that life is hard, but she still can find her future. She wants to help her community and work in a nursing home. She attends English classes at Big Lake and Monticello to continue on her future plans. Anny now is a stay at home mom and has a beautiful loving family.

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## Trying to Help People

*Sahro Raabi, Waite Park*

I car-pooled to and from work. I shared driving with others who had the same hours that I had. It worked well.

Two others who worked different hours wanted to join the pool. Because there wasn't room for them and their hours were different, they were refused.

They had a car, but neither had a driver's license. They asked me to help them get to work and back. I left the car pool that I was in and tried to help these two people. At first I drove their car to work, waited until they finished their shift, even though I finished an hour and half before them. I even helped them to do their job. I even gave them driving lessons so they could pass the test necessary to get a driver's license.

After awhile they were able to drive themselves and they didn't need me anymore. Telling me that they no longer had a car to drive they tried to drop me from their car pool. When I discovered what they were up to I tried to rejoin my original car pool. That was no longer possible, as it was fall.

I felt let down by people whom I had tried to help. It makes me wonder if I should put myself in such a situation again.

## My Name is Gerardo Geovanny M.

*Gerardo Giovanni M., Worthington*

My name is Gerardo Giovanni M. I am from Mexico. I remember when I came to the United States of America in 1986. I was a baker in the state of Florida, and kept a lot of vegetables and fruit. I was a baker and worked hard there, but I loved the job. Then I went to Texas to work a construction job. The work was very hard too, but I liked it because their pay was good money. But sometimes it rained too much. That's why I moved over here to Worthington, MN, and worked very hard at the factory. I worked there about 14 years, but I don't work there anymore because I had a car accident. Now I come to school to learn English to speak, write, and listen so I like to learn good English.

*Gerard Giovanni M. is originally from Mexico.*

## Thankful For My Teachers

*Ngoc-Tuyet Thi Truong, Columbia Heights*

In my life if someone ask me, "Whom I am thankful for?" besides my parents, I think that they are my teachers.

When I came to the United States, I didn't go to school to learn English, because I took care of my children and worked until last year when my company had been restructured. I had to leave my job. I thought that it's a good opportunity for me to study English. Then I registered at Adult Education Center in Columbia Heights.

In school, I was a level two student. During this time, I couldn't speak or understand listening because I didn't learn English in my country, and when I came to America I worked with Asian people. They were like me. We couldn't speak English. At home, I didn't have time to watch TV. Sometimes I learned English by myself. So I had a big problem that my teacher didn't understand when I spoke to them. I studied very hard, but I didn't remember English well because I was older. After three months, I was an English for Academic Purposes student. In this class, I realized ESL and EAP were very different and I didn't know enough English.

When my test score was high enough for EAP, I wanted to stay at level three to learn more English, but teachers Carol and Cary encouraged me to improve English in EAP. In this class, the students spoke and listened very well except me. I was afraid to go to school. So a few times, I wanted to quit but my sons said, "Mom, better to learn English slowly than learn nothing."

In class, I learn a lot of things from teacher Michelle. I like that she teaches vocabulary in a new way. I think that it's the best way for students to remember words well, although some don't study them at home. Side by side with teacher Michelle, tutor Manfred helps the students a lot too. Now I am studying English in EAP class until I understand enough for GED because I don't want to quit GED in the future.

Today, I write this story thankful for teacher Michelle, tutor Manfred, and all ESL teachers and tutors. They help me and foreign students get better jobs or good education.

## The Journeys of My Life

*Curtessa Francis, Minneapolis*

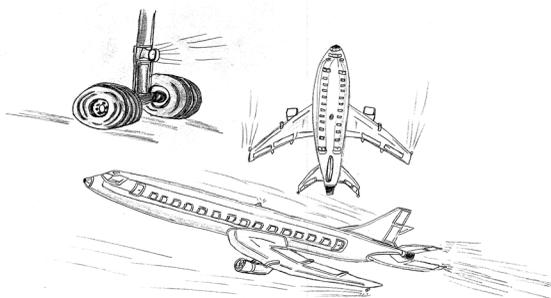
My name is Curtessa Francis. I was born in Antigua in 1988. I lived in Antigua for 17 years. I had moved to Minnesota in 2006 and stayed for nine months; then I went back home and stayed awhile. In 2008, I moved to St. Thomas, a U.S. Virgin Island. I lived there for three years. While I was living there, I had a son. I worked at Payless for a year, and also at Claire's Boutique for a year. I went back home in 2011, stayed a year with my families and friends, and moved back to Minnesota in 2012.

Before I decide to travel again, I want to accomplish getting my G.E.D, so I can get a good job in the near future. I want to provide for my family. I love Minnesota because it is very nice and quiet. Most of my loved ones are in Antigua, but I am trying to better myself so they can be proud of me, especially my mom.

I recently received my certificate as a Personal Care Assistant (PCA). I am so proud of myself. I can say that I have accomplished something and I am going to keep striving for success.

My personal experience when I first came to Minnesota was difficult because I missed my home and I had to get accustomed to the environment. In Antigua, it is not that big, so it's easier to get around. I think about my country, my families, and friends. However, getting to experience a whole different life style is very interesting and I am getting to love it.

*Curtessa Francis is originally from Antigua.*



*Gustavo Duque, Eveleth*

## About My Job

*Monica Moua, Brooklyn Park*

There are many things about my job. I work at DSI and it is a very nice job for me. I like to work at DSI because I want to learn something new and important. I make pacemakers for human beings and animals. Since I have been working at DSI, I know how hard it is to save a life. It's very important to be careful to make the pacemaker well; if we don't, we will lose the customers. I have learned many things from this company regarding the differences between pacemakers for human beings and animals like sizes, prices, etc. I like working with my coworkers and my supervisor. We help each other and the time goes fast. I think I am going to retire from this company.

## The Important Experiences

*Meylee Suy, Shakopee*

My name is Meylee. I just came from Cambodia almost six months ago. I live with my family. I was very excited to come to the USA, but sometimes I think it is very hard that I live in a country that has a different language, culture, and four seasons. My country has only two seasons: it's warm and it's rainy. I have never worked in my native country, but in the fourth month that I lived here my friend helped me to find a job. I was nervous about being a cashier at a gas station. I didn't think I could do that job because my English was not good enough. I was embarrassed when I spoke English to someone and they didn't know what I meant, but decided I had to try to make conversation with the costumer. That way I can improve my English, too. After that I can learn more from this experience. I can improve my listening and speaking also.

*Meylee Suy is originally from Cambodia.*

## The First Time in the USA

*Yukra Suy, Shakopee*

My name is Yura. I came from Cambodia. I came to the United States on June 24, 2012. At first when I arrived, I was so happy because I could live with my parents, but the most difficult thing for me was the language. When I went outside, it was very hard to communicate with other people, and hard to understand when they were talking to me because English wasn't the first language for me. So I decided to go to school to improve my English. I am in school now, and I can speak a little bit more English, and it's easier to understand than before. Now I am working at Abdullah Candies. I was very excited that I got a job because I can earn money, and especially I can speak English with my co-worker every day. That's why I can improve my speaking, too

So the English language is very important for me to live in the United States and make my life better.

*Yukra Suy is originally from Cambodia.*

## Untitled

*Anonymous*

My job is at home. I take care of my kids every day. I sleep late, but I have to wake up early to send my daughter to school every Monday to Friday. I have to cook every day for my family and get lunch for my husband to go to work. I wash my children after dinner every night. I read books to my daughter every night and check my daughter's homework. I also teach my daughter shapes, math, the alphabet, and colors.

My three kids are still in diapers so I need to change their diapers when they're full. I clean my house, take out trash, and do laundry. I feed my children milk and food. Sometime it's hard to be mommy, because I don't get a lot of sleep. But I want to be a good mom for my kids. I need to learn more and get my GED because I think that will help me to get a job to make money to help my husband and family. In the future I want my kids to go to college and get a good job.

## Working in a Hospital

*Fartun Kahiye, Waite Park*

After graduating from high school, I got training to be a nurse. My first job was in a hospital in Somalia. It was during the civil war of Somalia and many people were wounded when they came to the hospital. Some duties I had were giving shots and dressing wounds. I also was a surgeon's assistant.

Some patients were nice. They were happy to see you and said thank you when you did things for them. They also gave you gifts. Some patients were crabby. They yelled at you and told you to get out of the room.

What I learned is that nurses have to work well with all patients and treat them with kindness. Because I feel like I did a good job at this career, I am now preparing to do this in the future.



*Rebecca Tam, Roseville*

## My School

Noor G. Edward, Rochester

I began to go to Hawthorne Education Center in Rochester, Minnesota, in 2011. It contains multiple academic programs, a large community, and it provides the necessary services for students.

Hawthorne school provides programs of study. It offers a variety of programs to adults age 16 and older, such as Adult Literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), Computer Literacy, Math, and the Fast TRAC courses including Career Pathways, Nursing Assistant and Health Science, Volunteer opportunities, and many others to help students improve themselves in reading, writing, spelling and math while they find a career.

Secondly, it is a large community that contains responsible people like the instructors and teachers. They are elaborately dedicated in their work. They are competent because they put in every effort to clarify the required ideas for students, to motivate and encourage students, and increase their confidence. The other part is the hard-working students who organize their time daily to study, care for their homes, and some of them work also. It mostly takes two or more lectures to get the maximum amount of knowledge. Despite the fact that the instructors and students are from different countries and religions, there is an understanding between them to get the results of a satisfactory teaching and study.

Third, Hawthorne provides the necessary services for students. One is through the library, which contains a large number of books in the various fields of study. Another is the medical clinic containing a number of doctors and nurses, treating students without taking money from them, and helping them through health education programs such as healthy living including proper eating and exercise, and also how to reduce the flu in order to live in a healthy environment for all. The existence of the program Hand in Hand is of great importance for taking care of the kids when their parents are having school lectures. So the officials in the program prepare children well by teaching letters, the names of colors and numbers through images and songs. Finally, the cafeteria is where you meet everyone; we see that the planet joins different

countries and religions to be in peace and friendship.

I have the honor to be a part of this school community, featured by its knowledge, community, and services. These have been a benefit to me academically and socially.

## My Name is Zeinab

Zeinab Mahamoud Yalahow, Minneapolis

My name is Zeinab Mahamoud Yalahow.

I want to share a little bit about my life.

I was born in Somalia in the city of Mogadishu.

I came first to the city of Sanca in Yemen in May of 1995. I was very young. I lived there for five years. After that I won the lottery for a visa to the United States. In July, 2000 I came to the United States and I didn't understand English and it was very difficult for me. After that I went to a company to work. I was hired by Jennie-O Turkey, but I didn't know English. I worked 10 months and quit. I went to work at a hotel because my English was better. I worked at the hotel for four years. Then I went back to Somalia in February of 2005, to visit my mother and family. I came back to the United States in May of 2005 and I was looking for another job and found it. Now my job is cleaning at the Mall of America.

*Zeinab Mahamoud Yalahow is originally from Somalia.*

## A Typical Day in my Life

Armando Diaz, Brooklyn Park

I usually wake up at 8:30 a.m. in the morning. I often take a shower. I brush my teeth; I put on my clothes and usually go to school every day.

After school, I eat some food and I watch TV for a little bit. Then I take a nap for one hour. When I wake up, I put my work clothes on. Then I take my car and I drive for 15 minutes. I start work at 5:30 p.m. and continue until 1:30 a.m. When I arrive back at home, I don't like to come home late and sleep late. I usually go to bed at 3:00 a.m.

## My Uneducation in Africa

*Abdinasir Abdisalana, Saint Paul*

I went to Central Primary School in Hagadera Refugee Camp in Dadaab, Kenya. I was born in 1984, in Somalia. I moved in 1992. I went to a refugee camp for 18 years. I was around only hearing people. I would have liked to ask for a Kenya sign language interpreter. In my silence for 18 years around hearing students, I copied from the blackboard with no one teaching me. I am happy in Adult Basic Education class in Minneapolis because I see Deaf students and a Deaf teacher who can sign. I was in Minnesota, USA first. I want to learn American Sign Language more to talk with classmates, teachers, and friends. Now I am in civics and citizenship classes. Thank you to America!

*Abdinasir Abdisalana is originally from Somalia.*

## Coming to America

*Riyaam Ali, Saint Michael*

May 13, 2010, was my first day in the U.S.A. It is very hard for a person to leave their country and their own people and move into another part of the world. A country is a home, and my country means family, relatives, and even friends. My name is Riyaam and I am 22 years old. I have lived in the U.S.A. for two-and-a-half years. My first months were very hard for me because my English was very poor, but then I went to school and I took ESL class.

I was afraid to talk with anyone. I thought if I talked to them, they would make fun of me, but I was wrong. I have had a friend who helped me a lot. She kept telling me, "Don't be afraid to talk. I will correct everything you want to say, and I will help you." After that, my English got better, and she was not the only one who told me that; so did the teacher. My advice to everyone who wants to learn English or any other language is - don't be afraid to talk

Another thing that helped me learn English is work. My husband helped me apply for a job at a retail store. Working part-time and seeing different people helped me learn a new word every day. I also talk with my husband at home in English so I can practice more

and learn more. Working in a retail store also taught me the American culture. I learned how people talk and how they dress.

I really love staying in the U.S.A. because the people are very nice and the country is very nice. I'm also learning new things every day, and that's why I love staying in the U.S.A.

## Why Education is Important to Me

*Armando Garrido-Castaneda, Robbinsdale*

I personally believe that education is the best tool we can have to succeed. Education can make life easier by earning a lot of money and I can inspire the rest of my family to get a higher education as well.

The more you study, the more you know. Once you are a professional and have a degree, there is not a single thing that can stop you from moving forward. I think that when you prepare yourself in a good way and you just keep going, there is no limit to how far you can go.

There are many jobs people cannot get because they don't have the knowledge that is required. So, when educated people actually know how to do the job and they earn more money, others think life is not fair. There is no secret to this success and people can't get mad at those who worked hard and sacrificed their time in order to get their work done.

I believe that by being educated, you can inspire other people. Others see how successful you are, the type of life you have and getting the dream job that you always wanted. All these things motivate other people to do the same.

In conclusion, when you go to school and have a degree, there is pretty much nothing to worry about. Education helps you laugh at life, not life at you.

*Armando Garrido-Castaneda is originally from Mexico.*

## Thank You

*Yaneth Santiago, Red Wing*

My name is Yaneth Santiago. I've been living in this country for about six years. The first year was so hard because I didn't understand the language. I'm married and have two beautiful kids. When my teacher asked me to write something, the only thought that I had was to say "thank you." First thanks to God for giving me this wonderful family, a lovely husband that encourages me to reach my goals and lets me do it, and for my kids because they are the reason for my life. Also thanks for letting us live in this amazing country full of opportunities. I'm so thankful with all the people who help us to get over all troubles and necessities. Thank you to my family, friends, and my teachers. A special thank you to my teachers. I can't remember all their names but their faces are in my mind and everything that they taught me has been useful all these years. It will be something that I won't ever forget. Thank you so much.

*Yaneth Santiago is 36 and originally from Mexico.*

## One Day of School

*Roberto Cotorra, Eagan*

I am married and I have two children. We all go to Family School to learn English. My wife and I enjoy learning and teaching my kids to paint, color, sing and do many other things. We have so much fun when our children surprise us with the things they do at school. These are memories that we will always remember.

There are many people from different countries and cultures in my English class. We all try every day to learn the most that we can during class. My class is Monday through Thursday mornings from 9:00 am to 11:30 am.

The English classes are always interesting and important in content. The teacher is always patient with the students and has answers to questions..

Thanks to God for such good people who devote their time to teaching

## Importance of Saving

*Maria Yanez, Waite Park*

Not having to worry for any unexpected expenses is a satisfaction within itself, such as car repairs, a new wardrobe. How about treating yourself and others to a good restaurant or anything that might come your way? The best thing is not having to worry about it. The country club hang out that you hoped for. Not to mention actually making plans of that vacation you have been wanting to take. You can stop dreaming because now you are able to give yourself that luxury. You deserve to pamper yourself.

That is why it is always important to save. The importance of saving will be a big reward for you. You of all people will realize that the whole year of saving has paid off. And by the time you know it you'll be so happy to have made that decision. In doing so, it will enable you to have a stress free life. This will also result in buying what you wanted but couldn't afford. You won't have to compromise one thing for another.

To simply have that satisfied feeling in knowing that you didn't have to borrow money or what could be worse, to see yourself in a tight situation, only because you didn't take the intuitive to save that extra money. That is why every little bit counts when saving for a rainy day.

## The Problem

*Rafael Lopez, Saint Paul*

When I came to school it was a hard decision for me because I did not have time for school. I tried learning English in the house on evenings or weekend afternoons.

I bought a package. It is the Rosetta Stone for learning English, but that course needs a computer. I bought the computer, but I had another problem because I never used the computer before. I spent money for nothing. But this winter I have time for school now. I'm happy in school. I like school.

## I Have Worked My Whole Life

Marcelina (Lina) Hondel, Medford

I was only a single digit when I started to make a few pennies. I played scavenger hunter on nature walks. I collected cans, nails, newspapers, copper bottles and sometimes I found coins. I grabbed anything I spotted lying around on the road that was useful or valuable. When I felt tired or the sack got too heavy, it was time for me to go home. Then the next day I would take all of my collections to the recycle place and trade it in for a few pennies.

Selling popsicles, vegetables, fishes, water and treats were also fun things I did. I would knock on the neighbor's doors to sell goodies. Another thing that I sold was water to the neighbors. I lifted the heavy bucket of water over my head or my shoulder to refill their barrels until they were full.

Washing dirty laundry was the hardest thing I did, and it took three days before I would get paid. I was on my hands and knees sitting on the hard surface soaked and wet all day long washing clothes in the river. At the end of the day, I would carry them back home. Then I would have to dry, fold and deliver them all, so I could collect the money I had earned.

Sometimes I didn't get paid, but instead they treated me with a plate of food to eat and a shelter for the night in return. When I woke up the next day, my journey started all over again on different path.

Even though the jobs were overwhelming, I didn't mind. Instead I rewarded myself with something I liked, and I was very happy. It was a great experience for a child like me living in the Philippines.

## My Life

Moo Eh, Saint Paul

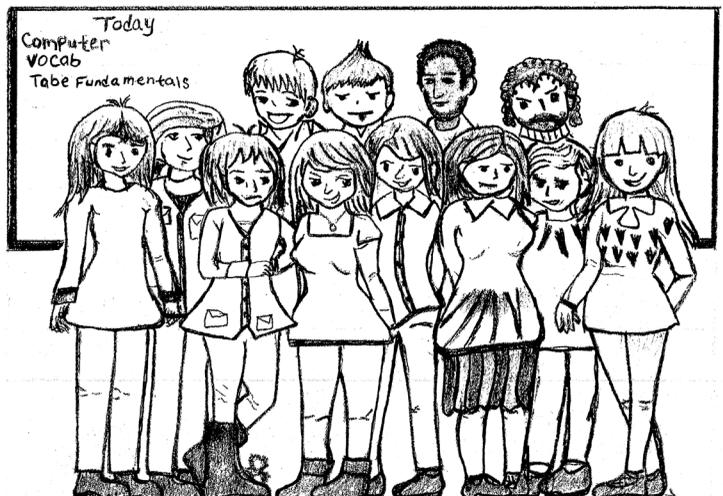
My name is Moo Eh. I'm from Burma. Long ago my country was Burma. I lived in Burma in the Karen State. In my land I was 22 years old. Today I'm 56 years old.

My land is very beautiful and in the mountains. In my land we build with bamboo. Coconut trees, mango trees, papaya trees, pineapple trees, banana trees and lemon trees fill the village. The waterfall is near the village. The forest, lake and river are next to the village. My village is very beautiful.

The Karen Army and the Burmese Army are always fighting in the village and near the village. So the all people are running in the jungle. My family and some people ran to the Thai border, to the Mae Rah Moe refugee camp. I lived in the refugee camp for 11 years. Mae Rah Moe camp is near the Mae Rah Moe River. So Mae Rah Moe camp is very beautiful.

Today I live in Minnesota but I always remember my village and Mae Rah Moe camp. But I remember I want to work. My family case is on my mind. I never forget this in my life. So I have to try very hard in my life. Thank you very much.

*Moo Eh is 56 and originally from Burma.*



Billy Huang, Brooklyn Park

## About Me

*Ku Ku, Saint Paul*

My name is Ku Ku. I was born on September 13, 1967. I lived in a Karen refugee camp.

I have four children - three daughters and one son. I came to the U.S on September 20, 2012. I have to come here with only two daughters and one son with me. My husband also came with me too. I have to learn English as a second language at the VSS office.

Every day the van comes and picks me up at eight o'clock in the morning. When we finish our school at 1:30 p.m. the van takes me to my home again.

I want to be a good teacher because that is my favorite job. Here in the US I can't speak English well. So I will try hard and when I can speak English well I hope I will be good teacher for our Karen people. I don't everywhere, maybe I'll teach where I live.

I want to make sure my people don't forget their language and they can speak and they can write their native language always. One day when my children graduate I'll go back to my native country to help our people, especially people who had no education and not a lot of knowledge who lived in a small village. I hope to make a new village where a village was destroyed. That is maybe my dream because now I don't speak English well.

*Ku Ku is 46 and originally from Burma.*

## The Dream I Never Thought Would Come True

*Thaa Lee, Saint Paul*

I was born on March 7, 1962, in the village of Xieng Khouang Province. I was born during the Vietnam War. As I grew up, I noticed the killing was done by the Vietcong, which had made my people migrate from jungle to jungle with no roof over our heads. In January 1970, we chose a place to stay in a small village named Padongnoi where I gained my four years of education. Fighting and killing still continued in Laos. This made my leader General Vang Pao migrate out of Laos and into Thailand in 1975. We couldn't live in

the villages because of the Viet soldiers.

In January 1979, I moved to the refugee camp called Banvinai where I worked with an organization called World Vision Foundation. I worked there for five years to help educate my people.

In November 1987, the Americans came to Thailand where I had an interview with the Americans. In June 1988, I then moved to another refugee camp called Phanatnikhom. That's where I learned English and how to live in the United States. After, I flew to Bangkok, Thailand, then to Tokyo, Japan, then finally to the Los Angeles, California. In California, we lived in the city of Long Beach. During that time, the new surroundings were unfamiliar for me; it was a struggle to survive. I decided to go to school where I attended ESL during the weekdays. I was also a security guard at night during weekends. In 1989, there was a robber who came to my workplace. I got injured during my shift from the robber. I was taken to the hospital where the doctor examined me and told my family members that I had a brain trauma. I decided, I didn't want to live in California afterwards. I moved to North Carolina in April 18, 1997 where I raised my family for 13 years. On June 30, 2010, I moved in to Minnesota.

I decided to move to Minnesota to reach my goals. I go to the Hmong Culture Center to take a citizenship class to become a citizen. I am taking another ESL class to help myself to prepare and to be a good citizen in America. I hope I will get the job done soon.

*Thaa Lee is originally from Laos.*

## My Job

*Hanh, Maple Grove*

I have lived in Minnesota only for a few months. I think to find a good job now is hard, but you can if you have more abilities, experiences. I have changed my work many times in many companies. The job I like best is as an officer in the human resources department. My staff is very nice and has a good attitude. My manager is a good man; he always helps us at work and takes care of his employees. He also makes more opportunities for us to develop skills. Although it is not a high salaried job, it has good benefits like insurance, retirement, etc. Sometimes my work is so hard, but I feel good.

The main reason is I work in good conditions and with honest people. On the whole, I think it is a good job when we have a job with good benefits and good working conditions.

## **My Job**

*Anonymous, Brooklyn Park*

I am a worker, and I work at the machine shop. The first day I started working, there were problems because I didn't know anything about my job. My job is packing parts and sometimes the supervisor takes me to run the machines. After five months, they moved me to the hard job to fix the parts or make the parts complete, but I wanted to stay at the old job. I like a fine job or peaceful job, and this wasn't. But I have no choice; I must do what they want. Now I passed that point. Right now my exact job is second operation. It means after they finish running the parts, they send them to me. For example, the parts they run are sharp, have a burr on them, or have a chip inside. I have to sand it out, make it flat, or fix it.

## **My Story**

*Vera Fisher, Apple Valley*

My name is Vera. I am from Russia. I have lived in the U.S. for 16 years. When I came to the U.S., I had two children, 300 dollars in my pocket, and spoke no English. After three months, my husband got work and was also a student in TVI College. I found a school and started English classes. I handled that school for one year. English was very hard for me. I was scared about my life in the U.S. I believe it is very important that all family be together, helping each other. My husband got his diploma and found a good job. Our children had a good education. I was working at Bloomingdales for 13 years. We came to the U.S. for a good future. I am sure we succeeded. Everyone is happy in this beautiful country!

*Vera Fisher is originally from Russia.*

## **My Story**

*Diana Renslow, Saint Paul*

Here is mine. I was working for a company for almost 17 years. I worked in a call center so I knew some stuff on the computer. Then I got let go. I was devastated and not sure what to do. I went to the work force center and one of the workers suggested I take BTOP, basic computer run by the literacy council. So I signed up. The first day I walked in I found out that it was not a class like I thought, but work at your own pace. I was not happy with that. Working on my own to learn things does not work for me. So I was frustrated, upset, and not sure what to do. But I tried it. The person who runs the lab Jenna Rose was very nice. She helped me get started and was very patient. I knew the basic computer stuff. I started with Word and Excel, but I was not getting it. Jenna suggested to do a one-on-one with the tutor. Justin explained things so well that I understood it. I would listen to the lesson and practice. Once I finished Jenna suggested I become a tutor, being that I understand how most of the people feel when they come in at first. I was not sure I knew enough to help. I feel the people that I tutor I learn as much from them as I teach them.

## **Untitled**

*Anonymous*

I work at MSP and I am a packer. And right now my exact job is second operation. The first thing that I always do in the morning at my job is find out what's new for the day. I find out the customers' names, order numbers, how many items the customers want, what kind of boxes customers need, and how the boxes fit. Second, I have to ask my trainer or my supervisor about the order number that the company is going to ship that day and what time the order will be shipped. Third, after I'm done asking, then I have to scan in the job and put the part in the machine to wash it. And after that I have to look for the chips that are stuck down in the part, and if I see some, I have to blow them off. I also have to be on time. And that's it.

## About Me

*Edgar P. Paredes, Brooklyn Park*

I am from Ecuador, this country is in South America, it is a beautiful country. It has four well-defined regions, coast, mountains, rainforest, and island region such as the Galapagos Islands. In my country I finished my college career in agronomy and worked 10 years for Dole banana plantations, whose final product is shipped to the U.S. and Europe for the most part.

It was never in my plans to immigrate to this great country. My first trip was in 2001 with my family to Miami on vacation visiting some places within these reaches Orlando to go to Universal Studios. But personal reasons did you take the decision to return and stay in the U.S. in 2003. The need of my daughters to study and improve their English supported this determination, but they finished their high school and returned with her mother to continue university studies.

I worked at Consortium Book Sales until 2007 in Saint Paul, then this company moved to Jackson, Tennessee and I also went with the company until 2010 at which time I decided to go back to Minnesota because here I have a sister, brother, and because Tennessee was lonely.

From 2011 I have been working for a temporary, because it is difficult to find work for a company for many factors. For me one of those factors or major reasons is the English language that is very difficult to learn. But one of my main goals is to speak the English language, to get a better job and try to assimilate this great culture.

*Edgar P. Paredes is originally from Ecuador.*

# CULTURE

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## The Story of My Name

*Sara Opeiw, Buffalo*

In the country of my birth, Sudan, there is a tradition that a groom's family helps him to gather a dowry for the bride's family, but my father gathered the dowry for my mother all on his own. He was so proud of this that when I was born, he named me Leme, which means "gathering." We have another tradition that when a wife is about to have a baby, she returns to her own mother's home to have her first born there. There are two reasons for this tradition.

First of all, the new mother is learning how to take care of the baby and she will have the support that she needs while with her own mother. The second reason is so the new mother can avoid her husband during the time when she is nursing. Many generations ago, and still in some villages the people believed that having relations while nursing would make the mother's milk bad for the new baby. So, husbands return after a few months to take their wives back home.

My father, however, could not wait that long. He couldn't wait six months or even three months. He came back to my grandma's house to take my mother only one month after my birth. He was at grandma's house much too soon. Grandma got very angry because my father broke the rule. She was insulted at his lack of respect for the tradition. She was so angry that she did something to make my father always remember the rule he had broken. Because of the disgrace he had brought, my grandmother changed my name to Ajange. In general, Ajange means, "curse." I was a child and didn't mind, but when I grew enough to know the meaning, I did not like it. Its meaning does not have the beautiful meaning like the one my father gave me. So today, I am called Sara, but that is another story.

*Sarah Opeiw is originally from Sudan.*



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I was born in southern Sudan and came to Minnesota on September 23, 2002 to be with my future husband. He and I are now raising three beautiful children in Buffalo. I also attend classes there with WEST ABE and Buffalo Community Education. My future plan is to get my GED, then follow my interest in being either a flight attendant or going into child development.

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## Chinese New Year

*Junjie Huang, Saint Michael*

In China, we have a big holiday called Chinese New Year. Since it is in the lunar year, the date of holiday is different every calendar year. It happens between the end of January and the middle of the February.

This day does not only mean the first day of the year for us, it also means the whole family gets together. Every family member comes back home to see their families, and spends the first several days of the New Year together. We clean the house two or three days before the New Year day. We should clean every corner of the house; it is a big cleaning job. The oldest women in the families like to cook a lot of Chinese traditional food like different steamed stuffed buns, dumplings, babao vegetables, and egg rolls.

My grandma used to cook a lot of different buns. She put meat, sausage, vegetables, beans or sesame-seeds, and sugar mix inside the buns, and she liked to use different colors and shapes to decorate them. She also liked to cook babao vegetables. She used eight different kinds of vegetables cooked together. These eight kinds of vegetables could bring happiness, health, and luck to the person who eats them.

We ate lunch together in grandpa's house on the last day of the year. We had chicken, fish, sixty meatballs, babao vegetables, and eggs. After lunch, we cooked dumplings together. These dumplings would be our first meal in the New Year. It meant we would have a reunion year. My grandma liked to add several nuts inside the dumplings. If you ate them, it meant you would be the luckiest person that year. We ate lanterns for the breakfast on the second day in hope that we would have good luck in our new year.

On the first day of the New Year, if we say, "Happy New Year" to our parents or other adults, we get money from them. For the kids, it means we have new clothes to wear, yummy foods to eat, fun time to play, and have money to buy something we want.

Chinese New Year is a happy start for everyone. Parents hope their kids will have a happy year and kids hope their parents will have a healthy year. Every one hopes they can have a happy year.

*Junjie Huang is originally from China.*

## Observing Nature

*Helena Birkaya, Maple Grove*

When two Americans meet, their first conversation is about the weather. This is true because the weather in the US is always uncertain and can change quickly. It's useful to be able to find out what kind of weather to expect in the next day or two. Information about the weather that's likely to come is called a weather forecast. There are regular local and national weather reports on television and radio 24 hours a day. You can also get weather reports by phone or from the Internet.

Do you know that by observing birds, animals, insects and flowers, you can forecast the weather? It is known that some insects become more anxious before a change in the weather. Flies and mosquitoes, for example, begin to buzz and bite before the rain. Big blue-black beetles fly only on evenings before nice weather. The smell of flowers in the gardens and in the parks is very strong before it rains. Flowers have much sweeter nectar before the rain and the nectar is good for insects. So, if you see insects flying over flowers in large numbers, you should know that it may rain soon.

Birds and animals also help forecast the weather. Birds fly lower than usual before it rains. If you see a bird hiding its head under its wing, it means that soon it will be colder. Even your cat can tell you what the weather will be like. If the cat washes its face or the ear, it's a sign that the weather will be fine and clear. Cats sit with their backs to the fire before snow. When a cat scratches itself, or scratches on a log or tree, it indicates rain. Look at the sky and it will tell you about the weather. A red evening sky tells of good weather for the next day, to say nothing about a little yellow or green sky. A grey sunrise gives promise of a good day, too. If you want to forecast weather, you must know about winds too, but not from meteorology, from weather folklore:

The South wind brings wet weather  
The North wind is wet and cold together  
The West wind always brings rain  
The East wind blows it back again

Study nature. Observe it and you'll understand that it needs our love and protection.

## **My Favorite Holiday**

*Carlos Andrades, Brooklyn Park*

My favorite holiday is Christmas. This holiday is on December 25th every year. It is a religious holiday, and we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Family and friends get together. I like all the Christmas decorations, colors, and fun. Sometimes people receive a gift, or you give a gift to someone. We like to spend time dancing, setting off fireworks, and eating good traditional food, like tamales, chicken sandwiches, and good cups of coffee. The next day everybody gets in the bus and goes to the beach. We spend time swimming, and playing soccer at the beach. When the day is over, everybody goes into the hotel and gets ready to party. At night they have live music after 8:00, and people begin to dance. The party is over at 3:30 in the morning, and you need to go back to the hotel to put your things together and go back home. I miss Christmas in El Salvador. Maybe one day I can be available to go back in December and celebrate Christmas back home in El Salvador.

## **My Home Country**

*Safiya Kahiye, Minneapolis*

My home country is one of many in Africa. I am from Somalia. The capital city is Mogadishu. I was born in Mogadishu. I always remember my country, because I love it so much. My home country is not big, but it has good weather. Sometimes it is hot. Also it has lakes and many rivers, and there are many farmers. In the farmers' market the people get many kinds of food. Before civil war happened my home country was a very nice and safe place.

*Safiya Kahiye is orginially from Somalia.*

## **Favorite Holidays**

*Frederic Cazales, Brooklyn Park*

My favorite holiday is New Year's Eve. The New Year starts on January first. This is my favorite holiday because all my family stays together, and we spend the night together eating a lot of food. I'm not the only person that celebrates this holiday. A lot of people around the world celebrate this holiday as well. I love to celebrate this holiday, and also I have another favorite holiday: Cinco de Mayo, which is celebrated on May fifth. Every year on the west side of Saint Paul, I like to go to celebrate Cinco de Mayo because there are a lot of bands playing Mexican and Caribbean music. I love it because there is a variety of people that come from many countries in South America. The parade starts at 12:00 o'clock in the afternoon; there are a lot of things to see like Aztec dance, mariachi singers, fun activities, rides, and clowns for children to enjoy. I like to eat tacos and grilled sweet corn. The musicians play salsa music, and I am always ready to dance salsa on Cinco de Mayo.

## **My Favorite Holiday**

*Maria Fuentes, Brooklyn Center*

My favorite holiday is Christmas because on December 24 at night all the families gather to celebrate. This is a time of peace and harmony. This is a traditional holiday because it is on the same day every year. It's a religious holiday in many countries. They celebrate the birth of the Christ child, and also in many homes they rock a baby to sleep at midnight. They also put many colorful lights on all the houses in Mexico. In every house they make different foods like turkey, fish, punch, and salads.

Everyone goes to stores to buy new clothes, usually the color red is used for Christmas. I like this holiday because all families get together to share, and I like that people receive many gifts. Also the next day you don't work, everyone stays home and spends time with the family.

## What I Like about My Village

*Atong Kue, Brooklyn Center*

When I lived in Laos, I lived in the village of Yondngoum. The village of Yondngoum is in the Peak District of Xiengkhoung in the province of Laos. It is in the northern part of the country.

I like my village very much because it's not too hot and it's not too cold. In the summer, the highest temperatures are between 70-75 Fahrenheit and in the winter, the lowest temperatures are between 20-25 Fahrenheit. I also like this village because it is relaxing in the spring. In Yondngoum, the farmland is rich. My family grows rice, corn, potatoes, and squash. I like that my village is in the mountains of Laos. I like to see the views from up in the mountains. It is beautiful as it is like living in the wild. You can hear birds and monkeys in the morning and night.

Additionally, the people in the village are also very nice. We all know each other and help each other out like family. During the rice season, the village will help my family harvest and then my family will help others. We do that with no charge. It is a partnership. I really miss my village. I have a lot of memories from there. I especially like my fishing memories from my family's farm.

Finally, transporting students to school is different in my country than in the U.S. In my village, from 6:30 to 8 in the morning the students ride their bicycles and walk in the streets to get to school. The kids do not ride a school bus. The cars have to share the streets with the students. It is not like in this country where the people drive to work in the morning and there are no students in the streets.

*Atong Kue is originally from the village of Yondngoum in Laos.*

## When I Was Ten Years Old in Laos

*Yer Lee, Saint Paul*

When I was ten years old in Laos, I watered the flowers. I took care of the chickens. I got the eggs to give my mom to cook. I was happy.

*Yer Lee is originally from Laos.*

## What I Miss About My Home Country

*Yanett Lopez Sanchez, Rochester*

My name is Yanett Lopez Sanchez. I was born in September of 1989, in Acuna City, Mexico, located just across the Rio Grande.

Acuna City is a tourist city from the food to its religious architecture. It's also known for its varied number of places and tourism attractions; they have excellent restaurants and stores where the visitors love to shop. Since moving to the U.S., I mostly miss beautiful Lake Amistad, the great Mexican food, and the warm weather.

Lake Amistad divides Mexico and Texas. I miss swimming, fishing, boating, scuba diving, and having family cookouts, but most of all camping and staying up late by the shoreline in the warm starry nights. Lake Amistad is one of the biggest man-made lakes in the U.S. Its body lies in both the U.S. and Mexico.

The food in Mexico is very spicy and almost always combined with rice, beans, and flour or corn tortillas. My favorite plate that is missed is called chile relleno. Chile relleno is a stuffed, roasted, fresh poblano pepper. It can be stuffed with cheese or ground meat, it's covered in egg batter and fried, often served in a tomato sauce if liked. I think my grandma's were the best.

Acuna City, Mexico, is a very warm country day or night. During winter it gets cold, but not like Minnesota. The weather is truly missed, especially when it's winter time up here. On warm summer nights there, my cousins and I would go to Calle Hidalgo, the main street as you enter Acuna to the night clubs.

I miss so much. Almost every time after our long nights of dancing we loved getting food from every vendor selling on each corner. The biggest and most important thing I really miss about my country is my family members. Every holiday is not the same as it used to be as I do miss something special about each one of them. On a daily basis, I mostly miss Lake Amistad, Mexican food, and the warm weather.

*Yanett Lopez Sanchez is originally from Acuna City, Mexico.*

## **I Love My Home Town!**

*Hiroko Takahashi, Minneapolis*

I love my hometown!  
I'm Hiroko Takahashi.  
I'm from Japan.  
Do you know about Japan?  
My hometown is Shimane Prefecture, West Japan,  
north of Hiroshima.  
Shimane is in the country. My town has beautiful  
mountains and rivers, big lake, and sea.  
My town has many hot springs. I love it!  
When it is cold, I'd like to be at a hot spring. If you go  
there, your body will keep hot forever.  
Izumo Taisya is the most famous place in Shimane.  
It is dedicated to the god of relationships.  
People come here to pray for a good relationship.  
Every October, all of the Shinto gods from all over  
Japan come to meet here.  
They decide if a couple is compatible or not.  
The gods selected me and my husband as an appropriate couple.  
And, we held our wedding ceremony there.  
There are a lot of favorite places in my town.  
I love my hometown, Shimane.  
If you go to Japan, you should go to Shimane!  
You will like my hometown!

*Hiroko Takahashi is originally from Japan.*

## **Untitled**

*Bilan Ahmed, Waite Park*

I lived in Syria from 2005 to 2011. Syria is a country that has good weather and easy life. In that country you don't worry about transportation because you can take buses and taxis on the streets and it isn't expensive. The food is also very cheap. Even \$200 a month is enough for a person. The Syrian people are friendly and happy to greet you even if they don't know you. You can walk in the street at midnight and it isn't dangerous. Syria has a lot of tourism; people come visit old historic buildings. I enjoyed living in Syria and will never forget the easy life in that country

*Bilan Ahmed is originally from Syria.*

## **My Town**

*Maribel Collazo, Farmington*

San Jose Iturbide is a little town in Guanajuato, Mexico. For a long time the people have worked in the textiles business. Every Wednesday you can find everything in the market.

On Sundays almost all people go to the church. When it's done the young people go to the principal garden. The girls walk around the garden, and the boys check them out. They find a boyfriend that way.

The big Fair is in February. We enjoy a lot of kinds of music (Mariachi, Banda, etc.). In the night the big fireworks illuminate all the sky and finally the Queen coronation and the dance. This is a good place to live.

## **Weather Changes**

*Farhia Ahmed, Plymouth*

Imagine when you move from the country that you grew up in and leave everything that you knew behind. Where I came from, Somalia, East Africa, the weather is so nice around the year. In my country, there's no snow or cold weather at all and it's not too hot. It's just normal. When I came to the United States, it was hard for me to deal with cold weather. The weather is too cold and changes a lot. Every day is different. When I came, I had African clothes. Then I had to change all my Somali clothes and bought Minnesota clothes. Now that I have been in the United States for twelve years, I know how to dress for every season.

*Farhia Ahmed is originally from Somalia.*

## **My Country**

*Omaima Rasheed, Lakeville*

I am writing about my country. I was born in Egypt. It is a very beautiful country. It has many tourist attractions like the pyramids, mummies, and many other things. Everyone enjoys it when they go on vacation. I try to visit my family every year because I miss my family and friends a lot. I started a new life in Saudi Arabia when I got married and I had two kids. After that I moved to the United States. When I moved to the United States I experienced many new things in my life.

*Omaima Rasheed is originally from Egypt.*

## **Fourth of July**

*Rogelio Hernandez, Lakeville*

The Fourth of July is an important holiday for all of the United States. I think most people celebrate this holiday. Some people invite guests to their houses. They may be relatives or co-workers or friends invited to have fun throughout the day. My first Fourth of July was 10 years ago, and on that day I ate different kinds of food like BBQ, seafood, fruits, and played soccer or other games. Everybody waited for nighttime to see the fireworks. It is one of the best parts of the holiday. The different colors blue, green, red, yellow, and white light up the sky. They fill the silent night with a cannon-like sound at night. My family and I went to downtown Saint Paul. My children were very happy at the end of the night, but there was a lot of traffic on the way home.

## **My Favorite Food**

*Fadumo Nur, Saint Peter*

My favorite food is goat. I like goat meat and goat milk. I cook the meat with onions, carrots, potatoes, garlic, cabbage, tomatoes, and scallions. I drink the goat milk. My family likes this meal.

*Fadumo Nur is originally from Somalia.*

## **The Holidays in the U.S.A.**

*Holly Lam, Apple Valley*

I came to the U.S.A. in 2009. During the three years I've lived here, I have had a surprise with the U.S. holidays, because they are different from my country, Vietnam.

The best of all is Halloween. When I saw the children wore Halloween costumes, went to every house and knocked on the door, I had fun. The children come back home with a lot candy, cake, and chocolate. The children kept smiles on their faces, and they were so happy!

The second holiday I like is Thanksgiving Day. The people stay home and prepare the feast. They thank God for food, for health and eat dinner together, and talk about life. It's a special day, because everyone can share a lot about his or her life.

Now, we still celebrate Vietnam holidays, but I think American holidays have a lot of people to share in the fun. That is why I feel they're the most excellent!

*Holly Lam is originally from Vietnam.*

## **New Year's Day**

*Yon Htoo, Worthington*

In my country, they celebrate their New Year's Day on January 1. Before the sunrise they wake up early in the morning and they decorate themselves and dress up their clothes. Some people go to wait for each other on the street in a group. Next, they divide people into three groups. Each group has a leader. The leader has to stand in front of the members and they have to hold the flag. When the leader gets to the place that they have prepared, all the members have to follow them.

While they are walking, one of the leaders says with a big voice, "New Year, Our New Year." Then all the members repeat it. When they get to the ball ground, they start to worship and thank the God that gives them their food and for a good life day by day. Then they pray to the Lord to forgive their mistakes that they made in the past. After that, they eat together and have a good time singing and dancing. When the party is over, they all go home.

*Yon Htoo is 25 and originally from Burma.*

## Respect

*Bol Diew, Austin*

In my tribe, Nuer, in Southern Sudan we had more respect that was admired by everyone in the community. We believe that not only should you respect the people you know, but also the people you don't know.

The way you respect yourself it should be the same as other people should respect you.

If people are disrespectful it makes life difficult for their families. If I were to be disrespectful I would have trouble getting married, and my family members could have trouble too.

You couldn't yell or embarrass at any time, wherever you are, whether you are with your age-mates or with elderly people. You should treat them like you're treating yourself. Respect is part of Nuer tradition in Southern Sudan.

*Bol Diew is 40 years old and originally from Sudan.*

## My Family Traditions and Customs

*Maria Velazquez, Brooklyn Park*

I'm from Mexico. Our tradition and custom is to spend time together at Christmas. My mother cooks great food for the whole family to enjoy. When the dinner is done my brother, sisters and cousins play games and talk about the time when we were kids. Sometimes the neighbors come to visit and join in our conversation. During the Christmas holidays, when I take vacation I like to go to my country because I see many people who I haven't seen for a long time. We celebrate a Posadas party with friends and family. A Posada party means a party with a D.J., piñatas, food, candy and games. Another tradition is to make tamales and champurrado. All these things make me and my family happy at Christmas time.

*Maria Velazquez is originally from Mexico.*

## Peace

*Anonymous, Blaine*

Every day is a new day. I learn about how people are different, the way they treat each other and communicate. When I was on a trip around the western United States, we looked for many places for children to have fun. In some states they stared or treated us different. For example, when we were at the Grand Canyon it was so beautiful I wanted to look at it, but people stared so bad I had to go sit in the car. In Seattle, Washington they treated us just like all the other groups. My family and I love to go on road trips across America. But it's hard to relax when we are being glared at. I've lived in America for 14 years. My family and I are America citizens, but we are treated different because of our religion. I think I am equal to any other American citizen. I wish most people would learn about other cultures and religions even if they don't like it because they need to respect human beings. I came to America for peace and a better life. I wish there was peace worldwide.

I took experience and used knowledge of how to speak respectfully. We use some words our parents taught us, not good or bad, but here they could be rude. I learned a lot about respectful words. One of my friends is so nice. I learn a lot about how to communicate respectfully in English. I watch her and listen to her. For example, I like so much how in personality she treats other people or me. I try to do the same thing with others.

## My Country

Leyla Bayer, Blaine

My country is Somalia in East Africa. It is on the Indian Ocean. There are two major rivers, the Juba and the Sheble. My beautiful country has good weather. I remember summertime. I will never forget my country, because I used to play on the beach. There are three seasons; summer, spring, and fall. The summer season is very hot, sometimes in the summer the people move to other states because it's very hot. Sometimes it is 100F. After, spring comes. It is very nice weather. It rains very well and makes beautiful trees and grass. My country is different from Minnesota because Minnesota has four seasons; fall, winter, summer and spring. In my country there are three seasons.

*Leyla Bayer is originally from Somalia.*

## A Winter Survivor

Gina Cuesta, Minneapolis

I came here from Cali, Colombia, the "Branch of Heaven" (it's what we call the city), where the weather is warm all year, sometimes too warm. I remember I was a little scared because of the cold weather here in Minnesota. I had listened about the many inches of snow and this was going to be new for me. I came in the winter season early in February 2012. By my fortune the winter wasn't too cold like it was supposed to be. I was very excited to see the snow. There was just a little snow, but I was still excited to see that. The winter ended and I survived, and so came the spring, the HOT summer, and so on, all the seasons with the year, and once again the winter. But this time I was not scared for the cold, I was more prepared and ready to receive the winter. Even though this year has been colder than the last one, I have been happy.

*Gina Cuesta is originally from Colombia.*



Santa Rai, Roseville

## My Favorite Food

*Maymuna Mohamed, Saint Peter*

My favorite food is anjera. Anjera is bread. It looks like a pancake. I eat anjera with meat, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, salt, and vegetables. It is not hard to make anjera. I make anjera with flour, water, eggs, and salt. I mix it in a bowl with a big spoon. I put a little oil in a fry pan. Then I put a spoonful of this mixture into the fry pan. I put the stove on medium. When it is done it is light brown. It tastes good.

*Maymuna Mohamed is originally from Somalia.*

## Halloween

*Francois Lyon, Woodbury*

Oh life, what a strange affair,  
During a day allowed to play,  
All along the way, to have fear,  
Have fun while games are in the air.  
Carved pumpkins, skulls on the stairs  
Ring the bell, press the button,  
Trick or treat is the question!  
Regardless of any opinion,  
Life's mystery, it's a lesson.  
No matter what they wear,  
Ugly masks, holy witch, or sorcerers,  
Skeleton or giant web spider,  
It's Halloween there is no scare.  
Under the stars and the banner,  
I am on my way, blown by the wind,  
Happy at least it's Halloween.

*Francois Lyon is 55 and originally from Paris, France.*

## My Push and Pull

*Ashley Her, Saint Paul*

I grew up in a big family with the name Yang. (My given name is Bliang Yang.) There were some strict rules in my culture, and we had to follow them. The first rule for girls was not to sleep with a guy. When the guy takes you back home, your parents will force him to marry you. If he doesn't want to marry you, your parents must make the guy pay money to the girl's

parents. That is the Hmong traditional rule.

My culture has used this rule for a long time. However, this rule doesn't work with Hmong people in the United States. People here don't follow that rule. Here girls can sleep with guys. Their parents can't force the guy to marry the girl because there is freedom here. People can do whatever they like.

When I was young, I loved to wear sexy clothes like short skirts, high heels, skinny jeans, and make-up. My mom didn't like it. She said I should wear a long dress that covered all my body. On the other hand, I felt good when I wore a short skirt or skinny jeans. My mom said I looked like someone who was working on the farm, and she thought my face was dirty. But I thought make-up looked good on my face. I just followed the way people in my new world acted.

I am Hmong, but I love to listen to Lao and Thai songs. I listen to rock and pop songs. My mom doesn't like it when I listen to other culture's songs. She wants me to listen to Hmong songs only because I am Hmong. And if I listen to other music, she wants me to use ear plugs!

I am trying to move forward as the world changes, but my mom is trying to pull me back. This is all about my "push and pull."

## Push or Pull

*Kao Thao, Saint Paul*

The idea of "Push or Pull" is very challenging for many new people in the U.S. It pushes for a big change in immigrants' culture in the U.S. because of the new modern style. It attracts young immigrants to change and pushes them into different habits which mean changing lifestyles and changing the way they obey the elders.

Many older immigrants are concerned about preserving their own culture here in the U.S because their kids spend most of their time in school. There they learn a new language and new knowledge, so they forget their own cultural activities and their own beautiful traditions. They speak to outsiders more than their own family members. As year after year passes, the new generation is not interested in their own family background. Old traditions are slowly disappearing in

time. Because of these reasons, most immigrants are very concerned about their kids. They try to pull their kids back so they won't change their culture. They are against all of their kids' new attitudes, behavior and beliefs.

On the other hand, it is valuable for kids to learn a second language in the U.S., too. The new language will help them find jobs, continue onto higher education, and communicate better with other people. That's why immigrants have struggled between the old culture and the new culture in the U.S.

*Kao Thao is originally from Laos*

## **Guardian Spirits**

*Cha Xiong, Saint Paul*

In Laos where I come from, many people believe in some superstitions. I am not superstitious, but I do believe in some of the cultural customs. These customs are about fighting against evil.

People believe that if you go hunting or fishing in the woods, whenever you eat breakfast, lunch or dinner, you have to feed the guardian spirits in the woods. If you do, you won't have any problems. They will bring good luck to you. They would be willing to help protect you from evil. If you don't feed them, something bad will happen to you. In the house, we also feed the guardian spirits when we have a new baby and when someone is sick and needs to call the soul to come. Even today in the U.S. we still do this.

In conclusion, people always want to be protected from evil and to have good luck. Elders today often pass these beliefs to the young people. It will probably continue in the future for those who believe in these Hmong cultural customs.

*Cha Xiong is originally from Laos*

## **Food Traditions**

*Lee Her, Saint Paul*

Hmong in America and Hmong in Laos eat the same foods, but there are also some differences. I believe

that when Hmong people came to this country, they brought traditional dishes and added new ones. The way we work for food has also changed.

In a Hmong household, traditional dishes such as boiled pork with green vegetables or boiled chicken with herbs are cooked simply. At every meal, rice is the main staple. If rice is not present at a meal, it would not be considered a meal. The way rice is prepared for meals is by steaming, and it is served in a bowl by itself.

There are many differences between American Hmong food and Hmong food in Laos. One of the differences is that in Laos, sticky rice is served, and in America, white rice is set out. In America, we eat meat more than vegetables and rice whereas in Laos more vegetables and rice are eaten than meat. The reason for that is simple. In Laos it is expensive to raise livestock and easy to grow vegetables. In America it is easy to go to the store and buy your food. I have also seen that you can stop by the side of the road for fast food. In Laos you have to grow all of your food.

If you are Hmong and whether you live in Laos or America, you have to eat rice at every meal. Although a lot of foods are bland, we have added many other kinds of food into our meals. I believe that food is very important to a culture, and what you eat is who you are.

*Lee Her is 27 and originally from Laos*

## **My Favorite Holiday**

*Mi Tu, Brooklyn Park*

My favorite holiday is Chinese New Year. The New Year holiday is celebrated in the end of January or beginning of February. It is not on the same day every year and it is a traditional holiday. All Chinese and Vietnamese will celebrate it in different countries or cities such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam. Everybody will clean and decorate their houses before New Year. When New Year is closer, people will sell a lot of trees and flowers on the sidewalk, so people can buy their favorite flowers or trees. The streets are really animated – there are a lot of people and activities going on. Besides that, Saigon deco-

rates their street with many lights and nice flowers—it looks wonderful too.

People will eat with their family on New Year's Eve and go to the pagoda on the first day of the month. People will play some kind of New Year songs, and we will wear the red or pink clothes for good luck. We also have special food for the New Year, which is cake made of steamed glutinous rice. We will keep some at home and enjoy it with tea whenever we want.

I am in the United States now, and I wish I could go back to my country to celebrate the New Year and have a warm dinner with my family every year.

## **My Home Country**

*Isabelle Adjimon, Red Wing*

I am a Togolese. My country's name is Togo. Togo is located in West Africa and borders Burkina Faso to the North, the Atlantic Ocean to the South and Benin to the East and Ghana to the West.

Weather in my home country is summer, rainy seasons, spring and "Harmattan" (fall in USA). Our first official language is French and the second is British English. But beside the official languages that we must learn at school (French in elementary school and British English in middle school), there are many dialects and we learn two of them at school. They are called Ewe and Kabye and are considered National languages and spoken on the media. Our religions include Christianity, Muslim and traditional ones.

Togo is an agricultural country and its special products are corn, rice, coffee, cocoa, fruits, and vegetables. There are two big rivers called Mono and Oti. Our country has many cattle farms, and zoos. In our zoos you can see lions, tigers, snakes, some birds, and others. Those zoos are for tourism and they are few because it is not easy to find and buy those animals for business. But most of them are kept in the national zoo and are disappearing. So our Government is fighting to take care of and keep them for generations.

Togo has many schools (public and private) in every city. We also have two official universities named: University of Lome located in the capital which is old and big, and the University of Kara in the north of the country. Besides those official universities, Togo has

many private universities.

I lived in the capital called Lome which is a very beautiful city located by the Atlantic Ocean. The beach is an open area where everybody can go for many hobbies like for exercises (especially on the week-end), swimming, or just to have fun. It is very nice and wonderful to hear the noise of waves in the night when everything is calm!

*Isabelle Adjimon is 42 and originally from Togo.*

## **Learning the Language**

*Marco Vargas, Red Wing*

My name is Marco and I was born in Mexico. Now I am in the U.S.A. I have lived in U.S.A. for eight years. I came to this country when I was only fifteen. It was really hard to start a new life in this country because of the language, culture and the lifestyle. At that age, the only language I knew was Spanish.

My story begins when I came here. I was afraid to walk in the streets or go somewhere because I didn't know where I was. My first couple of years I felt weird because I didn't know how to talk to another person in English. I was like why is it so hard to get this language? My first three jobs weren't too bad because all my coworkers spoke Spanish. Then I got another job and my English skills improved. In that job, all the people spoke just English. There were Hispanic people but they were working in another area. When I started to work in that place, I started to know more people (American people). I tried to talk with them but sometimes I just gave up. English was a new important thing in my life, so I started to learn it better. The way I improved my English was by watching TV in English with subtitles also in English and reading (with a dictionary close by). I would also practice with the American people (trying to make conversations). American people are very nice. They teach me a lot of this language. Now thanks to these people, I can go somewhere when I want. I don't feel strange anymore. Now if somebody comes to ask me something I know what they want!

*Marco Vargas is 24 and originally from Mexico.*



Justin Pfannes, Duluth

## Learning to Drive in the United States.

*Silvia H., Rogers*

My name is Silvia; I'm from Lima, Peru. Here in the USA, you have to own a car and learn to drive if you want to commute to different places. It is more a necessity than comfort. It is not like in South America, where people have a car because they like to be more comfortable. Over there, there is a variety of transportation and the bus stop could be close to your home, like a two block walk. Mostly people in Peru live in the vicinity of stores, markets, pharmacies, etc. and the majority of the time people walk.

When I came here, my priority was to learn to drive a car because I wanted to work. Sometimes, when I wanted to go out, I needed to depend on my husband and often I felt like I was bothering him, so we decided it was time for me to have a car and learn to drive it. It took me months to keep my nerves down and be more confident with myself. I was so happy when I got my license because I was pregnant, and I knew I was going to be busy getting ready for my son.

My first car was a white Subaru four-wheel drive and safe to drive in winter. Last year we sold my Subaru, and my husband bought another car, four-wheel

drive and a beautiful gold color. My son calls my car Emily because he loves Thomas and Friends, and one train has this name. Now I'm accustomed to drive every place I want to go, instead of walk. Even if I want to walk I can't because everything is far from my home and I have to drive my car.

Now I like to drive and be more independent and go places with my son, enjoying every day here in my new country.

*Silvia H. is originally from Peru.*

## Laos New Year

*Chintata Vongsoury, Brooklyn Park*

Laos New year is in April, and we celebrate for three days, April 13 through April 15. On the first day of the festival, houses and villages are properly cleaned, because we believe that April 13 is the last day of the old year. Cleaning the house means we wash bad things out and welcome in new things for the New Year. The second day of the festival is in between, neither the old year nor the new. The last day starts the beginning of the New Year. During the New Year some people will have a party at home with their families. At the party, people like to give a gift to their parents or old people. They also like to drop a little water with flowers in it on their hands and say, "Happy New Year!" Old people like to go to the temple to wish for a long and healthy life for themselves and their families. Everyone at the temple bathes the Buddha for the New Year. It is an important part of the Laotian culture. We bring the special water that we use to bathe the Buddha home, and put some on everyone's head. We believe this will make them healthy. The most important thing is the water. It's a tradition during the celebration that people like to throw water with flowers or white powder on each other and say, "Happy New Year!" If you go out during the celebration you might get wet at any time. People will throw water on you, even if they don't know you. Some people will have a big party near the river because it is easy to get water and have fun!

## Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Easter

*Tekalign Geda, Newport*

Easter is one of the most important designated religious festivals of the whole year.

Usually, Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas at a different time than other Christians. Sometimes they occur at the same time due to the Eastern Orthodox calendar which is Ethiopian Fasika (Easter).

Ethiopian Fasika lasts 55 days and includes fasting from meat, eggs and dairy products. In addition we do not eat until 3 p.m. each day except Saturday and Sunday. On those days we do not fast.

These are the rules of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church before Easter. On Easter Eve we celebrate a long service in church that ends at 3 a.m. As it ends, we celebrate the risen Christ.

## The Coconut Tree

*Zalina Khan, Brooklyn Park*

I'm writing about the coconut tree. In my home country, Guyana, South America, it can be used to make many things, like cooking oil and regular brooms for cleaning. Also, it can be used to make many kinds of foods too. For example, to make breads, cook up rice, cakes, dried food and sugar cake. These foods don't cost much money to make back home. Poor people take the branches from the trees to build houses. The stems are used to make fences. The water from the coconuts can be drunk like the juice. It has a lot of vitamins. The jelly inside the coconuts can be eaten. I miss eating my coconuts jelly with sugar! The dried jellies are used to make soaps. The dried shells from the coconut outside are used to make fire for cooking. The husks from the coconut are used to feed chickens, ducks and pigs. The fibers from the trees are used to make medicines for people to drink. This one plant is a full time job for some people back home! It was one of my jobs to pick up coconuts on the ground. I had 19 coconut trees in my back yard. The trees are tall and thin. People can climb up the trees and pick coconuts. Also, they can see for miles away.

*Zalina Khan is originally from Guyana.*

## Back to Africa

*Marwa Abubaker, Austin*

Last June my family and I had a nice trip to Africa. My kids were born here in U.S. so it was a great opportunity for them to learn a lot of things and differences between Africa and U.S.

We had traveled by airplane to Africa. Most people there use bus and train for their transportations. There are a few boats, but a lot of cars in big cities. Here in the U.S., my family and me use our car in most trips.

In Africa people eat different food, some use a lot of bread in all their meals others use rice, pasta and spicy meats. My kids miss their macaroni and cheese.

When we got there it was summer. The weather was hot and dry and some time was dusty. Here in the U.S. it was hot and humid. Summer time in Africa is the rainy season too, so we took malaria medicine and mosquitos lotion. Hopefully no one got the malaria.

Women in Africa wear colorful gowns, a few women wear jeans, here in U.S jeans are handily out fit for most women.

Our trip was a visit to my family and my husband's family in Sudan, both families live in one small town. My daughters enjoyed ridding camels and donkeys, which was fun for them. A lot of people there still use carts pulled by donkeys or hoses to move their goods and in short trips to some remote areas where cars can't travel, because they don't have roads like here.

When we were there my daughters was singing their favorite songs in English, other kids liked it though they don't know the meaning because they speak African language. People in Sudan like music, a lot of people sing songs while they work in their farms or at home. My daughters told me that they like the

Sudanese music but they don't understand the meaning.

Most people in Africa live in groups of big families. Kids are being watched by more than two grandparents and other relatives. Here in the U.S I have to take my kids to daycare if I go to work. Living within a big family has a lot of advantages, like free daycare and handy relatives; on the other hand you may lose your privacy if such a big family lives in one place.

My daughters enjoyed visiting my home country Sudan and they asked me every day when we go back to Africa again.

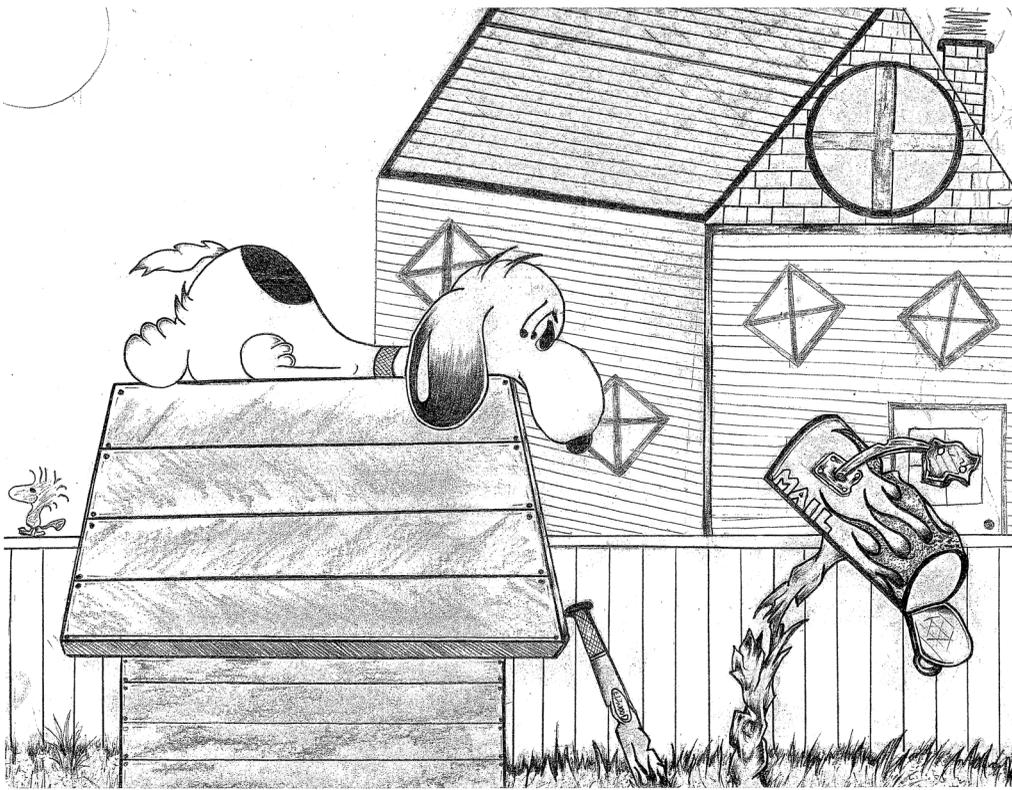
*Marwa Abubaker is originally from Sudan.*

## Home Sweet Home

*Aksana, Coon Rapids*

In Belarus, I lived in an apartment. Now, I am living in an apartment. My home in Belarus had two rooms. What I liked about my home in my native country was the balcony. What I like about my home in this country is there are big windows. We paid about \$135 each month for housing in my native country. Now, we pay about \$150 each month for housing. The rent in my native country included these utilities: gas, water, electricity, internet and telephone. The rent here includes these utilities: gas, water, electricity and internet. If I could change one thing about my home in this country, I would want to have a balcony. If I had enough money, I would move to another house because I'd like to have my own house.

*Aksana is originally from Belarus.*



*Andrew Woltjer, Saginaw*

## The Three Wise Men

*Aide A. Hernandez-Diaz, Elk River*

In Mexico people have a lot of traditions, but the most important one for me as a child was El Dia de los Reyes Magos (The Three Wise Men). When I was a kid, this tradition was very important to me because it was the day when we got presents. The three Kings brought presents to Baby Jesus when he was born, the Bible says. They made a long journey by following a bright star that led them to the King of the Jews. When they found him, they gave gifts like gold, incense and myrrh and worshipped him. So that's why every January 6, all the kids expect the Kings to show up.

And of course I expected them too, my four brothers, and all my cousins and friends. Together we had to clean our street and also put some hay for the horses or camels. On January 5th, I had to go to home to clean one of my shoes to put it where they can see it. Then we all went to bed and prayed for them to come and bring some presents. Sometimes I remember that I didn't get anything and I felt so sad because all the kids were bragging about their presents, but my Dad said that something may have happened to the king that was supposed to bring our presents and it would take more time for him to get here. Another time he sent me and my brothers to search for the gifts because probably they dropped it, so we found them on our roof. As I grew up and got more knowledge, and by peeking, I found out that the Three Kings were my parents.

*Aide A. Hernandez-Diaz is 35 years old and originally from Mexico.*

## Vacation and Celebrating Eid

*Anonymous, Fridley*

In 2006, my family and I went to the United Arab Emirates. It was a fun time for me because I got to see my family members. I hadn't seen them for a year, so we had a lot to talk about. We got to ride camels and sit on the beach. It was my first time riding a camel. It was so hot, but it was fun. The beach was beautiful and the sand was white. It was the first time I stepped in the ocean. We stayed there for a whole year. There were so many new people and places to see. We went to see my parents and brother. It was a relaxing experience.

Every year we celebrate Eid right after Ramadan. We decorate our house and buy clothes. We fast 30 days before Eid. We pray, give money to the poor, and give presents. During Eid, we eat traditional food with desserts. We cook and eat injara, a sweet cake, and halawat, a cake with chocolate and cinnamon. I bake steak and chicken in the oven and a lot of vegetables like potatoes and carrots. We drink coffee and tea. Eid is a great time for our family to get together and have fun.

## Traditional Festival

*Xin Wang, Austin*

China is a big and old country. It has a long history. So we have many traditional festivals to celebrate some people or something. Some festivals are interesting and have many stories. I'd like to introduce three big festivals.

The first one is the Spring Festival. This festival has an interesting story. In old times people were afraid of angry monster they called Nian. He is a very bad and would burn people's houses and their crops. People hated that monster. The people found a way to make the monster leave. So we make firecrackers because the sound is loud and can scare the monster away. I think it is the biggest festival. Children also put money under their pillow. We believe that the money can keep children healthy and safe. No matter where the people are, they also will celebrate the Spring Festival. Most people will come back home. They will have

dinner with their families. Their children, brothers, sisters and their parents will get together. Children like to play with firecrackers, even though it's dangerous. But it has become our tradition.

Second is the Middle Autumn day. It's also the festival that families get together. We will eat traditional food. That is the moon cake. There are many kinds of moon cakes. This festival has a very interesting story. A long, long time ago there was a beautiful woman. Her name was Change. One day her husband Houyi went hunting outside. He found a plant that could make people live forever. When someone ate it, that person can't become old and die. Houyi told Change, we can eat together. But Change can't control herself. Then she ate alone. Suddenly, her body becomes light. She became a God. She flew to the moon. Today people make different kinds of moon cake to remember Change and Houyi.

Last, I want to talk about the Tomb-sweeping Day. Many people will get together. They will burn incense and offer sacrifices at the graves of our ancestors. I think that is a very good festival. We can remember where we come from and who we are. We must respect old people even though they have died.

I like every festival. That means we have holiday. We have a lot of time to get together with our families and friends.

*Xin Wang is 25 years old and originally from China.*



Pa Thao,  
Saint Paul

## **My Favorite Food**

*Khadro Adam, Saint Peter*

I like camel meat and camel milk. It is easy to buy camel meat and milk at a supermarket in Somalia. I cook the meat on the stove with onions, tomatoes, cabbage, cumin, garlic, salt, and water. This makes soup for the whole family to eat. It is very delicious.

## **My Favorite Food**

*Zaynab Mohamed, Saint Peter*

My favorite food is sambusa. Sambusa is beef with peppers, onions, garlic, spices, and salt inside a flour breaded triangle. I eat sambusa on special occasions like Ramadan, Eide, and weddings. It is easy to make sambusa, but it takes a lot of time. Everyone likes sambusa.

## **Discover the Beauty**

*Victoria Steinhaus, Saint Peter*

When you say Romania, you say The Carpathians, The Black Sea, the Danube Delta, the monasteries in North of Moldavia, the old traditions of Maramures, the fear inspiring legend of Dracula, the taste of traditional cuisine and good wine. Romania is a beautiful country and its people are always happy to have you as guest. In Romania you can go to the seaside, fish and hunt at the Danube Delta you may well reach the highest peaks of wild mountains. The Romanian people have old roots that go back in time about two thousand years and they are well known for their hospitality.

## **Halloween**

*Aly Yang, Saint Paul*

We are back to celebrate Halloween again. Last weekend all children in America were looking to buy special clothes. They were preparing to wear them this weekend of the American culture of Halloween Day. After they waited for the time, the children ran to the doors and they knocked on our door too. They ran to go and say trick or treat, we gave some candy for everybody. It was for fun for all of the children, they ran to go to another house. They had some old man or woman who was driving and followed the children from place to place at the hour they had. Some houses turned off the lights because they didn't prepare with the candy to stay home and give for children that night. After that the children came back to their own house and everybody was happy because they got free candy. After that the parents checked the candy for children to eat. When the time was over they turned off the lights and the holiday was done.

# GOALS

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## My Success

*Camie Nath, Burnsville*

My name is Camie Nath. I grew up in Guyana, South America. When I was six, I entered elementary school. I couldn't understand anything. The other kids picked on me, so I ran away. That was when my family realized I was deaf. After that, I did not go to school. It was boring to sit around alone all day with nothing to do but clean and sleep. Every day I said to my parents, "I want to move to America." In America I can go to school, get a job, and help support our family. Finally, when I was 13, we moved to America.

In America I watched my younger sisters and brothers go to school every day. I wanted to join them. I wanted to learn everything I could so that I could get a job. After much begging, my family sent me to St. Louis Park Senior High School. I remember people using American Sign Language (ASL). At first, I didn't understand but, one month later, I was using ASL. I was so grateful to finally be able to communicate with my friends and teachers.

Now, I live in Bloomington with my sister and her husband. I entered CSD's Adult Education (AE) Program in order to improve reading, writing, and math skills. For the last nine years I have been really focusing on my U.S. Citizenship test. My teacher, who is Deaf also, is an expert in ASL and has been teaching me for four straight years. Together we've worked on improving my reading and writing skills and also, U.S. history. I hope to become a U.S. Citizen within the year. All of the communication skills I've learned at AE will serve me well as I improve my professional relationships.

Last year I decided that I was bored of just sitting around. I wanted to meet more Deaf people, so my friend and I went to the DeafNation Expo. I had never seen so many Deaf people together. They were all signing! I saw friends from high school, watched Deaf performers, and spent five hours meeting people, chatting, and visiting the booths. It was so wonderful and inspiring that we went back all three days! I've traveled to many places around the U.S.A. and always wanted to travel the world. After joining CSD's AE class and attending the DeafNation Expo, I know I can go anywhere!

*Camie Nath is originally from Guyana.*



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I moved to North America from Guyana, South America, when I was eight years old. I am so happy to find a Deaf Community here that I can connect with! In my original hometown there were no other Deaf around me and I had great communication barriers. I am currently learning a lot through my literacy classes. I want to thank my Deaf teacher for encouraging me to write this work.

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## English Class

*Gerson Elmeus, Saint Paul Park*

I remember the first time in the classroom when I met students from many countries. My first class was at Woodbury Elementary School. Every Wednesday I went to the computer class. I spoke little English, but I wanted to learn more. One day I missed the bus to get home. I was surprised because my teacher gave me a ride home. Upon arriving at home, I was satisfied and happy, and thanked the teacher.

We had a holiday party before school closed. At the holiday party, we had foods from many countries. Every student came to school with a food dish from their country. After the party, we took pictures together.

I have learned about many different countries. I met Sybah from Liberia who told me about the wild animals, and Alan told me about the good band carnival.

I am happy to be in English class because now I can speak English better. I am interested in learning it more in the future. I am happy with my teacher. She is so funny and nice to every student. She makes us relaxed, and talks with everyone in class.

## New Year's Resolutions

*Nelea Adonii, Brooklyn Park*

I love winter holidays, especially the New Year. New Year means a new beginning, a good opportunity to change something in your life, something for the better. For me personally I have many plans for this New Year and I hope they come true.

First, I decided this year to study more English. I really want this because I want to go to college. I want to be a doctor and I plan beginning to study at college in the year 2014.

Secondly, my husband and I decided to buy a big and beautiful house this year because we don't have one. Buying a house requires a lot of money; therefore we're determined to save more money for this goal. We'll try to not eat at restaurants, to go shopping less often and not buy useless things.

I hope that these plans become reality this year.

## A Different Life

*Jesus Martinez, Shakopee*

My name is Jesus. I'm from Mexico. When I came to the United States, I was sad to leave my daughter, my wife, and family. I came to the land of opportunity for a better quality of life for my family and me. I started a different life, new job, new home, and new language.

Sometimes life is very difficult here because I have to adapt to new ways, but I realized that if I work hard I can reach my dream. Learning a new language is difficult, but slowly I'm getting there. I remember when I came here and started working I didn't understand English and sometimes people asked me about the work. I just answered, "Me no English" and my boss told me, "You no English." I felt embarrassed. Now I can say, "Yes, I can help you!" I like my job. I'm a painter, and I feel good when people tell me that I did a good job and say thanks. Once I was painting my English teacher's house and she was excited because I did a nice job.

One thing I like is going shopping at the mall because I can buy many things for my daughter. When I talk with her, she tells me every day she prays to God that I have a lot of work and can come back home soon. That is very sad for me.

My dream is to have my own home and a small business, and slowly I'm getting there. The United States is giving me a home and opportunities that I didn't have in Mexico. I have been here three years and my family is very proud of everything I've accomplished. I'm eager to be back with my family.

*Jesus Martinez is originally from Mexico.*



*Manewan Lakavichit, Saint Paul*

## **Why Education is Important to Me**

*Rebecca Peterson, New Hope*

There are many reasons why education is so important to me. Education is very important because I am showing my daughter that her education will be valuable in her future as well as in my own future.

In order for you to get a great job in your lifetime you will need an education. I would love to get a great job so I can support my daughter. Also, I will want to make sure that my daughter has everything that she would need, including things she may want. In addition, I will always want my daughter to have a great Christmas and birthday each year and will need money for that too.

The next thing would be to show my daughter that if I am able to get a good education, she can as well. I want to prove to my daughter that education means a lot in this world and that it is very important for her future. The one thing that I am looking forward to is seeing my daughter Ashley succeed in her education and to make something of herself.

The final reason is to make me feel better about myself and knowing that I was able to complete my GED and finish college. Right now I do not have a job. Most people put me down for having to go on welfare when I was pregnant, but these people also have no idea why I had to do the things I did when I got pregnant. Once I can get through all of this and finally get a great job, I know my self-esteem will rise as high as the sky.

These are all of my reasons why I feel education is really important to me. I need and want a great job to support my family. My daughter is in first grade now and I want to show her that if I can do this, she can as well. I would really love for my self-esteem to go up once I complete my GED and get into college. At that point, I will feel so much better.

## **I'm Najma**

*Najma Mohamed, Minneapolis*

I'm Najma. I'm from Somalia. I came to the United States in 2009. When I was young, I liked to watch American movies because the people were running in the streets and I liked the high buildings and all the people were busy. So, now that I'm here, my dream has come true. Now I'm a mom of three kids. I go to school. I run in the street. I go to a job and I take the bus. So I'm happy.

*Najma Mohamed is originally from Somalia.*

## **My Life in My Country and USA**

*Antonio Lopez, Minneapolis*

I came to the United States because I wanted a better life. In my country it is too hard to live, and we live too poor. My hometown was humble. That's why I moved to the United States to get my dream. I like to come to the school to learn more English and get my goals. I want to go to the college because I want to be a doctor or something else.

I like to live in Minnesota. Another reason I came to Minnesota is we didn't have a good education, because we didn't have enough money to pay the school. We worked too hard to make money and we didn't have time to play something. I saw my friends. They were playing and I saw myself, that was too sad for me, but at the same time made me stronger. I want to live in Minnesota for the rest of my life.

But it's too hard without papers and with not enough education. I can't read the names of the street, because they are in English in that moment. I want to start to learn English. I started to come to the school. I am on my way now. I hope to get my dream. I am working to harder to get my dream.

## My Story

*Tiblets Tiklu, Saint Paul*

My name is Tiblets. I am from Ethiopia. I went to elementary and secondary school. After that I graduated from college for secretary and office management and I worked as executive secretary. I met my husband in 1995 at a training center. I got married on July 19, 2005. My oldest daughter was born after one year, and the youngest daughter was born after one year and five months. Then I left my work because I wanted to care for my daughter. After five years my daughter started preschool, and I started work. My husband graduated with a B.A. in accounting and worked as financial manager in government office. I wanted to come to the United States because the education is good.

So I wrote the D.V. lottery every year. Then one day I looked on the internet and I had the lottery. I was very happy. We moved to the United States four months ago and live in Saint Paul, Minnesota. It is a very beautiful city. We like the snow, the food, and the people, but the weather is very hard. My husband started work and my daughter started school. After that I started English class because I have a dream. My dream is to be a nursing assistant.

*Tiblets Tiklu is originally from Ethiopia.*

## New Year's Plans

*Francisco Tum, Brooklyn Park*

For this year, I don't think I have any special plans because I did not finish my goals last year. This time is good to stop and evaluate what happened last year, so I will continue to work toward the same goals. My time should be spent concentrating on different areas: my family, school, job and figuring out where to spend my money in my life. Regarding this time, I need to exploit it to the maximum.

Another area is health because I need to take care of my family. For me it is important to check what kind of food is better for the economy and for health because after 40 years we need to use more precaution. In this aspect I have a benefit because my wife cooks everyday and we eat fresh; my family does not buy fast food. I have good expectations for this year.

## My Dreams

*Leocadio Marquez, Minneapolis*

My name is Leocadio Marquez F. and I am from Durango, Mexico. I came to the United States 24 years ago. My four sisters and my brother are here in the United States, but my sister Bony and my dad live in Mexico. I miss them a lot, but I have a computer and I'm on the internet, so we e-mail each other all the time. I work full time at Khan's Mongolian restaurant. I prep and cook. I don't have much free time, but I enjoy music, especially ranchera and romantic. On Sunday evenings I go to church.

Right now, I'm studying English and I plan to start my own business in my country. I would like to have a restaurant bar because I would like to work for myself and save money for my family's future. I hope everything that I want will come true. There are many dreams in my mind. My other dream in my life is the most important for me, to tell others about respect for everybody because respect is a big part in everybody's lives.

Someday I would like to live with all my sisters and brother and my dad in the same town because we like to live close to each other. I have four kids, two girls and two boys. I love them a lot. My wife wants to stay here but I want to go back to Mexico.

*Leocadio Marquez is originally from Durango, Mexico.*

## My Life

*Joyce Peter, Austin*

I don't know what I can do with my life, but I have two children and I need help with my children. I'm a single mom. I don't have a job. I look like I'm suffering all my life, but in my future, I want to push myself in school but I don't know reading and writing, but I try to push myself. I pray to God, thanks for my mom and my dad.

## **A Different Place**

*Nay Moo Taw, Saint Paul*

My name is Nay Moo. I am originally from the Karen state in Burma. My village is called Klen Mu village. My wife's name is Corina and I have four sons.

In 1997, SPDC (the government army of Burma) attacked my village and killed animals and burnt the houses. Many villagers ran away to another village. The villagers dared not to live in our own village. All villagers moved to a different place to feed our family.

My family moved to Mae La Oon refugee camp. We started to move to Mae La Oon in 2002. We stayed in the refugee camp for 10 years. After 10 years, my family moved to the state of Minnesota in the U.S.A. We arrived in Minnesota on October 1, 2012. Since January 7, 2013, I have been learning English, grammar, and speaking English language at Open Door Learning Center.

In the future, I am going to learn more English language because I want to find a job and speak with my job counselor by myself. Another aim is to be a good interpreter. If my country has freedom, I will go back to educate our community in my country. That is my hope.

*Nay Moo Taw is originally from Burma.*

## **School**

*Ta Vang, Saint Paul*

My name is Ta. I am from Laos. I have 11 sisters and one brother in my country. I have two mothers.

I am very happy right now. I live in Saint Paul, MN. I have been here for three years in the United States. I am a student in the English class at Open Door Learning Center. I don't know how to speak English, but I want to learn more English. I want to speak to my friends and other teachers in my school and I want to speak to American people, so I am very happy to see my teachers and my friends in school. Thank you to my teachers for helping students to learn English.

*Ta Vang is originally from Laos.*

## **Untitled**

*Juan Cabrera, Bloomington*

Hi my name is Juan. I am from Mexico. I came here in 1999. I was 19 years old when I arrived in California. In 2002, I came to Minnesota. I miss my own country, the culture, and holidays. I hope to go back to my country soon, but sometimes I feel scared because the violence is high in Mexico. But my dream is to return to my own country one day.

*Juan Cabrera is originally from Mexico.*

## **My Family, Past and Present**

*Alicia Trujillo, Chandler*

I moved to California from Michoacán, Mexico about 21 years ago. Then we moved to Oregon, and then to Chandler, Minnesota about 12 years ago. We came to the U.S. to find a better life for my family.

I have one sister in Mexico, two sisters and three brothers in the U.S., and one brother in Minnesota. With me in Chandler, I have a husband, one daughter, and one son. One son in Willmar and one daughter in Marshall are going to college.

I remember my father and mother in Michoacán, Mexico. My dream is to bring my parents to Minnesota. I love all of my family and think of them often.

*Alicia Trujillo is originally from Mexico.*

## **My Life**

*Philo Yang, Minneapolis*

My name is Philo Yang and I came to Saint Paul in 1991. In 1992, I had hearing loss. I was one year old. I didn't have a sign language on my hands. My mom didn't know how to communicate with me in sign language. My mom tried to use gestures and I copied my mom. My teacher taught me and I learned a sign language from school in 1994. In 1996, I was transferred to another school named the Anne Sullivan Communication Center. I learned general education (math, reading, writing, science, social studies, PE). I was there from kindergarten through 8th grade, then I graduated that school.

In 2005, I transferred to a high school in Saint Louis Park. I was in 9th grade. Our deaf program closed in 2006. In 2006, I transferred to another high school named Southwest High School. I was there from 10th grade through 12th grade and I learned in both the Deaf class and the hearing class for general education. I did not feel comfortable and I did not like Southwest High School. I was in 12th grade and I quit school.

I transferred to another new school named Vector Transition Program. I took auto body classes at Hennepin Technical College. I liked auto body class. I learned how to clean and fix cars. I took this class for the 1st semester and finished in the 1st semester. Then I quit. I didn't want to take a second semester of that class again. I took culinary arts class and I earned kitchen skills. I learned to cook from recipes, watched cooking movies, made food and dessert recipes, and learned a lot about cooking any food, vegetable, baking, and soup with a recipe. I really loved cooking class. I still take culinary arts classes for my 3rd and 4th semesters. I am 21 years old and I graduated with a high school diploma from Vector Transition Program. I really want to take culinary arts classes for 4 years of college and get my bachelor's degree.

## My Story

*Mohamed Ketsane, Minneapolis*

My name is Mohamed. I am from Somalia. I was born in Kismayo, Somalia. When I was young, I lived and grew up in a Kenya refugee camp.

When I was young I went to high school in Hagadera, Kenya. I went to Kuja Special Secondary School for the Deaf in Kenya. I attended a central primary school in Hagadera, Kenya.

I came to the United States of America in 2007. I arrived in Phoenix, Arizona, but I hated the heat in Glendale, Arizona. Then I moved from Arizona to Minneapolis, Minnesota. I have been in the United States for six years and I am living in Minneapolis. I love to live in Minneapolis.

I am in Adult Education classes. But I want to learn more English grammar and vocabulary so I can go to college. I just want my GED in career arts

and education. I got a job at Pitney Bowes in Fridley, Minnesota. I very happy when I got the job at Pitney Bowes.

*Mohamed Ketsane is originally from Somalia.*

## My Jobs

*Dung Nguyen, Brooklyn Center*

I am from Vietnam. I have lived in the U.S. for one year. I have two jobs: interpreter and cashier. My first job is an interpreter for Fairview Hospital. I work as interpreter only on Friday and Saturday. This job is hard, but I try to get better. I go to the hospital to talk with patients and doctors. Everything about medication is difficult for me. I have to start to learn new things I have never known, but now I am confident about myself for the future. My second job is cashier for Marshalls. I work with many people from many countries. It helps me to learn about their culture. That job helps me to communicate. I feel good about myself now; one year ago, it was hard for me to communicate in Minnesota. My life has changed— it is getting better and better.

*Dung Nguyen is originally from Vietnam.*

## I Am a Black Man

*Paul Jones, Minneapolis*

I am a black man  
I wonder if there will ever be peace in the world  
I hear gunshots all the time  
I see bodies lying on the ground  
I want peace on earth, for

I am a black man  
I pretend that everything's all right  
I feel the fear of people in my community  
I touch the hearts of the young people  
I worry about the kids in the community  
I cry because I understand, for

I am a black man  
I understand there will be peace on earth someday

I say this in the name of the Lord  
I dream about it every night  
I am a black man

## The Four Seasons in My Cell

*T.C Hamline, Hibbing*

The four seasons in my cell  
One year and a day  
Sun shines on occasion  
My Fall is underway  
Dark clouds surround my head  
The coldness of the rain  
Lonely are the nights  
I drown and freeze in pain  
Soon the morning comes  
When winter is upon me  
Frostbitten black the soul inside

Bare branches every tree  
Half a year has past  
What will the next one bring?  
Sprouts of my survival  
Blooms of hope in spring  
Still the clock ticks slowly  
Count the tallies and their cease  
The last season in my cell  
And the summer brings release

## My Dream

*Abdi Hillowle, Minneapolis*

My name is Abdi Hillowle. I am from Somalia and I am 21 years old. When I was a young boy my dream was to become a rich man, to help many people and to have peace in my country. Now, I don't live in my country. However, to become a rich man is not easy and one needs to work harder and be able to speak English fluently in this country. English is not my first language, as a result speaking, writing, and reading was my biggest problem. So I decided to go to school. My English level was one, because I was unable to speak and write English well. Even holding a pencil was hard for me. I used to learn one word everyday and I was

becoming confident and working everyday to reach my goal. I never missed a class because I used to think if I miss one lesson I failed my goal. As time goes my English became better and my writing improved. English became my second language. If it is not possible for me to become rich man, I want to become a nurse. I want to be a respectable man in any country I may go to. Lastly, if I reach my goal and make money, I will use it to help my people and also get the best lady in the world. I am thankful to God and second the United States where I have opened my eyes.

*Abdi Hillowle is 21 and originally from Somalia.*

## Don't Give Up, Try Again

*Hla Tin, Saint Paul*

I'm afraid when I don't understand some people who talk to me, and when some people speak very quickly and not clearly. I worry that my English is bad and that I don't have correct pronunciation skills. I need a plan to study English. First, I will practice more and more, and talk with American children or adults in my neighborhood. Second, I will make friends with old American people and help them when they need help. Then, I will feel more confident and speak more politely. And when I walk outside, if I see other people, I will say hi and smile.

I think I will be happier when I will be able to communicate more easily in English. I will be more comfortable; I won't get nervous when I talk to American people. I will try my best to be very good at English.

*Hla Tin is originally from Burma.*

## Family

*Joel Rojas, Apple Valley*

Hello, my name is Joel. I came from Mexico in 2000 to try to make a better life. I cannot complain about my life here because I've made some of my dreams come true. However, I would be happier to have all my children with me and be able to watch them smile and be happy.

*Joel Rojas is 33 and originally from Mexico.*

## America Gave Me a New Life

*Kyin Hla, Saint Paul*

My name is Kyin Hla and I come from Burma. I live in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I went to school in Burma for 9 years. I studied Burmese, math and some English.

When I try to speak English, I am afraid when some people talk too fast and I don't understand. I don't know what to say and their meaning is not clear. Sometimes, I don't understand the English language.

I need to make a plan to study my English. First, I will practice reading and writing. Every day, I will read an English story out loud. Second, I will use the dictionary. When I can't understand new words, then I will write the new words in my notebook. Third, I will speak in English with people who are talking. Next, I will try to go to school four days a week. I will speak English with my friends. Finally, I will read a newspaper and watch cartoon movies every morning.

I think I will feel comfortable when I dare to improve my English.

*Kyin Hla is originally from Burma.*

## I Want to Help Orphans and Elderly

*Daw Nyo, Maplewood*

My name is Daw Nyo. I came from Burma. I live in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I went to school in Burma for almost 9 years; I studied English, Science, Math, History, Geography and Burmese. I want to learn English reading, writing, speaking, listening, and understanding very well one day. I want to help people who belong to the ethnic minorities in Burma.

In my country, the Burmese soldiers came to the village and they shot at the people. Usually, the children have no more parents and no clothes, education or food. I want to help these children, but I am in the U.S. and I have no job. Some men and women there are very old and can't run anymore. They have no food. I want to give them clothes and food.

*Daw Nyo is originally from Burma.*

## Things I Noticed

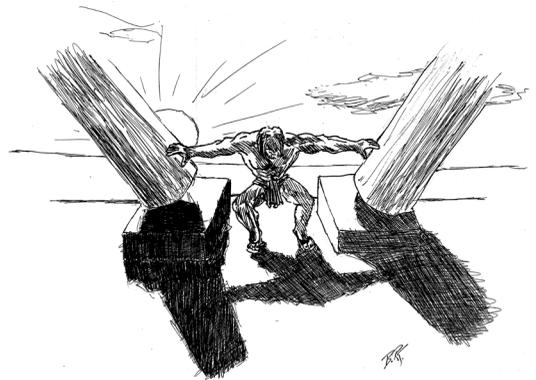
*Laetia Malungu, Minneapolis*

I'm Laetia Malungu. I'm from Congo. I have been living in the U.S. since November 2011. When I was in my country, I was a student who used to pass all my days at school, Monday through Friday. Now I'm living in Minnesota. The first thing I can mention is the weather. You know why? Because my country is a tropical country— no winter, just spring and summer.

The second thing I noticed was the English. How can I say this or that? You need English for everything. I feel comfortable and decided to take English class now. I'm feeling good even though I don't speak it very well. But at least I can understand and answer some questions because my English class helps me a lot.

The third thing I noticed: You need to be responsible and independent. I remember when I was in my country my mom did everything for us but here I need to work to save money because I'm planning to go to college and be more responsible. Thinking about all of these things drove me crazy but I believe that it's time for me to grow.

*Laetia Malungu is originally from Congo.*



*Brett Sanko, Carlton*

## **American Journey of a Colombian Dreamer**

*Patricia Garcia, Minneapolis*

When a dream comes to your mind, it starts knocking at your heart to let it become real, this just wants you open your life door for burning throughout your veins; making your dream tangible is just an issue of time and for sure, everything will be ready for it for a reason. This happened to me. Here is a little bit of my story.

My name is Patricia, I am from the tropical and wonderful country, Colombia, in South America. There, I was a hard-working college student full of goals and energy, a lover of languages and cultures, always having the feeling to travel around. Before I was celebrating my graduation on April 23, 2010, I realized where to go and what to do; in fact, that dream started burning throughout my veins! That was the beginning of my best and saddest experience in my life.

Saddest realities had come to my mind: knowing the few possibilities to make my dream true since studying had taken most of my funds and my dad was getting sick by then; however, a dream is more powerful, knowing new people, places, cultures and a piece of this wonderful world, made me think everything is possible. I realized how important it is to get an exciting experience of a foreign country. I kept it in my mind as a precious treasure working hard and saving up for my new life journey. These were long harmonious years of learning.

My last days in Colombia were ones of sadness and happiness, I shared special moments of long conversations, hugs and tears with my family, we prepared extraordinary dinners together and celebrated my farewell with all my friends and relatives.

That August, my American journey started. I was sad because I knew I would miss everything around me, especially my mom. Nobody else throughout the world loves and takes care of me as she does. That year was full of amazing experiences. This has been my best experience since I am getting experience in teaching Spanish, knowing new amazing people, traveling throughout the country, and learning English.

Now, I am taking advantage of what I am living in each instant because I know time flies and life is

a precious branch of lessons, in which things happen for a good reason. This story is a sample of how much life helps us to figure out which way we really want to take, putting us to the test. We just need to believe in our hopes and desires within our heart. The journey still continues.

*Patricia Garcia is originally from Colombia.*

## **Can I Do It?**

*Abdulkadir Omar, Hopkins*

When I came to America, I thought I would have a bright future and an easy life. But it wasn't that way when you are a newcomer and everything is new for you. The hardest part is the language. When I was new to the country, one day I asked myself 'what am I doing here?' It was my dark day. I remember when I came to America, even though it was daylight, it was a dark day for me. But I have to work hard to get out of it. I didn't go far enough yet. But I am out of the dark day and I am working hard. I go to school. I have my kids here. I get job interviews and jobs. I want to earn a degree down the road. Can I do it? That's the question.

## **Have a Nice Life**

*Lucinda Zhang, Owatonna*

My name is Lucinda. It's my real first name now, because I changed it. You may ask me, why you wanted to change your name. That is a long story, but I just want to tell you that it's a lucky name, and it changed my life. It let me meet a lot of nice people. I came to the United States six years ago from China. I had never been to school, so my English was very bad. I wanted to improve my English; however, I didn't have a lot of time to go to school.

I married my husband one year ago, and I have an almost five month old boy. He is very cute, and I am working very hard. When I come home, my son smiles at me and I can't feel tired anymore. I feel hopeful and full of life.

I have lived in Owatonna for two months. I like

it here, but it's too cold. I have trouble with one other thing, I can't drive. The last time I went to take the driver's test I did not pass, because it's a test in English. It's hard for me now. I want to try again, but my family doesn't have the time to practice my driving with me, so I'm waiting on that. I hope I can pass my driver's test. I want to be able to drive my family around.

*Lucinda Zhang is originally from China.*

## **What Was My Dream in America?**

*Pa Thao, Saint Paul*

My dream in America is to go to school, because I stayed in my country. My mother and my father didn't let me go to school. After I'm married, I went to America. I was going to school for the first time. The teacher asked me, "What is your name?" I didn't know what to say to the white teacher. My face got red and I was shy. I looked away. I hold my hands together, my heart is beating, but one man who is Lao asked me in Lao if I speak English. I said to him in Lao that I came to the America for only a week; I don't know anything.

After I went home, I told my husband I want to go back to my land. My husband says, "No, no, your brain is not working,"

I said, "No, I don't know how to speak English; I want to go home,"

My husband says I'm not a man; I am a woman and married. I have to stay with my husband. I cried, but I don't what to do any more. My mother-in-law says not to cry, I can go to school, so it can help me. Right now, I go to school and learn more English to help me, exactly the same thing that my mother-in-law to says to me before.

## **What is Your Dream in America?**

*Min Soe San, Saint Paul*

I am from Burma, but I am not Burmese. I am Karen. Karen is an ethnic group in Burma.

I love Burmese, but I don't like Burma's government. They don't want to govern the people. They need to also spoil all the other ethnics.

So my dream is have all people around the world, to know about Burma's government what is base on the people. Also I need to change my life and situation, because I can't read, write and speak English very well. Next, as of now I am healthy. However, before I die, I can plan for my dreams to come true.

*Min Soe San is 51 and originally from Burma.*

## **A Good Place to Learn English**

*Huong Luu, Savage*

I had a lot of feelings when I came to the United States. I felt happy to meet all of my relatives, and I was so excited to see the sights. In addition, I was very worried about my life in the United States.

What must I do to adapt myself to circumstances in this new country? After being here for a month, I studied ESL in Los Angeles, California. Although I felt that California was a good place to visit, I decided to move to North Dakota to live with my younger brother. After several months, we moved to Minnesota because my brother was planning to attend the University of Minnesota. My English improved fast in Minnesota. There have been many English classes that I could join. The teachers in these schools have been very nice and friendly. They have been ready to explain in many different ways what I have not understood. Moreover, I have been able to use the computer to find helpful websites for learning. Using the computer at school is a helpful method for immigrants who live in Minnesota.

Now, I am very happy and lucky to be receiving a good education in Minnesota. It helps me to be able to plan and control my future. I want to say thank to all my teachers and ABE for these educational opportunities that I have had.

*Huong Luu is 36 and originally from Vietnam.*

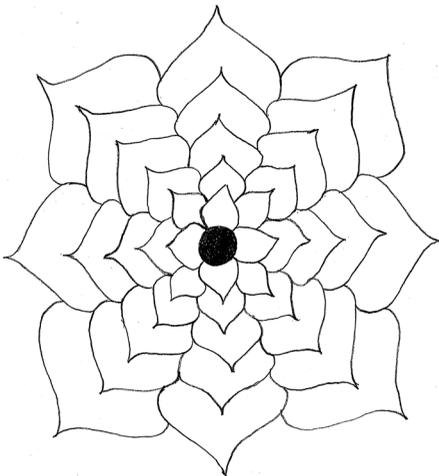
## My Dream

*Anonymous, Apple Valley*

When I came to Minnesota it was wintertime. There was a lot of snow. When I saw it for the first time I thought that I could not survive in that weather for two months. I couldn't go anywhere. I stayed at home, watched TV and talked on the phone with friends who were living in another state. Although that was fun, after a few months I looked for a job and a school. I enjoy talking with people in both of these places because it helps me to improve my English.

After living here for three years, I married and I had a child named Solina. She is now four years old. I have plans to have one more child. I continue to go to English class and work part time. My mom lives with us. I have two sisters back home that I help financially. My dream is coming true.

If you have a dream you must be strong and work hard to see them become reality. Thanks, God. God Bless America.



*Lacey Upton, Forest Lake*

## Life in the United States of America

*Anonymous, Eagan*

I found it very difficult living in America. Money was a major problem. Getting someone who I could afford to watch after my kids was difficult. I could not find a babysitter that I could afford. Working at a fast food restaurant did not provide enough for my family.

Time management was something I had a hard time with as well. I needed to learn how to balance my work with my family. I never wanted my children to feel like I could not spend time with them or that I was resented them in any way. Working nights and waking up the next morning to spend time with my kids was hard at times, but I still handled it well.

Learning the English grammar and vocabulary was hard for me. Pronunciation was also very difficult due to my accent. Another reason why school was so difficult was because I had to wait so long in order to go back to further my education. I had to raise my children and get a job so my family would have a source of income.

## The Key

*Erik Lundeen, Saint Michaels*

I am content with where I am  
Although it is not where I would like to be.  
I will sit and forecast the future,  
And hopefully perpetuate Thee.

I constantly strive for perfection  
And hopefully the judge will see  
That I am better than what I have been doing  
And that is the real me.

I was sober for four years  
Except for smoking trees  
But that is what got me into this mess;  
Meth and alcohol brought me to my knees.

Forgiveness is forgiving  
And soon the world will see.  
This time the lock will open  
Because I have the proper key.

## Hopes and Dreams

Allen Neubeck, Brooklyn Park

I'm hoping to receive my General Education Diploma soon; I need to have this done by December 31, 2013. When you are in school, you need to pay attention to your teachers. If not you'll be missing out on a lot of valuable information that they have to offer. I always sit near the front of the class, so I can hear and learn from the teachers. I've been going to school for approximately two years now. My lessons at Adult Basic Education are almost done. Once I earn my General Education Diploma, I'll be closer to my dreams. Right now I have so many dreams, I can't even make up my mind where I need to go. I will need to choose the perfect college or a technical university, so I can achieve my dream. I've had a wonderful journey here at the Adult Basic Education Center in District 279. Now I need to focus on a real job, so I can make lots of money. When my pockets are full, then I can make a real donation to District 279.

*Allen Neubeck is originally from the U.S.*



*Nanyia Thao, Saint Paul*

## My Dream

Coumba Cisse, Brooklyn Park

My name is Coumba Cisse; I was born in Mali, West Africa. I am the second daughter of my family. I came to America with my husband and kids in 2001. To get a job was not easy because of my lack of English. I got a job in a hair-braiding salon making \$75.00 dollars a week working Monday to Sunday from 9 a.m. to whenever they closed. That was not enough to take care of my family. I needed to come up with something lucrative. So, my sister told me to move to Minnesota for more opportunities. We moved in 2001. I went to school for three months; then I took the test to become a nursing assistant. I graduated within two weeks, and I got a job at Hillcrest of Wayzata. I stayed there for three years. In 2005 I got hired at Bethany Covenant Village and stayed until they went out of business in 2008. Then I started working as a nursing assistant at Shalom Home West. I am very proud of myself, happy and grateful for my life. Coming here with no English skills and now taking my GED classes for college to become a nurse is amazing to me.

*Coumba Cisse is originally from Mali.*

## Hopes and Dreams

Lee Meng, Brooklyn Park

When I was a kid, I lived in a village called Ban Vient-Khaug. It is located in the mountains in Laos. We did not have electricity from the city, so we produced the energy we needed from the river. If we needed to go to town, it took three to four hours to walk because we didn't have any transportation. One day my father went to town and he bought an American movie. The movie had tall buildings and a lot of traffic. I thought the movie must have been made in New York City. Everything looked nice, organized and beautiful. After I saw the movie, I started to have dreams that I would live there someday. But I didn't know where it was and how to get there! In 2000, when I was in high school, I knew the place I wanted to go and live

was the United States of America. My high school was great, but I was upset because I didn't get to learn English. The students, who got to learn English, had to pay for the classes. In 2004-2005 the time I was in college I started to teach myself English. In 2007, a woman came to Laos on a vacation; we met and fell in love. In 2009, I left my country for America and went to marry her. Now I am currently living in Minnesota, going to Adult Basic Education in the Osseo School District; and I work at Menasha Packing, INC. I hope that one day I can go to college again to get a degree. I will try my best to be patient and reach my goal. I want to go back to my home country and visit all my friends and family that I have in my memories.

*Lee Meng is originally from Laos.*

## **Hopes and Dreams**

*Sergio, Brooklyn Park*

Hopes and dreams are something that exists in almost everybody and I am one of them. When I was a little boy, I always dreamed about having many material things in my life. I would dream about a new truck, horses, cows, and a new house. However, the reality is no one can get something without effort. When I was a young boy, I thought about working two jobs and saving money. I thought I could get all the things I dreamed of. Today, I can see that life is very different compared with what I thought when I was young. Today, my hopes and dreams are to get an education and then pursue a career. Although, the road to getting an education is not easy; I need to motivate myself and get through all the obstacles that arise in my road.

*Sergio is originally from Mexico.*

## **Hopes and Dreams for My Children**

*Tawni Boos, Brooklyn Park*

I have a hope and dream that my kids will make better decisions than I made. I don't want my kids to struggle in everyday life like I have. I want them to finish school so they can have a career; and not go from job to job like I did. When I was young I was living from foster home to foster home. I gave up on school because I got frustrated switching schools so often. I soon realized that I needed a G.E.D or high school diploma to get the job I wanted. My kids know how hard it was for me to get them things they needed. I felt bad that I couldn't get them what they wanted. My kids know by finishing school, they could accomplish anything in life. I want my kids to be proud of themselves. I have worked hard to teach my children what they could have in life, if they continue not to give up. I already see that my kids are working hard. My children know how much I have struggled and life doesn't have to be that way for them.

*Tawni Boos is 41 years old and originally from the USA.*

## **My Hopes and Dreams**

*Anonymous*

I want to talk about my hopes and dreams that I want to become true in my life. If there is a tomorrow.

First of all my hope is in God because he is the only one that can help me. He is the only one that can give me life because without life there is no hope and I say this because I have seen many people with sickness suffering and they feel that the hope is ending because of the pain in their bodies. Second, my big dream is to go back to college, get a degree, and to have a better life. Also I would like to help people. That will make me feel good and proud of my life. Finally, I would like to see a better world with better people. I mean a place without discrimination, without hate, and without enemies. A place where all people can get along and help one another like a big family.

But I want to focus on this; everyone has to cooperate and think positively because a good attitude makes a big difference and the most important, big

and powerful thing is respect because if you respect people, people will be respectful. If a culture respects another culture the other one will respect too. That's why I think that everything goes with respect.

## Education

*Halimo Yusuf, Minneapolis*

Education is important to me and everybody in the world. Because every country wants to contact other countries, they help each other and communicate to understand people between other countries and group organizations. They want to work together. If people don't have education, they won't communicate with each other, but they have many reasons to work with people in the world.

Education is hard to reach because people must spend too much time and money. Education grows like something with life. It starts at K-12, then 12 to college, then college to university. After university people get experience, something in his or her life until life's end. I like people to have an education because I believe that a person knows how to help other people if they want his or her help.

I like all teachers in the world. Every place has somewhere to study called school. Every school has teachers, every teacher has different knowledge. But all are called teachers in the world. I would like to be a teacher assistant as soon as I can. What should I do? I study more and I want improvement in my reading, writing and speaking. Then I will start my program when I am finished. I hope to get everything in my dream, because I believe education is life.

*Halimo Yusuf is originally from Somalia.*

## My Goals

*Lourdes Hernandez, Minneapolis*

When I was in high school in Mexico, my English teachers were not able to speak English. I wanted to learn English but it was very hard. The teachers gave us the papers to answer the questions. Sometimes I didn't understand and I translated them. When I came to United States, I decided to really learn English, both speaking and writing and understanding very well. In 2012, I started to come to Minnesota Literacy Council Learning Center on Lake Street and 27th Ave.

One reason I want to learn English is so I can volunteer in my son's school and other places too, like community organizations, parks, or churches. At MLC there are good classes. I am in conversation and Advanced Class and college and career preparation. But I would like to get in the GED class and get the GED so one day I can have a good job.

I'm taking sewing class and learning how to use the sewing machine. One thing I wish to learn is how to make clothes for me and my family. With this writing I am practicing how to write very well with good grammar.

*Lourdes Hernandez is 28 years old and originally from Mexico.*

## Never Give Up

Jacquelyn Williams, Fridley

My name is Jacquelyn W. Williams. I am 33 years of age. I came to Minnesota in 2006 from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I have two children, both boys, ages thirteen and ten. They live with their father in Laporte, Indiana. I'm currently taking my GED classes at ABE in Colombia Heights. During this period of time I became very discouraged because everything seemed to start happening to me all at once. I felt like this was a test of my faith.

For example, my oldest brother died of a massive heart attack last year. I had to take time off from school. Immediately after returning I became easily distracted. Shortly after that, my mom became ill and was diagnosed with a tumor in her abdominal area. She was told she had to undergo surgery.

Shortly after that she became ill again this time she experienced a stroke and temporarily paralyzed on her right side. She was hospitalized for 30 days and had to attend inpatient physical therapy until she gained her strength back. She was finally discharged and was told she needed 24 hour care so my other siblings and I decided to rotate caring for her on a schedule, which required time off from school.

Meanwhile, I was experiencing back pains from a previous car accident so I was receiving steroid shots for pain. It just so happened that these shots were all over the news saying they were tainted and causing deaths in large numbers. I experienced excruciating back pains and of course, that also required time off from school.

But here I am in January 2013, still standing. I have completed four GED tests and have one more to go, and I still haven't given up, so all that goes to say, NEVER EVER GIVE UP...IF I CAN DO IT SO CAN YOU!



Primi Manteiga, Chandler

## A Mother's Dreams and Hopes

Ruth Salas, Brooklyn Park

At age 20 I became a young mother to a beautiful baby boy. As a mother I have big dreams and hopes for my son. I see him grow everyday by learning and exploring the world. He is now two and half years old and I think to myself, "Where will he be twenty years from now?" I hope his future is full of accomplishments and achievements. First and most important is happiness in life. I hope he earns a diploma and attends college and is well educated. I hope he finds a career and enjoys his life to the fullest. When he becomes a responsible mature man, I hope he starts a loving family and becomes a great father. I would love to be involved with my son and grandchildren's lives. I will always try my best to support him in all his decisions and be the best mother I can be.

*Ruth Salas is originally from Mexico.*

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