

Journeys

An Anthology of Adult Student Writing

2016

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

The Minnesota Literacy Council extends our heartfelt thanks to Ellen Fee, Anna Heinrich, Gabriela Nesheim, Nehemiah Nesheim, Lecam Trang and Rachel Yang who have donated their time and talent to the planning, design, editing and production of this book. Special thanks also to staff Lynette Ward, Liam Shramko, and Debbie Cushman for helping make Journeys a success.

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

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Go to mnliteracy.org/journeys for the Journeys Teaching and Learning Guide.

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From the Director

Of all the ways the Minnesota Literacy Council intersects with our communities, *Journeys: An Anthology of Adult Student Writing* is one of the most visible. In this 27th edition you will find stories that are familiar, surprising, difficult to hear, uplifting and uniquely human. It's our true privilege to be able to showcase these voices. In publishing this anthology each year, we are living our core values:

Promote the power of learning. We believe lifelong learning improves lives. *Journeys* offers a place for learners of every ability, age and background to share their stories.

Maximize human potential. We believe individuals maximize their potential through teaching, learning and community involvement. *Journeys* encourages adult students to test the limits of their prior experience, offering first-time publication for most contributors.

Energize communities. We believe building literacy skills create productive and sustainable communities. *Journeys* facilitates new connections among learners, teachers, volunteers and community members as they prepare submissions and authors read their pieces at public events.

Foster inclusion. We believe that being intentional in fostering diversity and inclusion is essential to rich collaboration and realizing our vision. *Journeys* welcomes entries from each and every student statewide who wants to provide a submission.

Advance equality and justice. We believe that open access to educational opportunities creates more just and peaceful communities. *Journeys* has grown into a much-anticipated annual publication for Minnesota adult basic education students along with their teachers, families and supporters.

Lead the way. We believe in providing pathways for groups and individuals to create meaningful change. With *Journeys* we create a space for learners from the 350+ adult basic education programs statewide to come together and speak on behalf of communities that are too often left on the sidelines.

The annual creation of *Journeys* is a time-intensive project that harnesses the collective power of many staff and interns. Please see the acknowledgements section for a full listing of everyone who worked on this edition. Additionally, in the assembling of the anthology, minimal editing is done to ensure the tone and voice of our authors remains intact.

Thank you for your support of *Journeys* and over 600 authors and artists published in this edition. Having these voices heard creates a new community every year of which we are so proud. Enjoy reading.



Eric Nesheim
Executive Director

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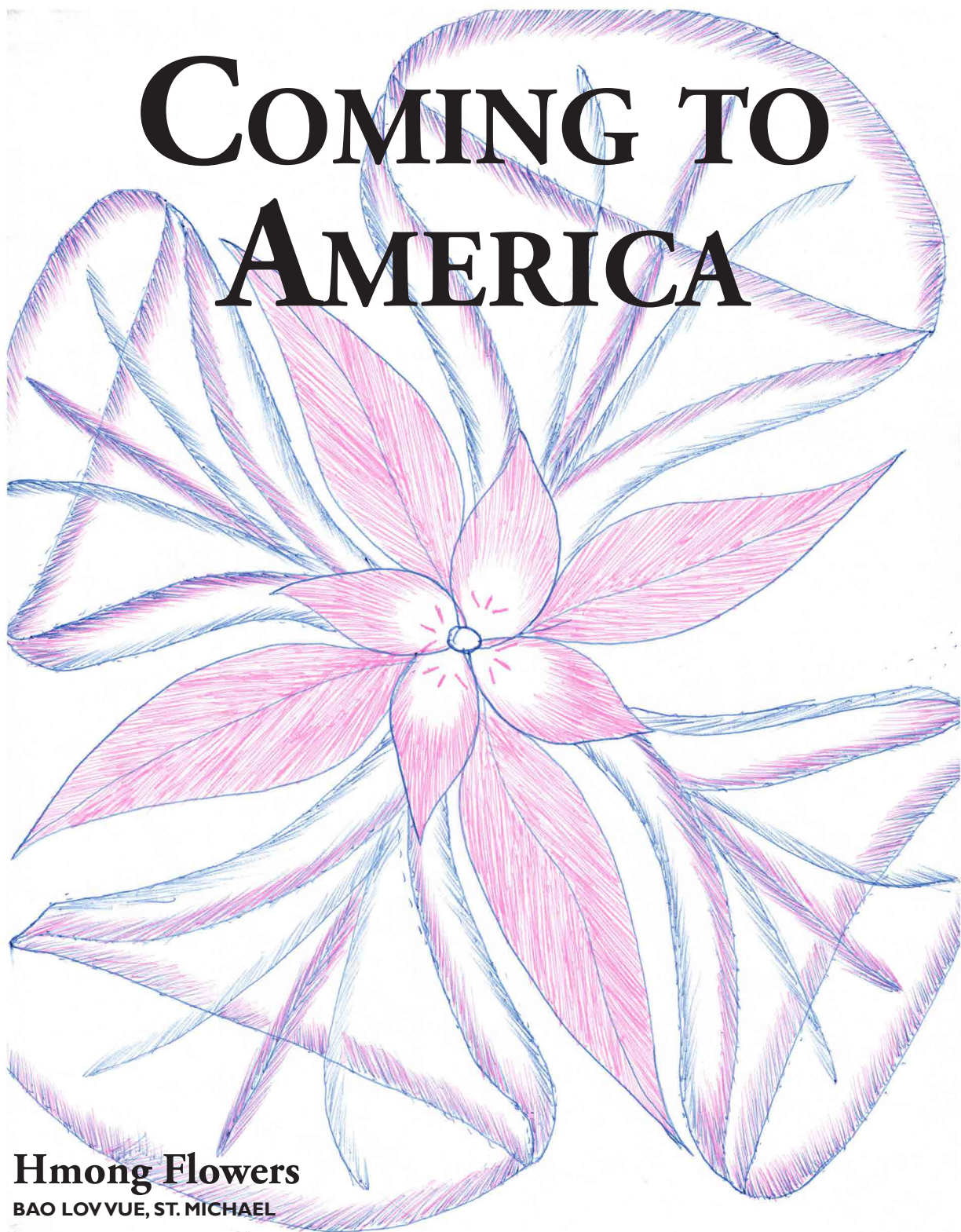
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COMING TO AMERICA



Hmong Flowers

BAO LOVVUE, ST. MICHAEL

Featured Author



SILMARA CLIFFORD

is Brazilian and has been living in Minnesota since she got married in 2013. She used to play bassoon in a big gospel orchestra in her home country. Beyond music, she enjoys dancing, watching movies, painting, and reading literature. She believes that art in general has a fundamental role in our society. Besides her English classes, she is working at a restaurant where she can practice

the English she learns in school. Her advice to people who want to improve their English is that if you are able, get a job where you have an opportunity to talk to people. It is also a good idea to choose a book that you like and read it out loud because when you see, speak, and hear the words, it's a very powerful learning tool. Even though in the beginning, you may not notice any improvement in your English, don't give up, and keep doing it. When you least expect it, you'll be speaking and writing like a native speaker.

They Are Looking at Us

SILMARA CLIFFORD, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Silmara, and I'm from Brazil. I came to the USA in 2013 and started to study English. Everything is still new to me. My heart beats with strong emotion about simple everyday things and sometimes my crazy English language mistakes make me laugh. Two and a half years would seem like enough time to learn English but it isn't. It feels like I am a child in an adult's body and this is very difficult and embarrassing for me in some situations.

I have learned a lot since I came here to Minnesota, but I still do most of my thinking in Portuguese, my native language. I count money in Portuguese. I get angry in Portuguese. I like or dislike something first in Portuguese. I make plans and dream in Portuguese. It seems impossible to express my deepest feelings in English, but I know that one day it will happen naturally.

When I walk on the streets here and I see the houses without gates with squirrels and rabbits running everywhere, I feel like I'm in an American movie, the kind I used to watch when I was growing up in Brazil.

I like to travel when it's possible, and my first road trip here was to Mt. Rushmore in South Dakota. Since I was a child I'd always dreamed of seeing the monument with the faces of the American presidents. I was so excited. I enjoyed every second of my trip. I didn't know the Badlands were going to be on the way to Mt. Rushmore and it was a wonderful surprise. I felt a mysterious atmosphere there while I was looking at the rock formations. I could see how old our planet Earth really is.

While my husband was driving us up the scenic Needles Highway, I saw on my right the huge monument. My heart was pounding! It was as if Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln were looking at us from the top of the mountain. I yelled out, "Look, there they are!" The closer we got, the more my heart pounded. It was one of the most exciting days of my life.

Silmara Clifford is originally from Brazil.

Coming to the United States

UBAH ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Ubah Ali. I'm from Somalia. My husband and I came to the United States on September 27, 2002. When we came to the USA I was three months pregnant. At that time I didn't know how to speak English, but my husband spoke English very well. The first time I came to the United States, I came to Dallas. The weather there is hot and my husband and I were happy because we know that weather because we grew up in a hot place. Our friends told us the USA is cold! We remembered that. My husband and I lived in a one-bedroom apartment, and my husband got a full-time job. My husband paid rent and everything. After one month, I got a job and I shared the rent with

him. Now we can help our families back home.

Ubah Ali is 43 and originally from Somalia

My Big Day in America

FALILATOU TAGBA, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember when I got my USA citizenship with my teacher Martha's help at Learning in Style School. When I started to take a citizenship class, it was so hard for me. Everything the teacher showed to us was strange to me, but on the other hand, the others students knew everything. I asked my teacher, "Will I be able to memorize all these things, too?"

She said, "Don't worry, it will be the same for you too."

I kept studying, and in few months it became easy for me. Now I was ready to apply. I did it in a few weeks. I did my fingerprints. In a few weeks I got my letter for my interview. Two days before my interview, my teacher put me on the hot seat. Other students and my teacher asked me all the 100 questions. I just missed one. Then my teacher told me I was ready.

I was so scared because I didn't know how it would be. Finally the day come and it was so easy. The lady I met that day was so kind to me. After she asked me a few questions, she said, "Congratulations." I gave her a big hug to thank her. She told me to wait for my letter for taking the oath. The day after my interview, my English teacher Laura organized a party for me. There was a nice, huge cake with "Congratulations Falilatou" on it.

In a few weeks my letter came. When I got it, I told my citizen teacher and my extra English teacher that July 2 would be the day that I would be taking my oath. They said they

would be there. It was in St. Paul. I went there with my family. I was so surprised to see a lot of generous people who came for my special day, like my English teacher and her sister, my citizenship teacher and her husband, my extra English teacher and my kids' daycare teacher. They were there with appreciation gifts for me. We were so happy and enjoyed the ceremony together in a big hall with many, many people from different countries. I was so proud. My thanks to everybody for all of the things they did for me. God bless them and Learning in Style with happiness, and God bless the USA.

Falilatou Tagba is originally from Togo.

My First Day in the United States

HAMDA ROBLE, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember when I came to the United States. I was 17 years old.

I traveled with my parents from Somalia. We flew to Dallas. When we got off the plane, I was afraid of all the people around the airport because I had never seen so many white people before.

At the airport my brother Abdi and the social worker were waiting. When Abdi saw us, he started running and he hugged everyone. I was crying because my brother Yusuf and my sister Hibak were being taken away. My parents and I could not find out where my brother and sister were being taken because we could not speak English.

The social worker told Abdi they were being taken to the hospital. He said he would take the rest of the family to our new home. After that he would take my parents and Abdi to the hospital. After four days in the hospital, my brother and sister came to our new home. When I saw them,

I felt comfortable for the first time.

Hamda Roble is originally from Somalia.

Moving to United States

JAFAR ALBARMAKI, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

It was almost one year ago exactly on March 4 when I decided with my family to come to the United States of America and that was big step for us.

We knew that it would be a different life and different culture and most of all, we were thinking about the language as a biggest challenge for us.

We were learning English in our country but we didn't use it all the time because we speak Arabic and we just used English in our academic learning or in some foreign guides when we had something like a TV or anything that is made in another country. So we had that big challenge because of English.

I remember the first day here in the U.S. The first person who talked to me in English was the border officer. I knew he was talking English but even so I didn't know what he was saying. I thought he was speaking in a fast accent, American English, different from the British English that we learned so I asked him to talk to me a little slowly to understand what he said. Everyone had told me that the English in the U.S. is different than what you learned.

Now I understand more than the first day attributing it to my teacher in the Adult Education Center in Columbia Heights.

Thank you all from deep in my heart.

Jafar Albarmaki is 32 and originally from Jordan.

Alone in America

ISTARLIN MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember when I came to the United States from Nairobi, Kenya. I was on the plane for eight hours. Finally we arrived in Atlanta. I came with my Uncle Said. I was 15 years old. My uncle didn't care about me because we didn't live together in Somalia. I didn't really know him, and he was rude to me.

I didn't like him so I wanted to live somewhere else. I moved into my friend's house in Atlanta. Then I started high school, but I could not make it. School was hard for me because I didn't speak English and I didn't write English. I didn't understand the teacher so I quit school.

Then I moved to Nashville, Tennessee. I met the man I wanted to marry, and in one year I had my first child. I wasn't alone in America anymore.

Istarlin Mohamed is originally from Somalia.

Life Changing

MARIA RODRIGUEZ, WORTHINGTON

My first day in the United States was a very exciting day. Being here was a dream come true. But in a few days it stopped being exciting as I began to feel nostalgia for all that I had left in Mexico. I was here alone, just my husband and me.

Now seven years later, I enjoy traveling to Mexico to see my family and knowing that I have the privilege of living in this country full of opportunities.

Maria Rodriguez is originally from Mexico.

Crossing the United States' Border

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I'm from Ecuador.

My biggest experience coming to the USA was crossing the border, because I didn't have any documents or a permit to enter into the USA. It was between May and July 2013, too hot to walk in the mountains. I can remember when I was between Mexico and USA's borders. I was almost in the USA, that's what the guy called the *guia* said. "We just have to walk a couple hours to find a place and someone will pick us up," the guy said.

But it took three days of walking in the mountains where there was no water or food. Because it wasn't expected to take a long time walking, we didn't bring enough food and water. I just had half a bottle of water, and it was the third day in the mountains. In the morning, the sun went up and it would be another hot day and people started asking, "How long will it take to arrive at the point and who will pick us up?" Nobody paid attention to them while on the other side others were weak and crying for water. I felt thirsty and I drank the last water I had, thinking in my mind, "I hope someone will come for us."

After hours over there we saw two cars of immigration and officers coming to us and saying, "Nobody move! We're coming to help you and take you out." We finally were good because they gave us water and food.

I remember that an officer told me don't worry everything would be okay.

That was one of the hardest experiences that touched me, but when I arrived in Minneapolis, it all changed. I started to study hard for my dreams, and now I see a lot of opportunities to be seized. I love America.

Coming to America

HAMDI JAMA, ST. PAUL

My life has been like a roller coaster. I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia. Unfortunately, when I was seven years old, the Civil War began and we fled from the country because people were getting killed, women getting raped, and children were dying from a lack of food. We went to our neighboring country, Kenya. We lived there many years. Life was so difficult because we lost everything in the move and we were faced with a very different situation. We were homeless and poor.

Finally, my family and I got a response from the United States, so we came here to get better opportunities. However, there were many obstacles in the U.S. For example, communication and transportation were difficult. I didn't even know how to drive a car and my level of English was so low. Finally, I tried my best and got my driver's license.

I also started English Language Learners classes, which I am still taking today. I am looking forward to getting my GED and going to college. I am thankful for the opportunities available to us in the United States. We have to work hard, but we can achieve our goals.

Hamdi Jama is 31 and originally from Somalia.

Mariela's Story

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

Time goes fast like a blink of an eye. I made the hardest decision of my life to immigrate to the United States when I was 14 years old. I had a brother who lived in the US and he wanted his wife to be with him, so they decided for his wife to come to this country. My brother wanted me to accompany her and I agreed. I remember that I was on vacation from school when we found someone to guide us. This person knew the way from Mexico to the US. He charged us \$2,000 in order to complete the journey. This dollar amount did not include the miscellaneous expenses incurred for the bus fares and the food.

We traveled on a freight train for three tiring days. I was holding on to the edge of the train the entire time. Sometimes at night we rested for four hours only. I could not feel my hands because I held on to the train for many hours. After we got off on the ground, we traveled by bus for five days to the Mexican border. After that, we walked in the desert for three days and three nights. It was so dangerous because we could clearly see the poisonous snakes and hear them hissing all around us. It was a horrible feeling. We slept during the day and walked at night. We wanted to eat fresh food but there was nothing but water and tasteless flour tortilla.

After we made it through, we arrived at my sister-in-law's family's home. They gave us fresh food and water and let us take a shower. It was like heaven for us because we made it home safely after such a scary experience crossing the border.

New Language

SILVIANO YUDHO, MINNEAPOLIS

At first, strange sounds,
Incomprehensible puzzle to solve
I'm alone and nobody can
Understand me,
Nobody can hear me.
I have no voice.

English is the language of defeat.
To my luck, schools, books, teachers,
And volunteers are with me.

Time passed dedication and discipline
Gave me an extraordinary gift
The gift of reading in a new language
I have my voice back!

Is this the end?
No! It's just
The New Beginning.

Great Opportunity

MARCO GARCIA, WORTHINGTON

This is a great day, and I feel so excited to tell you about a part of my life. Around the 1990s, I left my lovely country of Guatemala. I remember the long journey I had to make but it was good to discover other nice places in Mexico.

I encountered some issues on my way to the United States because I did not have the proper documentation to pass through Mexico. I also had problems with the language because even though we spoke the same language, Spanish, some of the words we speak are a little different;

examples are the following: the word "ticket" is called "boleto" in Mexico; "bus station" is known as "autobus."

In the end, I was successful in meeting a lot of different people and in understanding a diversity of languages. I thank God and all the people who helped me achieve my goals and those who persuaded me to strive hard in my life.

My Dream Life

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

I came to the United States when I was 16 years old. My life was difficult in my country. It was not safe because of too much violence. In America, I enjoy looking at the clean streets unlike my country where people throw their filth everywhere. This country is more organized and I feel more secure.

However, I feel scared when people talk about Immigration and Naturalization Services because I do not want to go back to my country. I like living here with my family especially my daughters whom I love very much. I go to school every day and I love it. I like Worthington but I do not like the weather when it is very cold. Life without papers is complicated, but I will try to stay here because my daughters and I have more opportunities to study and have a better life.

Why I Came to America

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

I am from El Salvador. I came to America in 2009 because my family was in danger. I wanted them to have a better life, so I decided to work here. I do not want to go back to my country because I lost my father there. I am scared for my family, so I decided to stay here where we feel secure.

Why I Left Guatemala

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

I came from Guatemala. Life was difficult since we had to work long days in the fields to earn our food and buy our basic needs like clothes and housing. We had to dig and fetch water from far away.

In 2001, I decided to move to the United States because I would like to have a better life and a better future. My first year in Minnesota, it was hard for me because I had no friends other than my aunt. The saddest part was when I said goodbye to my mom. I still remember her teary-eyed face. I have to start a new life, meet new people and make new friends. Even though I still miss my family, I feel so glad to be here.

American Dream

ROSIBEL MALDONADO, WORTHINGTON

My name is Rosibel Maldonado, and I came to United States in 2002. It was a great experience when I arrived in Dallas airport. I met my cousins and my aunt, and they were happy to see me. I lived in Dallas for only a few months because it was difficult to find a job there.

I moved to Worthington in 2003 and I started working in a pork processing plant. I worked there shortly for four years, then I got married and had two kids. Currently, I am a stay-home mom and I participate in an advanced English as a Second Language class. I enjoy every day of my life with my small family and I always remember the happy moments that I am enjoying in this country.

Coming to America

HYLTON DACRE, ST. PAUL

My name is Hylton. My native country is Jamaica. I was born on September 27, 1946. I grew up on a farm so I called myself a farm boy. Coming to America was hard for me to decide to do. My wife lived in America. During the winter, we would talk on the phone and she said to me, "I have to go and shovel snow and ice off the driveway!"

I asked her, "Are you walking on ice up there?"

She said, "Yes!" I told her that I wasn't coming up there, then, and if she needed me, she would have to come out to Jamaica. In Jamaica, we bought ice to cool down the heat; we didn't walk on it!

Finally, I did decide to join her here in America. I came to America on June 21, 1981. I got my visa on a Friday; my wife had a heart attack the day after and died on that Sunday. When I came, I met a dead woman in a casket. It was very hard for me. In Jamaica, I was a sober man. I was a private security guard and I had to escort the cash for payroll on Fridays. I had to guard ambassadors at the American Embassy, so I didn't drink alcohol. I started drinking after my wife died. After a year, I went to Hennepin County Hospital and asked for help. I did get help to stop drinking. I haven't drank for over 38 years now!

After I buried my wife, I had nowhere to sleep because her sons nailed up her house door. I slept at the bus stop the first night. The following week, I started to work. That was all I needed. My life changed from bad to good.

God bless America.

Hylton Dacre is 69 and originally from Jamaica.

To Minnesota

ZHANNA GOLTER, ST. PAUL

I came to America in the fall in 2014. I arrived with my cat. My daughter has lived in America for 23 years. I came to her with the program for family reunions.

From Moscow, I flew on the plane for 12 hours. I brought with me a lot of books and little clothes. And also I brought an easy sadness about lost youthfulness and about friends left in Russia. When I arrived, my daughter, my granddaughter, and my son-in-law met me at the airport in St. Paul with flowers, kisses, and tears of joy.

I fell in love with Minnesota at the first sight.

I think that America is very rich and a relatively young, smiling country with well-working human laws.

When this old lady can say, “no problems,” then that is happiness. Anyway, now it is so. Thank you, America!

Zhanna Golter is 72 and originally from Russia.

My First Flight to America!

SASHA SEFFER, ST. PAUL

My name is Sasha, and I would like to tell my adventure about my first flight to America. I was born in western Ukraine, which is close to Hungary. I'm Hungarian on my mom's side.

When I finished my high school diploma, I had a chance to study at Budapest Business School in Hungary. I moved to Hungary and started my student life. Five years later, I got my Hungarian citizenship.

I met my husband in Hungary. Our relationship was so serious and a few months later, he offered me to follow him to America. It was difficult for me to realize that this relationship was so serious. The first thing I was thinking was what about my school, my parents, my friends. This was a big deal in my life because not everyone has a chance to go to America. My mom always said that “those who don't take a risk, don't drink champagne.” This was the biggest decision I made in my life.

I'd never had a chance to fly on an airplane. This was my first, long flight to America. My husband went a couple months earlier than me so it meant that I would be flying by myself without knowing English and without experience. My flight departed from Munich to Atlanta and then from Atlanta to Minneapolis. My husband called me and said that I didn't have to worry because he sent his friend to meet me in Atlanta.

When I was in Munich to check in, I was very nervous and excited at the same time. I couldn't wait to get to Minneapolis or at least to Atlanta. Thank God that the lady who checked me in could speak Russian. Fortunately, I also speak the Russian language. I told her this is my first flight. She explained everything to me and she was very helpful. When I was boarding, I got to my seat and barely moved because I was so scared for the flight. The flight took almost nine hours. We landed successfully. I went through security and took my luggage and met my husband's friend. I thought I was the happiest person in Atlanta! I felt relieved while we waited for our next flight to Minneapolis. I couldn't wait to see my husband and tell him about my first flight experience.

Sasha Seffer is 27 and originally from Ukraine.

My History and Journey to America

KEBEDE BORENA, ST. PAUL

My name is Kebede. I came from Ethiopia. I came to the USA last year at the end of January 2015.

When I came here to America, everything is quite different and difficult for me:

1. Calendar
2. Weather conditions
3. Communication and so on

It is very difficult, but after some months I was trying to use the train in the town and trying to go shopping.

Now the adult school is helping me and giving me motivation to attend school to improve my language.

Kebede Borena is 60 and originally from Ethiopia.

The Story of My Life

HANI ALI, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I am writing the story of my life. My name is Hani Ali and I am from Somalia. My mother and I came to the United States six years ago. I have one brother and one sister; after we came to the USA, my mother sponsored my sister, brother, and father. After three years my sister came, and then my father came. Finally, last year, my brother came. Now we all live together and we're a happy family.

I had never been to school before coming to Metro North and I didn't understand any English. Now I do, thanks to Metro North School. Part of my life in Somalia was hard

and sad because I became disabled after I was shot in my back. Everytime my city has a war people can run to other cities but I can't. The other part of my life I was feeling happy because I lived in my home country with my relatives and friends. Also I want to share with you what happened to my life. I was born and raised in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. I lived there for 16 years and considered it my home. The most memorable time in my home country was when I was eight years old and started to help my mom by working with her in her own business. We sold clothes for women and children, and perfumes and creams. I was young, but I got a lot of experience and I will always be thankful for my mom.

The First Time I Got Lost in an Airport

FARTUN YUSUF, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Somalia, I moved to Kenya. I came to the United States in January 2007. I stayed in Chicago. I needed to come to Arizona. I got lost in the airport. I felt tired and I slept in the airport. I thought I'll never catch my plane. There was an old woman who woke me up and I could explain where I wanted to go. After that I followed her until I found my plane. I really appreciated that. Thanks for United States and its people.

Fartun Yusuf is originally from Somalia.

Coming to the USA

TRUC LINH LE, EAGAN

My name is Truc Linh. This is my story about how I came to the U.S. in 2008. I was so lucky. Maybe God is helping me. It was so stressful and I was thinking a lot about my life. I remember the first day I came here. It was cold and a lot of driving in the car. My family helped me a lot. I went to Santa Ana with my family. It was fun and nice. All the Vietnamese people live in Santa Ana. They had a lot of food, and I liked it. We went to the temple in Los Angeles. I thought I looked weird back in the day. I wore classic clothes and my clothes were not in fashion. I spent time with my family for two weeks before I went to school.

My first day in beauty school, I needed to pack my lunch and stuff I needed. When I lived in Vietnam, I did not need to pack my lunch. And I went to ESL to learn English, I had many friends over there but not now. The beginning it was hard for me because I did not speak English or drive a car. My family was busy and nobody picked me up. I never walk long distance in Viet Nam but the duration that I walked was an hour from my beauty supply school to ESL school. My class was eight hours long. I was so tired.

After three months I took a test. I was so nervous. The first test was pedicure but I was nervous and I did manicure first. I thought I would not pass, but I was so lucky. I learned a lot and I inevitably passed. Second I took the driver's license written test I passed the first time, but I failed the driving test. I was so upset. I appreciate that my cousin trained me to drive. I passed the second time and so happy. I got my nails license and my driver's license finally.

I am so happy, because my family has helped

me a lot. I appreciate my family. They took me in the U.S. My life is happy and lucky. I have one son and another girl on the way. I am so appreciative to my family. I am so thankful.

Lost in an Area and Don't Know Any English

RASHID ADAN, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Somalia, then I moved to Kenya. I came to Michigan in the U.S. in June 2012. On Friday the government rented a house to us, on Saturday I went to shop for my family. I was lost in the city. I walked around the whole area until I came to downtown. After that I was tired.

Then I saw a man in a garage. Then the white man took me in his car. Maybe I would remember my address. After one hour he took me to the police station. The officer asked me for my ID or document and it was hard to explain to the officer, but someone translated Somali on the phone, he started asking me when I came here and I answered I came yesterday. The officer took me to the Somali community. They asked a Somali man if they knew me.

After that at night they called the person who translated in the airport and he gave them my address. After a few minutes he arrived and took me home. Now I could relax and they told me never go out without my address.

Rashid Adan is originally from Somalia.

My Impression

NGA TRAN, MINNEAPOLIS

The first time I came to Minnesota, I was astonished because there were a lot of big buildings, large streets, and big highways. I realized I could have a good life here.

There are many advantages to living in Minnesota, for example, transportation, education, and technology. It is easy for people to take the bus to go to school. The Metro North Adult Education Center is free for immigrants. The school has technical equipment for studying; therefore, many people from different countries want to go there to study. The housing and health care policy in Minnesota is comfortable for senior citizens. Minnesota doesn't have oceans, but there are more than 10,000 lakes. The weather is very nice in Minnesota. Although Minnesota is very cold in the winter, the people are very warm and friendly. If the time made me young again, I would go to high school and then college. I would serve the U.S. with my new skills.

Nga Tran is 70 and originally from Vietnam.

Compare Between America and Africa

FARDOWSA AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Somalia. When I came to Addis Ababa my husband died before he could see American life. After that they taught how is the life in U.S. We came to Chicago, after that Arizona. My kids looked at another person on the street from the U.S. and asked, "Where is your husband?" When we told him he died he gave some money to us. The government rented a house for us in Arizona. At night my oldest son was a babysitter, then he started crying. I asked him, "Why are you crying?" He said a social security number, my son thought each one has one number. Najib started saying "I want to go back to our home country." I decided never to go outside for two months. For 15 days he was scared. He thought a number meant a day.

After that I decided to move to Minneapolis.

When he came to Minneapolis he liked it so much, he went to high school. I like Minnesota, they help people anywhere. Najib is helpful to me and he says, "I will never go back to Africa." Finally, I go to school every day and they help my kids, too. I really appreciate the government and I'll not forget that.

Fardowsa Ahmed is originally from Somalia.

My Struggle

TSEHAY BEYIN, MINNEAPOLIS

I grew up in Ethiopia with my brother. When I finished high school, I started a job at the hospital as a typist for three years.

One day there is war in Ethiopia. I don't feel safe to live there so I went back to my birth country Eritrea. I decided to go to Sudan. I talked to my family and they rented a camel and they sent it to me. It took me 28 days for me to arrive there.

I sent a letter to my boyfriend. He came and took me to a port in Sudan, because he worked in the garage.

After that day, we became married and we had our honeymoon on the port.

Then his cousin from Khartoum sent us mail. It says it is easy to go to USA from Khartoum.

We entered Khartoum, and I found a job as a cashier in a store. I worked for three years.

I had a son during this time but my husband was working at a garage and it did not work out.

Finally his aunt said she would be our sponsor to come to America. We arrived in Minnesota. Life is very hard for me!

Tsehay Beyin is originally from Eritrea.

My Dream to Come to America

BIRATU DINBAR, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

My name is Biratu Desissa Dinbar. I was born in the Eastern Wollega region of Ethiopia on October 22, 1944. I have a wife and three boys and four girls. Ethiopia is a beautiful country. It has many cultural foods that are exported, such as vegetables, coffee plants, crops, gold and silver, and leather. The population of Ethiopia is more than 85 million. There are also many mixed tribes, languages, and religions found in Ethiopia.

Now I will tell you about the result of my dream to come to Minnesota. In 2000, one night in my sleep, I saw an image of America and heard the voice of God saying to me, "This is America." My wife, my son Fekadu Biratu Desissa, and myself were going to the country of America. When I heard the voice, I couldn't believe it.

My dream came true for my son in 2001 when he got a scholarship to go to Minnesota. After 10 years, my wife and I got an invitation from our son. On May 3, 2012, we left our lovely country, family, and friendships, and flew more than 18 hours before arriving in Minnesota. Mixing with different people, using a new language, eating different foods, and missing my home and my old life was not easy.

After six months in Minnesota, I started taking English classes at the Adult Education Center in Columbia Heights, where I am still a student today. I've met many different people and I've gained much knowledge, especially during conversation time and with learning new vocabulary words. I feel happy concerning our school rules and how teachers help us when we're struggling. I appreciate them and I can't forget them through my life. When I was a teacher in

my country, I didn't see such kind teachers. So, in this opportunity, I would like to give thanks, especially to my Level Four teacher, Michelle.

When I examine my life, I feel very happy. My son and I have jobs working at the Crestview Nursing Home. I am working and learning English so I can get my GED. I love Minnesota SO much (even if it gets cold). I give thanks to God who protects me from bad things. I give thanks to my co-workers, classmates, and my son's family. Please pray for Ethiopia!

Biratu Dinbar is originally from Ethiopia.

The Story of My First Long-Distance Journey

SHAAMIL ABDULLAHI, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

My name is Shaamil Abdullahi. I was born and raised in the tall mountains of Eastern Ethiopia in 1979. When I was nine years old, I had a lot of friends who were older than me and no longer wanted to stay in Ethiopia because of our government. I chose to leave with my friends without telling my dad, and go to Somalia. I followed my friends on the longest journey of my life. We spent 86 days on foot, non-stop. It was a very dangerous journey and terrible experience traveling from a known place to an unknown place, but we did it.

After almost five years of being in Somalia, I left because of the Civil War and went back to Ethiopia. Because of political issues, I left for Kenya after three years. For the next 17 years, I lived there as a refugee, which is where I met my future wife. We got the chance at resettlement through the United Nations to go to the United States. On November 9, 2011, we finally arrived. I felt lucky to be in the United States.

I would like to tell you a funny story that

happened to me after I got to the U.S. I was at the hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to get my shots with my family. This was my first time at an American hospital. I was praying in front of the desk of the office. A staff person came to me and said, "Sir, are you OK?" She thought that I was doing exercises in front of the desk. I couldn't respond to her because in my religion, if someone is praying, he or she cannot talk to another person. My family couldn't speak English, but they were trying to tell her what I was doing. They were laughing SO hard they were crying. After I finished my prayer, I said to the woman, "I am sorry about what happened between you and me. I was praying and can't speak to anyone during that time." Now that she understood that I was praying, everyone started laughing and she apologized. All of these experiences I had were to get a better life, and finally I got it.

Shaamil Abdullahi is originally from Ethiopia.

Coming to the United States

HAMDI S.,APPLEVALLEY

I came to the United States in 2003.

After one month, I started a job. At that time I was very happy because I was starting to build my life. One year later I learned how to drive a car and I went to school.

After three years, I married and I moved to Wisconsin. My husband and I discussed what happens without education. We decided my husband would start school first and he finished two years ago. He earned a degree in business. One month later, he started a new job. Alxamdulilaah (thanks to Allah).

American Food

FARTUN OSMAN, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember the first time I arrived in America.

My Aunt Hawa took me to her house. She cooked food for me. The food was pasta noodles. I had never eaten pasta noodles before. When I smelled the food, it smelled bad to me.

I did not like most of the food here in the United States. I tried different foods, but I didn't like them either. I always try to cook my own food. After only a few months, I had lost a lot of weight.

My mom ate traditional food. I tried to eat with her most of the time. It took about six months to learn to like American food. Now pasta noodles are my favorite!

Fartun Osman is originally from Somalia.

My Journey

CLAUDIA TAVARES, ST. PAUL

I was born in the city of Zacatecas, Mexico. I remember the first satisfaction in my life was when I finished my studies of teaching. This was great for me personally. In the year 2000 I married, so my lifestyle changed. I moved to the U.S. to Georgia and lived almost 10 years there. It was not possible to continue my work. In 2004 my first baby was born. It was the most wonderful thing that I had him, because according to some doctors, it was very difficult for me to have children. Now I have three beautiful kids. In 2010 I returned to my country. It was very exciting to see again my parents and siblings. I lived three years in Mexico and in 2014 we traveled to Minnesota. It is a beautiful place.

Claudia Tavares is 42

My Story

HSA PAW, ST. PAUL

I was born in Burma and lived there until I was 13 years old. Then I lived in Thailand. After that, in 2010 I moved to the United States. I worked for two years but stopped when I got pregnant. Now I have two boys. Three days a week I go to school with them for a family literacy program. I hope they will be good students, for that will give them a good future.

Hsa Paw is 27 and originally from Burma.

Why I Came to America

NAI THIN, ST. PAUL

Thousands of people come to the United States from around the world. My life began in Myanmar, also known as Burma. It is located in Southeast Asia. Myanmar is a place of great history and wonderful culture, but the military government is bad for the Burmese people. I grew up in a poor family and lived in the village. Burmese soldiers bully other ethnic groups in the villages. When they came into the village, they caught the pigs, chickens, and goats and took the rice for their ration. Sometimes they cruelly forced the villagers to build the military barracks and fence.

I didn't have any good educational opportunities. In America, everybody can get a free education. Therefore, I wanted to come to America. When I was born in Burma, there was a civil war. Many children and women died, and some people lost their families in the civil war. I hated the civil war, so I wanted to migrate to the United States. That was my dream for a long time.

When I passed high school, I didn't continue with a college education because my parents didn't have enough money to support my

education. At this time, I left Burma and went to Malaysia. I had a difficult time in Malaysia. I tried to register as a refugee in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office. After they acknowledged me, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) kindly helped me to migrate to the United States. Now I have been living happily in America for three years. America is the land of freedom and better than my life before because I can easily get a good education and stay healthy. Therefore, I am very thankful for my life in America.

Nai Thin is 55 and originally from Burma.

What I Miss the Most

NEE LOE, WORTHINGTON

There are a lot of trees, beautiful land, and many kinds of fruits and trees in my country. The people like to hunt and fish with their friends and family. Sometimes my parents and my grandparents would go hunting and fishing, too. When I came to the United States for the first time, I was surprised because it was very different than my hometown in my country. But my family has built a new life in this country, and we also have opportunities.

One thing I miss the most is my grandparents. When I was a little girl until I grew up, they took care of me and prepared everything for me, so it's hard to forget them. Someday I hope I will go back and see them and enjoy being with them. They are over 70 years, so sometimes I'm worried about them. I always call them and talk to them by phone and Skype. Sometimes I send money to them because they are old and they need healthier foods for themselves.

Nee Loe is 30 and originally from Burma.

I Like Minnesota

PHIA CHA, BROOKLYN PARK

I came to the USA because I wanted to help my family in Laos because my family's life in Laos is destitute. I came to the States because I want to help my family. I'm in the USA because I would like to know how to speak English and see new things that I have never seen before. In Laos I studied two years in the University of Laos.

I am happy very much that I came to live in the USA. I like the streets because it's big and not dangerous like Laos, which has many motorcycles. This is the first time I see snow. I like snow, but I don't like cold weather. I like the four seasons. In the future, I want to work because I want to help my family in Laos and the USA.

Phia Cha is 24 and originally from Laos

My Story

KYUNGRAN KIM, APPLE VALLEY

My name is Kyungran Kim. I am from South Korea. My family came in July 2014 to America because my husband has been ordered to work in Minnesota. When we arrived we were very confused. My children and I couldn't speak English, so my children couldn't meet friends. They felt unhappy. They wanted to go back to our country. We thought about how to get a good American life. We needed to learn English as soon as possible. In September, my children started school and I started an ESL class. A year later, now we can speak some English. And we met kind and friendly people, so we can more enjoy American life.

Last year, we had many good memories. We traveled to Wisconsin, Duluth, Lake Superior,

Chicago, and the Dominican Republic. We felt happy. Maybe we will go back to my country, but we will never forget American life. Beautiful lakes, scenery, fresh air, ice fishing, kind and friendly people, my good neighbors the Anderson family, ESL teachers, and classmates. I think my family is settling into American life successfully.

Kyungran Kim is 37 and originally from South Korea.

My Story

MAIMOON NAGI, MINNEAPOLIS

I have a nice family. My mom is the best mom in the whole world. My brother's name is Ahmed. He is married. My brother's wife's name is Fania. They have one girl. Another brother's name is Musadaq. His wife's name is Amiin. My brother has two daughters and one boy. Their names are Raqda, Riham, and Ramsi. My sister Badura loves me because she is my big sister. I have eight brothers and seven sisters. I have a big family.

I was born in Somalia. When I left Somalia, I first lived in London. I have been married for 10 years. I have two children. My kids were born in London. My kids' names are Maisa and Mahomed. I moved to the USA on September 8, 2011 with my children. I was happy because my husband and I had a new life together. When I came to America, my eyes opened, and I felt I wanted an education and to speak more English. Thanks to the government because they helped with everything. To all my teachers and the volunteers I say thanks because when I came to America I didn't speak or read English. Now I understand everything. I know English is not easy.

Maimoon Nagi is 34 and originally from Somalia.

Coming to America

FADUMO JAMA, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Fadumo Jama. I was born in Mogadishu in Somalia in 1985. I came to America in 2003. It was the last month of the year. It was the holidays, and it was snowing. The weather was very cold, and I didn't know how to handle the winter. It was difficult for me. My sister asked me, "Do you feel the cold?"

"Yes," I told her. I feel very cold on my hands and lips because I was born in a hot place. It is good to live in different weather and culture, and I am glad because I know winter now and I know it well. That is my story about my first time in America.

Fadumo Jama is 29 and originally from Somalia.

My Story

BASHIYA NUR, MINNEAPOLIS

This is my story. I was born in Somalia. I left Somalia in 1991. I first lived in Ethiopia. I lived there for 20 years. I was a refugee in Ethiopia. I was married in 1996. I had six children, two daughters and four boys. Then I moved to America. My children and I came to America in 2011. We lived in Idaho for 20 days, and then we moved to Minnesota. Now, I live in Minneapolis. I have lived here for four years and seven months. I like Minneapolis because I have good health, and there are good schools for me and my children. I hope to learn English very well. Then I hope to go to college. I want a good future. I want my children to graduate from school, and I hope they find a good job and a good life here. I want to become a grandmother one day.

Bashiya Nur is 45 and originally from Somalia.

My Story

GABRIELA RAMIREZ, ST. PAUL

My name is Gabriela Ramirez. I was born in Mexico. I grew up in a village called Teotlalco. When I was 11 years old, I started working in a friend's family business, packing boxes to help my family, so I did not go to school. When I was 20 years old, I got married. I have four children. My husband is a musician. Now I live in St. Paul with my family. I go to school with my son. I study English with one teacher while he is in a class with other teachers. I like St. Paul.

Gabriela Ramirez is 35 and originally from Mexico.

My New Life in America

SAFIYO SHAFIE, BURNSVILLE

My name is Safiyo, and I am 35 years of age. I was born on November 1, 1981. I am from Mogadishu, Somalia. I lived in Nairobi, Kenya for more than 10 years as a refugee with my family. Fortunately, we received a visa to the United States of America in 2000 from my older sister.

We arrived to the state of Minnesota on February 1, 2001. I was so glad and very happy when I landed in MSP International Airport. I was shocked by the cold weather and snow because I had never seen snow in my entire life. When I came here, everything was strange and new. I wasn't speaking English or understanding anything.

Then, I moved to the small town of Barron, Wisconsin. There I worked at a meat factory called Jenni-O Turkey Store for four years. I met my husband at work and was married. My oldest son was born while we lived there, too. In

2005, we came back to Minnesota. I have been living in Minnesota since that time. Now I am speaking English and understand people well. I love Minnesota and the snow too.

Safiyo Shafie is originally from Somalia.

My Family

DIANA RAMON,APPLEVALLEY

My name is Diana. I am from Ecuador. I met my husband Nelson in my country. He lives in Minnesota and traveled to Ecuador on vacation every year. We were married in 2006, and a year later I came to Minnesota. I was sad and happy at the same time because I had to separate from my family, my country, my habits, and start a new life with my husband in an unknown country for me.

The language, the customs, and not being with my family was very difficult. My dreams here are for me to study, have children, and help my family in Ecuador to come to this land of opportunity. In 2010, thanks to God, I became an American citizen. My dream came true in April 2011, and God blessed me with my son Justin. In November that year my parents came to this country. I am blessed with my family living in the USA now. My family is my engine to continue forward.

Diana Ramon is originally from Ecuador.

My Journey from Sudan to America

YODIT KAHSAY,APPLEVALLEY

My name is Yodit. I came from Eritrea in March 2012 with my three children. Here is how I started my process. First, we got our passport from Eritrea, and then we headed to Sudan to get our visa to America. At that time there was

no U.S. embassy in Eritrea. We stayed in Sudan for eight months. It was so tough because it was our first time traveling out of our country, and we don't speak Arabic, but we found Eritrean friends who helped us rent a house. They showed us the lifestyle and how I had to dress. I had to dress like Sudanese women, which I never got used to. I had to cover my hair and cover my whole body with the dress. They called the dress an abaya. It was difficult to wear with such a hot temperature.

After this process, we received our visas. We came to the U.S. and met with my husband after eight years of living separately. We were so happy that we spent all that night up, and we stayed two days in my sister-in-law's house. After that we went to our apartment that my husband rented and prepared for us. That year there was not much snow and by the time we came, it was already gone.

After two days my children started at a school near our apartment named Cedar Park Elementary. I was so happy and appreciated how the American people welcomed us. The first time my children started school, I was so worried, wondering how they are going to find their way around the school, but they did a pretty good job to adapt to the language and everything fast. After one month, I found information about learning English language for adults and started there for free, which is where I am today. I improved my speaking, listening, reading, and writing. After being in the U.S. for three months, I got my driver's license, and then I started to go to the Midwest Career Institute in Minneapolis where they teach a nursing assistant course for two months. I had received my license and applied for jobs and found a part-time job. I keep coming to school and taking care of my children. Today I am living comfortably in Apple Valley.

Yodit Kahsay is originally from Eritrea.

My Story

ANONYMOUS, BURNSVILLE

I have five children in my country of Eritrea. I wanted in the USA freedom, shelter, health, and knowledge. I came from Eritrea and now I live in the state of Minnesota, in Apple Valley near the high school. I came in the USA on October 1, 2014 and started learning ESL on November 1, 2014 at level two and then level three. Now I am in level four. I came here as I explained above to get freedom, shelter, health, and knowledge of language. I got in this country a life that is very good for me because I got what I need, especially about health for my life, so it is a good journey for me in the USA.

My Country and the United States

THUY THI BICH T. NGUYEN, WORTHINGTON

I miss my big family in my country. I lived in South Vietnam where the weather is so hot. I miss my mom, dad, my brothers, sisters, and my nephew. I have four brothers and two sisters. They are older than me. I am the youngest. I miss them so much, and I want to go visit my family. In the summer in my country I liked to help my parents serve customers, and then I liked to stay home and enjoy time with them. In the United States I enjoy time with my family in the summer and go outside and play games. I am married and I have two children, one boy and one girl.

I also like to cook. In the United States I cook every day for my family. Sometimes I go online to find some great foods and I write down the recipes to remember the next time I want to cook those foods. My favorite food is rice with meat

or beef, soup, and chicken soup. In my country we have many kinds of food, but we always liked soup, beef and noodle soup. I like many kinds of gardening. I spend four times a day in my garden in the United States. Some vegetables that I grow in my garden are cucumbers, Vietnamese spinach, green beans, chili peppers, and some Vietnamese vegetables. The names of some famous gardens in my city in Vietnam are Chom Chom, Nhan, Mang Cau, and Sau Rieng.

Thuy Thi Bich T. Nguyen is 33 and originally from Vietnam.

My Trip to America

MOHAMED HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Mohamed Hassan. I am from Somalia. I came to America November 1, 2014. When I came to America, I came with my family. When I came to America, I didn't know anything about American history. Also, I didn't know how to speak English. When I came to America, I liked to see the snow because in Africa, there is no snow.

I like my school, and I like my teachers. Now I know many things about America. Thanks to God, thanks to my teachers, thanks to America.

Mohamed Hassan is originally from Somalia.

My First Winter in Minnesota

SALMA EZZULDDIN, MAPLEWOOD

For many people who come to Minnesota, winter is very hard and difficult, but for me, I love Minnesota's winter. It's so nice and beautiful. It makes me calm and happy when I look through the window and see a white blanket that covers the ground everywhere. That's the most wonderful

picture I have ever seen. I feel like snow is a gift that comes down from the Heavens.

Originally, I am from the north of Iraq. My village has a lot of snow in the winter. However, I was not born there because my family was forced to move. But I remember my aunt when she told me stories at night. Her stories always involved my home. She told me about the winter, snow, and how the people there prepared the wood to use for fuel. She told many stories. She made me happy and I dreamed of being there to play with the snow. I feel like I was born in my village, like my parents.

Now, I am in Minnesota, which has the same weather, so I feel like I am living in my home village. Hopefully, one day I can improve my English to write a long poem about Minnesota's winter to interpret my feelings about how elated and wonderful I feel to be Minnesotan and live this life.

God bless Minnesota and all our nation.

Salma Ezzulddin is originally from Northern Iraq.

My Journey to America

MOO MOO PAW HTOO, ST. PAUL

I came to the United States on July 23, 2008. I couldn't eat or sleep for a week before I left my country. I was so excited, afraid, and very sad. I knew America was my future and my dream; otherwise I'd rather be dead. I was tired of being poor and hungry. I knew I would have to be strong even though I was small and wary. Even as I packed my stuff with shaking hands, I had decided to become an American citizen.

I packed the traditional clothes I had made myself. I weaved my own classic clothes that

wouldn't go out of style, and I still have them now. I also packed some herbal medicines, pictures, music, and some books.

I was so shy and felt so small because of my culture and who I was, but in America, things were different. Everybody speaks and walks like they are somebody. Even children are fearless. That changed me. I became brave, confident, and independent. My eyes and mind were opened. I became wise and able to get rid of some meaningless superstitions. I threw away my bad characteristics and adapted to a new life. I became a U.S. citizen but kept my name. I value my cultural name, which means I changed for my own good, not because I was reborn as a new person. I was who I was, and I will always be that person. I will not be ashamed to tell people who I was and where I came from.

I am married and have a son. He is just four years old, so I can't really tell what he will be like, but I really wish him to behave well. When he grows up, I hope he will keep my cultural religion. I want him to be faithful and keep his promises. I hate cheaters. I wish my child to be honest. I have been through a rough life, but I'll make sure my child walks on the smooth path. I'll never be like my parents.

I made the right choice to leave my country. I packed my stuff with fear, but now I am an American and proud of it. I love to be in America, but I can't forget my country: the woods, the fields, and the villages. I wish my child to be the best of America and the best of my culture.

Moo Moo Paw Htoo is 29 and originally from Burma.

The Blessings and the Challenges of My New Life in the U.S.

RATNA KOMALASARI HARRIS, ST. PAUL

On May 17, 2015 I arrived in the U.S. in Minnesota. The journey from Jakarta, Indonesia was long and tiring. Fortunately there were no problems with the immigration and I was so happy when I saw my family and fiancé at the airport. I can't believe it. I'm in the U.S. starting a new life. I'm so lucky to have family here to help me with my transition.

The Twin Cities is wonderfully green with many trees, and the air is so light and clean. I especially like the smooth Minnesota traffic. The roads are so wide and clean, and the drivers obey the traffic rules. I look forward to the day when I can drive around the town and enjoy the ambiance. The public services are very impressive. The parks, the libraries, public transportation, education, and healthcare function so well. Riding the bus in Twin Cities is so much easier, especially for people with disabilities. My educational experiences here have been most rewarding. The teachers always encourage and motivate the students to learn more and more. In my free time, I visit the library and utilize the giant selection of books and videos to increase my knowledge. There have been so many blessings since I moved to Minnesota that I can't count them with my fingers.

However, the extreme weather variation can be a challenge, especially since this is my first winter. Every day is cold and the days get shorter and darker. I'm so thankful that my family gives so much advice to face the winter like always wear warm clothes, check the weather

before leaving, and eat warm food as well as take vitamins. I'm really amazed at the beauty of the white landscape and the winter sunset. I miss food from my homeland but fortunately my aunt is teaching me how to cook Indonesian food. I want to overcome the challenges and change them into something better.

Living in another country teaches me a thousand lessons every day, how to communicate, how to behave, and how to be good in community. It makes my life so colorful and I'm so enthusiastic to start my new life here. I'm so thankful for the joys and I hope I'm able to go through every challenge in the future. I'm blessed to be in Minnesota, the land of 10,000 lakes with its comfortable lifestyle and fresh air.

Ratna Komalasari Harris is 30 and originally from Indonesia.

Ethiopia

MARIA ADEM, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Maria. I am from Ethiopia. I have three children. I'm now in Minneapolis, before in a Kenyan refugee camp. Kenya is very very hot, no good. Minneapolis is good.

Maria Adem is originally from Ethiopia

My Story

PAW LAH, ST. PAUL

I was born in Burma, but grew up in a Thailand refugee camp. I lived in Thailand for 10 years. In 2006 I came to America. When I arrived at the airport I was very confused because I didn't know anybody and didn't know any English, so I felt very lost, confused, and frustrated. Back then Karen people were very few and I only knew Ms. Paw Wah. She has been helping my

family every step of the way. I am very grateful for her. She helps with school and takes me to Ramsey County offices and the clinic for check-ups. She helps me in so many ways I can't even remember all of them. Even today she is still helping her community.

The first school I went to was Humboldt Senior High School. On my first day there, I felt helpless, stressed, and hopeless. I was nervous and scared because I did not know anybody at school. Additionally, it was hard because I didn't know my way to class. I just wandered around the hall until a teacher offered to help me. She was very nice. She walked me to my class and asked me my name.

In 2008 I applied for a school closer to my home, Arlington Senior High School. In this new school, I saw old friends and made new friends. But in 2010, Arlington High School was shut down. I was devastated, but somehow I managed to graduate from Arlington. I like my new life, but I can't forget my old life.

In 2015 I got married and had a child. Her name is Nelly. She is my everything.

Paw Lah is 25 and originally from Burma.

Unexpected Journey to the USA

BADRI PAUDEL, FRIDLEY

I never thought in my late twenties I would ever go to a foreign country in my life. Actually, I did not want to go and work for another country. I was doing my bachelor's degree in Nepal when suddenly a big change happened in my life. I won a diversity visa to come to the USA. This is an online lottery like the Powerball lottery here in the USA; whoever wins gets a visa to stay

permanently in the USA. Approximately 10 million people filled out the online lottery each year. Among them maybe almost 2,000 people each year are selected to come to the USA from the random lottery. I became one of the luckiest ones to win it.

As soon as I heard that I won the lottery, I was not happy because I was the kind of guy who does not like to go away from family. I have never lived far away from my family even one night. After I won the lottery everybody was pushing me to go to the USA because it's a land of opportunity and I will get a better life over there. This is what everybody was saying to me, trying to convince me. Eventually after so much pressure from many people, I agreed to come to the USA.

When I entered the USA, from the very first day, I found the USA is not like what everybody thinks back in Nepal. I found it is a very different culture, language, people, and other things. The life here is totally different than back home. At some point I realized I would not stay here for many years. Probably after I earn some money, I would return back to Nepal. But it is already seven years since I came here and I am still living in the USA. Now I am married and have one daughter, and I could not imagine going back to Nepal although I would like to go back.

Life

MUKTAR IBRAHIM, MINNEAPOLIS

My name's Muktar. I am from Somalia. In 1992, I went to Kenya. In 2009, I went to America, Minneapolis. Thank you, now I am happy, and here is safety.

Muktar Ibrahim is originally from Somalia.

My New Country

PATTY CORTES, SHOREVIEW

When coming to live in this country, many people have to leave behind all their belongings. Personally, this was my case. In addition, I came with little but what mattered most, my children. I also brought the hope of a better life and the promise to keep on surviving.

After having two children in Mexico, they became my motivation. I needed to provide a future for them away from poverty and corruption. I needed to give my children a better life with education and the right to feel safe. In my country with our status, I knew my husband and I could never give this to them. So we picked up our roots and set out for a new life in the United States. We migrated to the U.S. by walking through the desert. It was a hard experience, yet under the sky, we had a lot.

I needed hope to make this change. I hoped for everything under the stars, from finding a safe place to live to praying that animals wouldn't attack us while we were walking. I knew I was going to struggle coming here with just my kids and hope for the future and the will to survive, but it was enough. Now I have accomplished children. My promise to them was always to provide, and I did that as best as I could.

Patty Cortes is originally from Mexico.

When I Was a Child

AUNG NI, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Burma in Karen State in Kwan Bi village. When I was young, I went to middle school in Hlaing Bwe. Then I left school. I worked on a farm with my family. In 1988, my family left from my village and went to the Mae

La refugee camp. For years my family lived in Mae La refugee camp.

Later, in 2007, my family came to the United States. We lived in Pennsylvania, in Pittsburgh. There I worked at an Embassy Suites hotel for five years. In 2012, my family moved to Minnesota. Now I study English at Open Door Learning Center.

Aung Ni is 68 and originally from Burma.

Thankful American

CUC VAN, BLAINE

In 1999, I immigrated to the U.S. I didn't have anything. I struggled with weather, language, driving, and learning the way from home to work. When I remember that it was tough, I think, "How did I handle it?" The first time I stopped at a gas station for some gas, I tried so hard to open the lip of the tank on my car. I spent time watching people come get gas. They did it easily, not like me; I broke my nail!

When I saw a woman who was a senior, I thought she can't be stronger than me, why did she have an easy time too? And then I went to the older lady for help. I told her, "Help me open the lip of the gas tank," but she didn't understand. She stared at me like I was crazy because when she went to close her own gas tank on her car, I stopped her. I kept trying to tell more and did the action with my hand. The woman thought for second, and suddenly she said "Oh, I got it! Follow me." I went with her to my car. She told me, "Open the first door." I thought she didn't understand what I wanted. I pointed at the tank and she said, "Okay, okay." This meant just do as she says. When she pulled the button inside the car and pointed, the lip of the tank was open! I was very happy and

hugged her as I repeated, “Thank you, thank you!” She smiled happy like me.

Currently my life’s better than in Vietnam. For that I am thankful for the people who helped. My brother sponsored me to come here, the school supports my English, and my friends help me blend into daily life. Now I get confidence to try to help people who look like me, and I wish them success and to feel happy in their life.

Living in the United States

FARTUN MOHAMED, BURNSVILLE

My name is Fartun Mohamed. I am from Somalia. The first day I came to the United States, it was snowing. It was a surprise to me because it was the first time I saw snow. I didn’t like the weather and I didn’t speak English very well. I went to high school but I didn’t finish. I had to go work because I needed to help pay rent. So after that, I got married. My husband lived in Green Bay, Wisconsin. We are now in Minnesota and we have four beautiful kids. Now, I am happy to live in the United States.

Fartun Mohamed is originally from Somalia.

Why I Came to America

PETER EKAME MOBY, APPLE VALLEY

My first name is Peter and my last name is Ekame Moby. I’m from Cameroon. I was born in Douala, Cameroon on February 21, 1985. I have two kids, one daughter and one son living with my mom in my country. I grew up in Douala, went to primary and secondary

school, and finished high school there. After that, I tried to start up a business in my country for some years, but it didn’t work out. In 2012, I moved to Moscow, Russia to continue my school at Moscow State University in food production.

In June 2015, I got an American visitor visa. I wanted to visit my siblings and my friends. A couple of weeks after I came to Minnesota, I met my future wife and we fell in love. I wanted to go back to Moscow to finish my bachelor’s degree, but my wife convinced me to stay and build a family with her. I decided to stay and I got married on December 25, 2015. Now I’m a happy man because I have a great and beautiful family. I feel I am so lucky because I came to America, and my life is better than when I was in my country. God bless America.

Peter Ekame Moby is originally from Cameroon.

My Story

HASSAN MAHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I am Hassan. I came from Somalia. I live here two years. My family live in Minneapolis 12 years. I have six daughters and one son. My wife works 80 hours every two weeks. Three daughters work just like their mother. We live in a big house in Minneapolis together. Sometimes we meet together to talk about family problems. Everyone explains their problem, then we tell them the best way to deal with it. We are so happy to stay in the same place now.

Hassan Mahamed is 51 and originally from Somalia.

Me and My Hometown

TAHIRA SHEIKH, MINNEAPOLIS

This story is about me. It's been eight years since I came to the USA from Pakistan. It was cold here. During the first three months, I was so sad because in the USA there is different language, different culture, and different people. And my husband really helped me, and he took me out of state to Florida where the weather was great. I came back to Minnesota and got busy in my practical life. Time passed and I visited many states of the USA. But I like my state Minnesota, my city Minneapolis. In Minnesota, I feel like it's my hometown. Sometimes, my husband says, "We should move to a different warm state." I say, "No." I will live here because this state gave me my citizenship. This is my hometown. I won't leave this town.

Tahira Sheikh is originally from Pakistan.

How I Came to Live in the State of Minnesota

MARIO RODRIGUEZ, WORTHINGTON

In March of 1995, we had the first appointment with immigration for the residence of the United States in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The next day we left for this country. We went to California, where we lived with some of my brothers. We were finally together as a family.

In this state, I went to school for two years. At this time, I began working at a landscaping company with one of my brothers. My brother was given the opportunity to open a seafood shop where I also helped him.

After seven years, I had to go back to my country because my dad died. I spent a year

in Mexico. When we came back to the USA, I came to the state of Minnesota, where I have lived 13 years and was recently married and started a family. So that's how I got to live in the state of Minnesota.

Mario Rodriguez is 31 and originally from Mexico.

Start from Zero

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

Ten years after the end of the civil war in Nicaragua between the government of Anastasio Somoza and the Sandinistas rebels, this small country in Central America could not stand up from the chaotic destruction. We lived through the armed fighting where more than 50,000 people died. A lot of people chose to find better horizons, like what the thousands of Central American children are doing to save their lives from violence.

In 1990, my husband and I decided to leave the country and make a better life in Mexico City. He found a job as a taxi driver, and we lived there for three years, and we had two daughters. After that, we took another step in life. I know in the United States, we had more opportunities, jobs, and better education. I'm always thinking of a better place, a better future for my family. It was the most dangerous and risky decision that I ever took in my life. I traveled to the United States with my one- and two-year-old daughters.

After raising my four kids and living half of my life in this country, I feel proud and grateful because this is a big nation with great leaders like the ex-president Bill Clinton, who made possible the Nacara law, helping a lot of Central American people to have a legal status and to be free to work and support our families. Also, I really appreciate all programs and volunteers

who dedicate their precious time and effort teaching English to new immigrants and opening doors to integrate together a new and strong community.

My Story

MAIRA HERNANDEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Maira. I'm from Mexico. When I came to the USA, I was very happy because I saw my sister after a long time. Coming here has new things for me and my family, a better life. It was difficult to learn a new language and new customs. Also winter is very cold. Now I work and I have the opportunity to study.

Maira Hernandez is 25 and originally from Mexico.

My First Day in the United States

RONGFANG TANG, NEW HOPE

I came to the United States from China 10 years ago, and I still remember when I first arrived in New York City. It was a cloudy early October morning, and the cold air made me shiver. Streets were so quiet. There were a few peddlers getting ready for their businesses. A bakery had opened for its early-bird customers. When we arrived at my cousin's apartment, he told me that it was in a place named Chinatown. I was surprised! Although I was on United States' soil, I couldn't believe I was in such familiar surroundings.

Rongfang Tang is originally from China.

Push and Pull

EH PAW MOSES, ST. PAUL

I was born in Burma in a small village where daily

living was hard and few people were educated. My grandparents were farmers, but I spent most of my life in a Thai refugee camp. There I went to school and got some basic education. In 2007, we were given the opportunity to come to the U.S. Some people in the camp decided to go back to Burma. But our family did not want to go back there because we didn't have land to farm.

Before coming to the U.S., we packed our family pictures for memories as well as Karen clothes for our cultural traditions. We also brought out our Karen Bible. My family decided to move for many reasons, but our biggest pull was to live in a safer place with better education and opportunities like freedom. Our push factor was because of the civil war in Burma.

When we first came to Springfield, Massachusetts, it was a little hard for us to go places and do things because we couldn't speak English very well. We didn't have cars for transportation. We lived close to the school, so my children could walk. The teachers were friendly and kind. One morning my kids went to school an hour early because we didn't know about daylight savings time! The school patrol told them to go back home and return in an hour. We lived in Massachusetts for only seven months because there weren't a lot of Karen people there. Then we moved to Minnesota.

Now my children are somewhat Americanized. They prefer American food over Karen food. They can speak their own language but can't read or write it. I would like my children to learn new languages and cultures but also not to forget their own.

Eh Paw Moses is 39 and originally from Burma.

My Life

NAW MYINT MYINT WIN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Naw Myint Myint Win. My friends call me Naw Win. I was born in Burma in 1986. When I was 17 years old, I went to Malaysia. I came to the United States in 2010. I am so happy to be here. I want my children to have a good life and a good education. I have three children, two girls and one boy. I believe my dream for my family can come true in this country.

Naw Myint Myint Win is 30 and originally from Burma.

My Story

NICOLAI RADOV, GOLDEN VALLEY

My name is Nicolai. All my life I have lived in Moldova. Blossoming Moldova was part of the Soviet Union. The boundaries of this great state were closed. Soviet ideology, through their media, propagates that the best life is in the Soviet Union. It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 that we really learned how people live in the West.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moldova gained its independence. But with independence came an economic crisis. And it made a lot of people emigrate from the country in search of a stable life. I and my family of seven also thought about it. My older sister Maria and her family immigrated to the United States in 2002. At her invitation we agreed to immigrate, and in 2009, my wife and two youngest children, ages 20 and 21, arrived in Minneapolis. Then my two older children came in 2010.

Unfortunately, my second daughter and her husband stayed in Moldova. They were refused immigration to the United States. Yet we are

grateful to the government of this country for allowing us to live in this free country. I made the decision and became a citizen of this country.

We live in Golden Valley in a two-bedroom apartment. I'm 62, but I go to school and try to learn English. Thanks to all my teachers, and especially Barbara, for their work in teaching us English.

Nicolai Radov is originally from Moldova.

Coming to America

RUKIYA OMAR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Rukiya. I have two beautiful daughters. I was born in Somalia. When I was four years old, my country had a civil war. I went to the neighboring country, Ethiopia, where I lived in a refugee camp for about 19 years. Then I received resettlement in the United States of America in 2009. When I came to the U.S., I noticed a lot of snow which I had never seen before. I was not able to speak, read nor write. Life was difficult for me in America. One day, my neighbor came to the house. She asked me something, but I couldn't understand. What she said was, "Hello, I need a potato."

But I said, "No English." Then she went back to her house and returned with a picture of a potato. She showed me, and then I understood and gave her a potato.

Now I understand enough English to read and write. I have caught up with life in America, but still remember my second home country, Somalia, since I grew up there. Some of the special things that are unforgettable are the fresh food and the fresh air with no pollution. Finally, I thank God for helping me with my difficulties.

Rukiya Omar is originally from Somalia.

Arriving in the USA

SHAFIE ABDINOOR, MINNEAPOLIS

I came to the United States in January 2014 to New York City, and it was wintertime. I came from Kenya, and the weather in Kenya is normal and mostly hot. When I came out of the airport, it was cold. I saw the snow—the weather was below zero—and I stepped back into the airport. I thought that maybe I should go back to Kenya. “This life in the cold, I can’t live it!” I thought. But then I told myself that in this country, a lot of people live here, and they have to face things like snow, so you have to learn something, and don’t run away before you learn and know.

I went straight to Rochester, New York, when I arrived in the United States. After one month in Rochester, I started adult school, improved my English, and had job assistance. Life in the United States became normal to me. Rochester welcomed me, and I met people who could help me, and school was good, but my family didn’t like Rochester. They wanted to move to Minneapolis because some of our other family members lived there. After three months, I moved to Minneapolis. After two nights, I left to Wisconsin by myself when a friend told me about a job there. So, I started my first job in Barron for one year in a turkey factory. Then I decided to come back to Minneapolis to my family and bought myself a car. It has been two years now, and there’s no running back. Every life when it’s new to you, it’s hard to catch up with, but when you keep going on, it will be normal to you.

Shafie Abdinoor is originally from Kenya.

My Country and the United States

MARIA TERESA VEGA RODRIGUEZ, WORTHINGTON

My mother’s house is very big in my country. She has many flowers, one apple tree, and one orange tree. The orange tree has three branches: one sour orange, one sweet orange, and one orange lime. I like mangoes in my country. They are sold to many. I like to go to the market to buy groceries. The food is very fresh. In the United States, I enjoy spending time with my sons, sisters-in-law, and my grandkids. On the weekends, we go to church, and then I go home, or I invite my family to my home, and we enjoy eating together. After that I clean my house.

Maria Teresa Vega Rodriguez is 67 and originally from Mexico.

Something New

MOHAMED OMAR, MINNEAPOLIS

I am from the border of Somalia and Ethiopia. Right now I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I came here on January 11, 2013. I came with my family, but the life was new, and everything was new. It is amazing right now! I have been here almost two-and-a-half years. Since I came here, I started a job. I work in Chanhassen. I have been working there until now. I learn English in class in the mornings. I enjoy that class. I studied some English in Ethiopia. Something new for me was snow. Somalia doesn’t have snow.

When I was a child, I heard a story about snow. One day my friend told me a story about snow, and he said snow is dangerous. Snow falls from the sky with snakes. That was really a surprise! He had never seen snow, but he was just saying that, and I thought it was true. When I came here, the weather was cold and snowy, but there were no snakes.

From Mexico to the USA States

CHRISTIAN PINA PINA, CRYSTAL

I was born in Mexico in 1980. I came to the USA in 2002. When I started to work, everything was very difficult and different. But I like hard work. I think I am building a better life for my family and me. I'm happy living in the USA because I can make my dreams a reality.

Christian Pina Pina is 35 and originally from Mexico.

My First Trip

PABLO LOPEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

The first time I left home was when I needed to work to give my mother a better life. I was 17 years old when I decided to go see the world. I lived in a small town in the state of Veracruz and then left to Mexico City and stayed there for two years. Then I went to Puerto Vallarta and I was there for one year, and then I went to Tijuana, Mexico. I was there for three years, and then I came to Los Angeles in the United States.

I worked here distributing newspapers and learned to drive cars, and so I drive a truck. And then a friend who lived in the same apartment as me commented that in Minneapolis, Minnesota, there were many opportunities. So quickly after, I went to buy a bus ticket for Minneapolis but ended up taking the wrong bus to Indianapolis instead! I worked there for one month then made enough money to bus back to Los Angeles to find that same friend. I told him, "You liar, there were no opportunities in Indianapolis!" That's when he told me he said Minneapolis. After that, I worked another couple of months to save up money to go to Minneapolis. And now, I finally I made it and have been living here for 24 years with a beautiful wife and three kids.

Pablo Lopez is originally from Mexico.

HUMBERTO GRANADOS, WORTHINGTON

I came to the United States from Mexico in March of 1988. I lived in Houston, Texas for three months, but I didn't have work, so I moved to Sheldon, Iowa for 20 years. In 2008 I moved to Worthington to live the rest of my life in this town. My babies were born here. I enjoy this place because I can play with my girls in the summer and winter, and some days go fishing. In Mexico we have different types of music, and the language is very different. We have a lot of statues, different foods, and a different religion.

Humberto Granados is 44 and originally from Mexico.

Missing My Daughter

MARIA DE PILAR VALLEJO ACONA, CRYSTAL

Nine years ago, I made the most important decision of my life. I left my one-year-old daughter with my mother in Mexico, and I came to the United States looking for a better life and future for my daughter. I didn't want my daughter to suffer shortages like I did. I had to drop out of school when I was 13 years old because my mother didn't have enough money for my education, and ever since then, I started to work to make money and help my mother to help my siblings.

When I left Mexico, half of my heart stayed there with my little princess. While crossing the desert to come to the U.S., I didn't know which prayer was stronger, to reach my destination or to return to my beloved daughter. Now, I have been in Minnesota for nine years, and I consider myself greatly blessed because I have a job, food on my table, and a new baby. This country has

provided the best future for my family and has helped many others who have been in the same situation as I was. My daughter in Mexico is a lovely girl. She tells me how much she loves me despite the distance between us. I pray that we can all be together soon.

Maria de Pilar Vallejo Acona is 32 and originally from Mexico.

My Country and the United States

ROSI MAUGLIN BENAVIDES, WORTHINGTON

I like my country because it's little and special. The house of my family in El Salvador is very humble but beautiful. The weather in my country is fabulous every year. I like the evenings in summer. I play with my sisters, my son, and my friends. I like to eat mangoes under the trees. I like the food in my country, especially the pupusas, yuca, and tamales, which are typical foods. I miss the fruit, especially nances, mamones, and mangoes. I like the fresh water. Everything is fresh. I like everything about my country: the hard working people, the food, the traditions, and culture.

I miss my country, my friends, and especially my family. When I go to my country, I miss the United States. I like the United States. I like the liberty in this country. I like the snow in winter, and spring and summer. I like it because there are different people. American food is good. I like pizza and hamburgers. I like the sun and the weekends with my family in the summer. I like to go out and walk, and I like to go to the lake. I like the parties outside in the summer.

Rosi Mauglin Benavides is 25 and originally from El Salvador

The First Time I Saw Snow

AYAN NOOR, MINNEAPOLIS

I came to the United States in 2014. I was so happy. It was the first time I saw snow in my life. Where I came from, Kenya, it was so hot. The life here is so exciting. I got a lot of help from the government. I really appreciate the people helping me and my family.

Ayan Noor is originally from Kenya.

Coming to America for the First Time

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I'm from Kathmandu, Nepal. I came here (USA) on April 17, 2012, to stay with my husband. My flight was so long. It took 45 hours from the KTM airport to the St. Paul airport. On that trip, I also needed to change airports from the LaGuardia, New York airport to the JFK airport. At that time I used a yellow cab from the LaGuardia, New York airport to the JFK airport. And at that time I didn't know that I needed to give tips to cab drivers, and I didn't give the tip.

After I reached JFK airport, I flew from JFK to the St. Paul airport. My husband came to pick me up. I told my husband about my journey from Nepal to the USA, and I also told about how I changed the airport in LaGuardia, New York using a yellow cab and I gave \$30 to the cab driver. My husband asked, "Did you give him a tip?" At that time I felt very awkward because I didn't give the tip to the driver. That moment I will never forget. After that, I studied about the USA culture, and that helped me a lot.

Better Life for Me

KARENA CHEN,APPLEVALLEY

My name is Karena. I was born in 1988. I came to the United States in 2011. I came just by myself.

When I came here everything for me was strange and new. I was happy, also scared, because I was afraid to be in a new country. I wasn't speaking English or understanding anything when I decided to come to the United States. I know everything for me is very difficult, but I had to come. I wanted to have a better life. I wanted to be together with my boyfriend. So I left my family. I left really sad leaving my beloved family. I came here to start a new life for my family and me. I miss my mother, my father, and my brother.

Now I am married. I have a child. I can study at school. I'm happy to live here. We have everything we need for our life. We have stable work and a place to live. Life is better for my family and me. I think that is my American dream. God really blessed us in this country.

Karena Chen is 28 and originally from China.

My First Time in an Airplane

ANONYMOUS,MINNEAPOLIS

The first time I got in a plane, I was so scared when it was taking off from the airport. After that, I was in Germany for at least four hours. I came to New York City. After that, I got on the bus. My mom thought the driver was kidnapping us. We didn't know any English. After that, we stayed with a Somali family. Now

my mom was happy because we could speak our native language. Finally, the government gave us our own home, and we have a new life in the United States.

Coming to the USA

PEDRO GIL,MINNEAPOLIS

I am Pedro Gil Onofre. I am 37 years old. I still remember what I had to do to come to this country. It was really hard because it was dangerous to stay near the Mexico border, but I did. Now I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This country is beautiful because there are many different people, and I have friends of different nationalities. I am really happy living in this country. I am learning to speak English and hoping to realize all my goals. I want to say thank you to all my teachers for teaching me English. Thank you so much.

Pedro Gil is 37 and originally from Mexico.

Coming to America

SANDRA NGO ITAM NYEMECK,FRIDLEY

My name is Sandra. I was born in Africa in a country named Cameroon, but I used to live in France. I was so young when my parents moved to Lyon, France, so I didn't really know African culture, and I regret it because for me it is the best one in the world. I moved to the USA a few months ago because my lovely husband used to live here. So now I live in Minnesota with my newborn son.

Since I moved here, so many things have happened. Some are funny and some are not. Life here is very different and colder. I was worried because of English, but I have met a

lot of people who are kind, compassionate, and gentle who help me with it. I also met an angel in my neighborhood. That woman adopts me and my family. She shows me a lot of love, and because of her I begin to feel like I'm home. I miss my family, especially my Mom, but no big deal, God gave me new one. I'm now an American.

I Didn't Want to Quit

BEKELE DEBELE, ST. PAUL

My name is Bekele. I came from Ethiopia, in East Africa. I grew up in Bekoji, the town of many world-famous athletes like Deretu Tulu and Fatuma Roba, Olympic gold medalists.

Today I want to write about my expectations and what I got in America. First, the way I came to America is the Diversity Visa Lottery, which I won.

Always I've had a dream to live in the U.S. One day my dreams came true. I got the news the day after Ethiopian Easter. I was happy to move forward because due to corruption and tough economics, it is hard to get a good education and a suitable job in Ethiopia.

Most Ethiopians expect what we've seen in movies because they show beautiful places and more technology in America. When I left, my dad told me, "You won't have to work hard to change your life."

I told him, "Everything is about technology, so don't worry. Everything will be easy, not like Ethiopia."

I came to Atlanta, Georgia in November 2008. There were no jobs. It was a bad time in my life. I didn't sleep well and worried about depending

on my cousin, who did everything for me.

After three months I got a job cleaning. In my hometown, cleaning is if you are not educated. I attended Addis Ababa University and I was hoping I would continue my education here and be successful. I told my supervisor that this job did not look good for me, so I wasn't coming back. The guy was confused, and I told him again it was a dirty job.

I had a cousin in Minnesota, and he told me that I should think about moving to Minnesota, that life would be easier there. He told me that Minnesota is one of the top states with a lower unemployment rate, a good place to get an education. He told me housing and other benefits are convenient for Minnesota residents.

I thought about that. I also thought about moving back to Ethiopia. I have a wealthy family. We own our own farm there and a few houses. Money has never been a problem. I lived a privileged life when I was in Ethiopia, but I wanted to leave the nest and create a life of my own. I didn't want to quit that easily. I wanted to make my father and mother proud of me, so I decided to stay in America.

I moved to Minnesota. I got a new job and I started to tell myself that America was different from what I expected. I have to move into being strong and surviving. When I say strong, I mean working hard and, as we say in Ethiopia, changing my eye glasses (my expectations) and moving on.

Thank you, and God Bless America.

Bekele Debele is 28 and originally from Ethiopia.

Newcomer

AHMED SAED HUSSEN, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to America, it was winter and cold. We arrived in a house very far from the market. When you have a car, you can go everywhere you want, but we didn't have a car. The house was very far from school, and you cannot see Somali people or even black people in our city. All the time we stayed in the house. There was also a boy and girl in the house but they were always working. They were so busy, too much. On a Sunday, the boy was free so we went out together. We were afraid of the people but the boy told us that there is nothing to worry about. After we stressed, the guy told us to walk outside. "No one will harm you," he said. So, we walked outside and we saw nice people, because when you are a newcomer for the first time, you fear.

Coming to America

ANGELINA ARIAS, BROOKLYN PARK

My name is Angelina Arias. I'm from Michoacán, Mexico. I'm married. I have three girls. I came to the USA in May of 2000. When my husband and I decided to come to Minnesota we had a lot of dreams. They were to work very hard, to save money, and start to build our own home and business. We had to cross the border by walking. Thanks to God because we didn't have any problems with the migration people when we crossed the border. We didn't have a green card to be in the USA. We were immigrants.

Now after 10 years I get my U.S. citizenship. I have not fulfilled all my dreams, but I still have

new goals to do. Now I know life in America is not easy. We have to struggle a lot and go to school to learn English as a second language to have more opportunities to have a better life. I don't know when I will go back to live in Mexico. Now I'm so happy to live in Minnesota with my lovely and beautiful family.

Angelina Arias is 35 and originally from Mexico.

Coming to America

ANONYMOUS, BROOKLYN PARK

I came to America in 2012. My mother, my brother, and I flew to America. That was a very long trip. We had three carry-ons and six large boxes. My brother was nine years old. This was my mother's first flight, and she didn't know English. That is why I had to take care of them. That was a hard trip, but it went well.

Why I Came to America

TENZIN KUNSEL, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

In 1959 China occupied our country Tibet, and my grandparents came to India in exile. During that period they had lots of kids, and they had a financial problem, so they could not send my parents to school. Tibetan government gave them a house and field, and they started doing cultivating and got married and sent us to school. I am the oldest one among my siblings. It's my responsibility to take care of them.

I have two dads, and my real dad left for America in 1997. After my high school, my dad started the immigration process for me. I was born in India, and I grew up in India, but I don't have an Indian citizenship. The biggest problem in India is corruption—I hate that. When I was

in India I heard that people are studying and work part-time. I feel like, why is this opportunity not in India?

When I first came to New York I really didn't know what I could do—my dad was living with his wife in a city. I didn't like the place, and after a week I visited my aunt's house in Minnesota, and I observed that the school is near from my house and easy to get bus for work. So I went back to New York and talked with my dad and decided to come back to Minnesota. Nowadays I am here, and my Aunty is supporting me to continue my study, and also I am doing part-time work. I am earning some money from my part-time work and helping my parents and two brothers to study further. I think I can make my brothers well-educated and able to work in a government job. I am very glad to have an Aunty who is supporting me all the time when I have problems. Due to her help, support, and kindness I can continue my study and could help my parents. I think soon I can achieve my goals I had in coming to America.

About Myself

MA YIN, ST. PAUL

I came from Thailand. I speak Karen. When I came to America in 2007, I was 19 years old. I went to Leap High School. I studied there for about two years, and when I became over 21, I had to leave the school. Then I went to the GAP school and graduated after one year. After graduation, I got married. I have two children, one three years old and one two years old. I want my sons to go to school everyday, so when they grow up, they can be more clever than other people. Thank you for reading my story.

Ma Yin is originally from Burma.

Coming to the United States

OLUSHAYO ODELANA, MOUNDSVIEW

The journey started way back in the year 2005. The process and the whole paperwork started, and I thought it would take just a year, and the visa would come through, but that wasn't true. It took approximately eight years to be granted a visa into the United States in June 2013.

On the day of my departure from my home country, Nigeria, my grandma, uncle, aunt, and my siblings all came to bid me farewell. It was really hard to say goodbye. Amidst tears and hugs, my time was up, and I boarded the plane. However, my first landing was in Atlanta, and there was little or no difference in the weather despite having heard about the cold winter here. Little did I know of Minnesota. I boarded a connecting flight to Minnesota, and before the plane landed, I could only see white all over the place. In my mind, it was like a ghost city. I had not gotten off the plane before I knew what I was in for, as I was wearing a chiffon blouse and sandals on my feet. I was shivering like a jelly fish.

Back in my country I was a banker, but I have to change my career because the company that brought me to the States is in the health care sector. It was really difficult and challenging blending into my new world and new field, many nights of crying for the fear of the unknown, but as mother earth will smile on me, all my fears and worries were all taken care of.

How time flies; it's now over two years and I am still struggling to survive in the cold winter. One can never get used to the winter, but I try to stay warm as much as possible. It could be a cold winter night, but talking with my family back home keeps me warm.

My First Year

MAGALI GARDUZA, FRIDLEY

My name is Magali. I am from Mexico, and I came to the United States in 2001, and it was a winter season. At that time I felt so cold because in my country it is hot almost all the time. Even when it is wintertime, it feels just a little cold compared to the extreme cold here. So I remember I just brought light and cool clothing, like for summertime. But fortunately my husband was here before, and he helped me to buy a jacket and some warm clothes.

Despite that, I continued feeling lost, frustrated, and a little bit weird because I didn't know where to go to buy groceries or how to prepare my food like in my country. Also, I didn't know how to read or speak English. This made it more difficult because my husband got very sick with pneumonia, and I didn't know how to help him, what to ask the doctor, or how to understand what the doctors said about his health. I can say that those difficulties made me stronger, and I learned how to live in a different country to start a new life. Now I feel happy and more confident because I can go wherever I want to buy my groceries, I can speak and read English, I have a job, two children, and I am still sharing life with my husband.

I Came to the United Lost Story

MYINT SOE, ST. PAUL

Hello everyone. My name is Myint Soe. When I came to the United States I lost my airplane to my new state Virginia, and my new city Harrisonburg.

I did not know how to take an airplane and I

walked around in the airport and the police saw me and asked me "What are you doing in the airport?"

I said, "I don't know. How can I go to my state Virginia?" And then I showed my bag I brought from the refugee camp and he looked at my bag and he knew what airplane I should take. He sent me on the plane.

After that my case worker waited for me in Harrisonburg airport. She saw me. She asked my name. I told her about me and then she hugged me. She shook my hand. That time, I felt happy.

Myint Soe is 24 and originally from Thailand.

Coming to the USA and Not Knowing English Is Not Easy

MAHAMED ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

This is true story, not fiction. When I came to United States, I could barely understand or speak English. I used to live in South Africa and one day one of my friends came to me and said let us go to the USA and explained to me the way to get there. We then bought tickets from Johannesburg to San Paolo, Brazil.

Mahamed Ali is originally from Somalia.

Hoping for a Better Life

CHERNOR BAH, FRIDLEY

I arrived in New York on December 5, 1998. My friend picked me up at JFK, I spent 30 days roaming the streets and subways while waiting for Immigration. I was excited about the new life and nervous about what is waiting for me in this part of the world. When my

cousin came to visit me he told me that we have another cousin in Minnesota and because I had never heard of Minnesota I asked him where it was. We took the train. Since it was snowing throughout the trip we got stuck in Chicago. We had to take a Greyhound bus to Minneapolis. The first day I went out I fell on the snow because I did not know it was slippery. It hurt badly and I did not leave my house for 30 days. "Welcome to Minnesota," they said.

Chernor Bah is 55 and originally from Sierra Leone.

My Journey to the U.S.

MA ELENA GUTIERREZ, ST. CLOUD

I was born in Mexico. I was 17 when I married Servando. And when I was 18 I told him to come with me to the U.S. I had money for three people. There was not enough money for my whole family. Our journey started with my husband, my 15 year old brother, and me. I found out I was pregnant because I started to vomit a lot. We did not have documents so we looked for a person that people call Coyote to help us cross the border.

Coyote took us by car for several hours and dropped us where there was not anything around. We started running and walking as fast as we could with about 20 other people. Around 6:00 p.m. Coyote asked us to give him our water and food so he could carry it for us. He told my family to follow the group at a distance. Coyote said, "Maria has a bad cough and it is not good for them. If you leave her here you can come with us." They told my family to leave me behind.

My family answered, "NO!" Soon the whole group moved faster and we were left with no food and no water. On the third day we were

fatigued, feeling hungry, with no sleep and looking for a safe place. We kept moving to the city light and water tank. Eventually my husband and brother walked to a water tower. It was too high to reach. Below the tank was green stagnant water. They were able to strain the water through a shirt for us to drink. We had walked for four days. The fifth day, we got to the first city light. It was a gas station, and my husband and I went inside to buy some cookies and water. When I went outside I could not see my brother. A taxi driver told me, "Your brother is inside my taxi. This place is dangerous for you. I will take you to a safe place." Then he waited for my husband and he bought hamburgers, fries, and pop for us. He spoke with my uncle in California and drove us to Los Angeles where we met my uncle. We were finally safe.

Ma Elena Gutierrez is 38

States

ABDIRAHMAN HEYBE, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Abdirahman Heybe. I am from Somalia. I have two brothers and three sisters. I am working in customer service. I like my job very much. I live in North Minneapolis. I study at Adult Education MCE.

The first time I came to the United States, it was the first long-distance flight in my life. I flew for 18 continuous hours. The first city was New Jersey around 10:00 a.m. I saw a big airport, a big city, too many people and too many airplanes. It was also the first time I saw snow. It was February 27, 2015. I was scared and I didn't like it, but I liked the highways and large buildings and the beautiful city and beautiful people and beautiful country.

Abdirahman Heybe is 47 and originally from Somalia.

I Miss My Family

LAYLA OMAR, APPLE VALLEY

I would like to introduce myself. I was born in Somalia, and I grew up in my country. I got the opportunity to come to the USA in 2008. I am glad to live in the United States of America. I haven't seen my family since I arrived. When I become a citizen, I will get the chance to visit all of them. They still live in Somalia. I will be really happy to see them in that time.

Layla Omar is originally from Somalia.

Coming to America

NOOR MOALIM, MINNEAPOLIS

First, I am ethnically Somali. I was born in a small village called Sala, I began school in 1985 and completed my high school in 1994. When the government in Somalia collapsed, I left my country to live in neighboring Kenya. During my 10 years in Kenya, I attended a college, found a job, and became engaged to be married. This was, hopefully, a new life for me and my family with both positive and negative aspects.

Times were hard, but we were happy until I lost my job. We decided to move on to Uganda, my third new home. We went to the capital city of Kampala where I applied to the United Nation for refugee status. We were granted this status and were sent to the Nakivale refugee camp, where we lived for eight years while waiting for a chance to come to America. We are now here and together, felt it was well worth the wait. Today I greet each new day with joy and happiness. All I said above is true.

Noor Moalim is originally from Somalia.

My Life in Minnesota

NAWYEE PAW NOENO, WORTHINGTON

My name is Naw Yee Paw Noeno. When I first came to the United States, I came to the state of Minnesota. I couldn't speak English and had a lot of problems. I didn't have a car and had to walk or call a taxi. I thought a lot about what I should be doing now. I thought I have to learn to speak English. I'm so happy I came to Minnesota.

My school is free. I don't have to pay money. I'm so lucky. I can speak English 50 percent. I want to learn a lot of different languages because I don't want to have problems anymore. I want to help people and help my family.

God blessed my family when I came to the United States and Minnesota. I'm so happy. I love my Minnesota. Thanks.

Naw Yee Paw Noeno is 24 and originally from Thailand.

The Scariest Time in My Life

SAIDO HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

The scariest time in my life was the first time I was on an airplane. I left Nairobi, Kenya by myself and travelled to the USA. The first airplane I was on I saw diverse people, but the second airplane I was on had a few black people and a lot of white people. I was shaking because they were staring at me and I did not know any English. The only thing I knew was that my brother was in Las Vegas and I was going to that city. The third airplane stopped in another city and I thought it was Las Vegas.

Suddenly I got off the airplane and I looked around for about ten minutes then I asked

someone if I was in Las Vegas through pointing. The man said, “No, go back,” and he took me to the airplane. Luckily I did not get lost and I finally met my brother. I cried and he said, “Do not worry, you are safe.” When I remember my travel to the USA, it was so hard because I did not know the language, the people, and I looked different. At that time it was difficult for me, but now I am happy with my life.

Saido Hassan is originally from Somalia.

My Journey to America

MATT SHULSTAD, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I was born in Bogota, Colombia. My mom dropped me off at the Catholic church when I was six months old. The nuns raised me till I was one year old, then I was brought to a orphanage and was there. When I was three years old, a couple came to visit me, and they decided they wanted to adopt me. After they went back to America, I got polio. Then I had a fever from the polio. It was 117 degrees, and my body was so hot, they had to fill a bathtub full of ice and put me in it to bring my body temperature down. I died for over three minutes, and I left my body. I was looking down and saw my body and people all around me. I looked up and saw a light then heard a voice saying it wasn't my time and went back into my body. I was alive but unconscious for hours, but I lived!

After my temperature came down, I found out my right leg could longer move. It was paralyzed from my hip down, and I couldn't walk anymore, so I had to crawl around like a dog to get around. After that I ran away from the orphanage. I stayed on the street, and the only food I could find was in garbage cans. Once I got stuck in a garbage can upside down, and I had to rock the can back and

forth to tip it over to get out of it. I also remember I had to fight wild dogs for food. Somehow I got found again and got brought back to the orphanage. The nuns came to check on me to make sure I was okay, and they brought me food that I loved.

The orphanage hired a couple to look after me. They took me to a house. It was nice, and they had a pool and wild animals. One time when they weren't watching me too well, I drowned in the pool, and they had to give me mouth-to-mouth to save my life again. The couple ended up getting the flu or something and they couldn't look after me any more, so they had to bring me back to the orphanage. Shortly after that, my new mom and dad showed up to take me back to the USA. That's my story about getting to America.

Matt Shulstad is originally from Colombia.

I Am From Somalia

ASHO MOHAMMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I came to the U.S. in 2010. My first state was Florida. It was beautiful. At that time it was raining and I didn't know how to drive, so it was hard for me to go and get something. Even if I went I did not know where the market place to shop was.

Asho Mohammed is originally from Somalia

My Best Friend

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to the United States my friend Ahmed took me in his car. He showed me around for two or three days. He showed me the bank, Target, Cub Foods, and all. He is my best friend. I will not forget those days.

My Experience in Minnesota

EDUARDO SILVA, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I was born and raised in a small town in Mexico. Some years ago, I decided to come to the U.S. to Minnesota because my cousin was here. When I arrived here it was January 12. There was a lot of snow. I marveled that I had never seen much snow. After a year, I had to move to St. Louis, Missouri for my work. I have worked in over 35 different states. One day I decided to return back to Minneapolis because I liked it there. Also, it was the first place where I lived when I arrived from Mexico. I love Minnesota and its people. Living in this place is one of the best things that ever happened to me. Being here and enjoying all the seasons of the year is a blessing. Thank God that he has allowed me to know this place and its people.

Eduardo Silva is 35 and originally from Mexico.

My Name Is Fatuma Ismail

FATUMA ISMAIL, MINNEAPOLIS

I came from Somalia on September 25, 2010, with my daughter. We came to Minneapolis at 6 p.m. When I arrived at the airport, I didn't know anybody or the process. I was so tired, hungry, and so weak, but I was lucky because my case worker had been waiting for me for almost five hours. He had our photos with names. When I came out he saw me and said, "Are you Fatuma Ismail?" I said, "Yes, do you know me?" He showed my photo with my name and my case number. I asked him, "Are you my case worker?" He answered, "Yes I am. Can you follow me?" "Yes I can." After that, I went to my cousin Fatumo's home. She was so

good and polite, and she also knew what I wanted. After seven days I decided to travel to Lewiston, Maine, where my sister lived. I started my travel at 6 in the morning. My first flight was to New York, but New York has two airports. That was bad for me. When I arrived at the airport, I got lost, and I missed my flight. After five hours, I finally got on the correct flight and I got to see my favorite sister, and I was so happy. Dear reader, enjoy reading.

Journey

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in 1990 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I'm the middle child in my family. I have two younger and two older sisters and no brothers. My mom is an accountant, and my dad is an electrician. They both work for the government. My childhood wasn't like most African children. We were a middle class family, and I went to school. I even remember my dad send me and my sister to taekwondo class. After I finished high school, my GPA couldn't let me go to university, so my family wanted me to go to community college, but I said no. The thing is in the community college you don't have the choice to study what you want to study. In that time, my older sister was living in Dubai working in five-star hotel as a waitress. I told her I wanted to come to Dubai and work there. She wasn't happy with the idea, but I convinced her, and she started the process right the way. My dad wasn't so happy, and he even told me I'm not his child any more. That time I was so excited to go to Dubai that I didn't care what my family think. My visa came and I went to Dubai in 2011. I was so happy and excited. Everything was beautiful: the buildings, the cars, the houses, everything! I got a job in Crown Plaza hotel.

The hotel was beautiful. I had never been to a five-star hotel before.

After I worked for couple of months, I missed my family very bad. I remember crying every single day. My dad wasn't speaking to me, and my mom was still mad, so in six months I ask time off from work and went back home. My mom and dad forgot they were mad when they saw me; I stay there for two weeks and went back to Dubai. In 2014, my finance came to visit me in Dubai. He wasn't happy about me being in Dubai, so he told me he wants me to come to America and get married to him. I was happy, scared, and confused. I don't have any family or cousins or anyone I know except him. I told my mom, and she helped decide what I want; the process only took two months. I came to here in 2014 on June 12 and got married in 2014 August 21. I'm really happy with my life. I'm back to school. I'm on the first steps to achieve my goal, and I thank god every day for what he did for me.

we were going from Germany to Chicago. I stayed in Chicago one night. In the morning I woke up, and I wanted to go back to the plane. I took an escalator, and at that time I was wearing a long dress. I forgot to hold my dress up, and I fell down! It was close to cutting my legs. Alhamdulillah, that didn't happen! Earlier on the plane, I met a Somali man with his mother and younger brother. Nobody saw what was happening except him. He ran back and saw my dress was almost gone, and my legs were close to being cut in the escalator. He was able to cut my dress.

I was happy because he saved my life! Fortunately, I had my pants, sweater, and scarf that I wore underneath. When I came to Minneapolis-St. Paul, I walked around dressed looking like an American.

Asha Muse is originally from Somalia.

When I Came to the USA

ASHA MUSE, MINNEAPOLIS

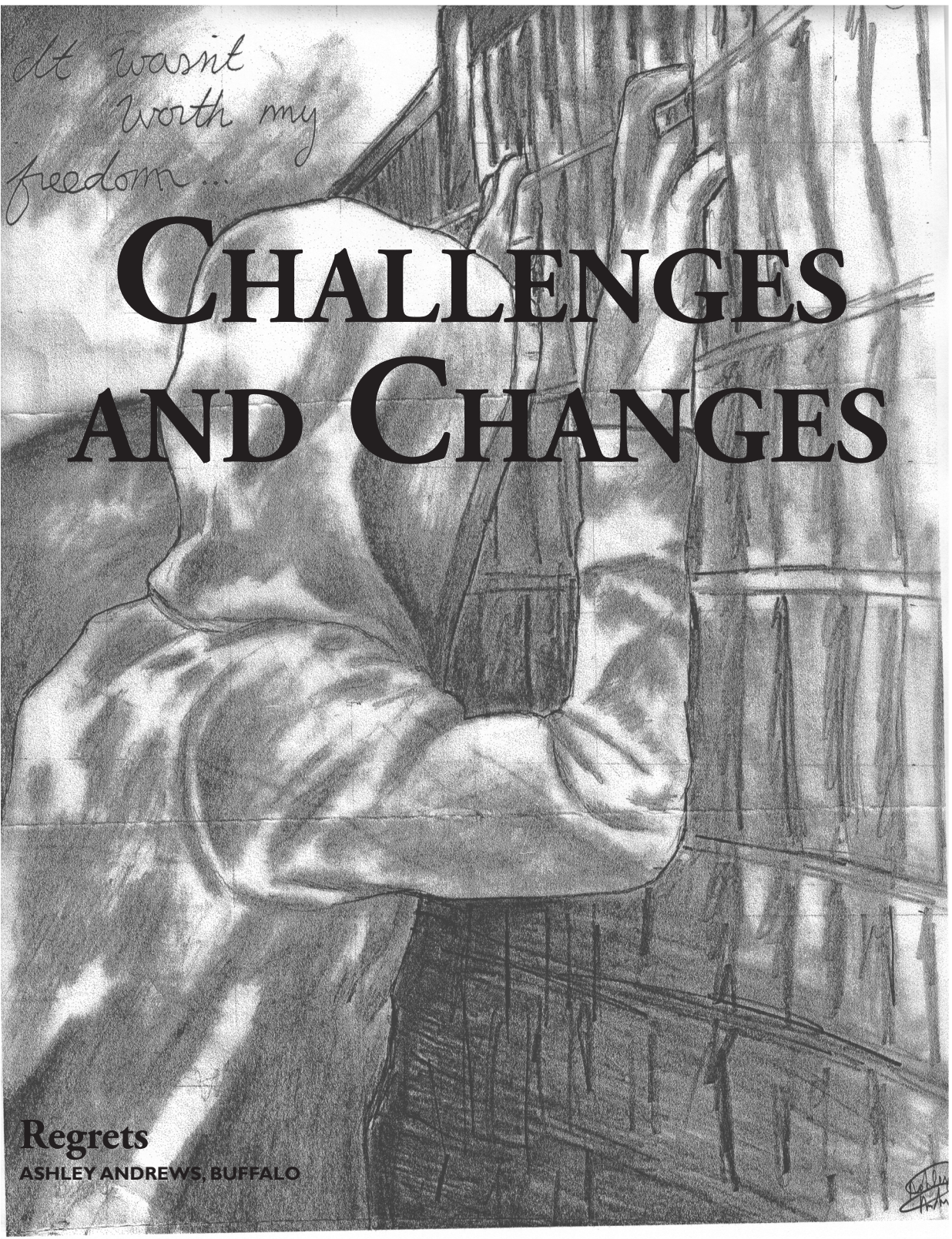
I felt tired but couldn't sleep because I felt pain in my legs, and they were swollen. I didn't know how to tell anyone what I felt. After that, we arrived in Germany. The plane landed, and I tried to stand up, but I felt dizzy and fell over. My legs were shaking, and I couldn't stand up. I also hadn't eaten anything for 16 hours because I didn't know the food they had.

All the people tried to help me. They gave me water and soft food, and some people tried to hold my hands. After that, I woke up and went outside to the airport. I rested and then had to go back to a different plane. Now

*It wasn't
worth my
freedom...*

CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

Regrets
ASHLEY ANDREWS, BUFFALO



Ashley Andrews

Featured Author



SHARON WEAVER

Sharon Weaver, often known as Michelle, was born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee. Around the age of thirty, she made the decision to relocate to Minnesota to finally recover from troubled years of addiction. Michelle managed to be successful in her quest, and, along with many other accomplishments, has maintained sobriety for the last 13 months! Although she misses her family, she expects to go home someday. In the meantime, Michelle is a student with the Hawthorne Education Center, is working on obtaining her GED,

and is planning on attending college in the future, majoring in writing. She loves writing, and Michelle eventually dreams of authoring a book.

My Master

SHARON WEAVER, ROCHESTER

I used to have a master of the most evil kind,
He totally controlled my body, my soul, and my
mind!

At first he seemed fun and cool,
Soon I became his fool!

A victim without a chance,
And he took my life in just one glance!

He is so sneaky and full of deceit,
I wonder why we ever had to meet!

I used to have a life and it was somewhat great,
Now I am someone I hate!
I used to be caring, and kind,

That was before my master took me for his wife.
Everyone said I don't look like the type,
They can't picture me locked up in a room
smoking a pipe!

I used to be a pretty girl from the South,
Now I am left with teeth rotting out of my
mouth!

No matter your religion, sex, or age,
He only searches for his next victim to engage..

I pray you never meet my master,
And if you do, please, turn and run, and then
run faster.

Sharon Weaver is 35 and originally from the United States.

Today

DELILAH M. BACHAND, BUFFALO

Yesterday has come and gone

Tomorrow is so near

How can I live for today

When today is full of fear

Fear of what's to come

Fear of the simple unknown

Strength is what I'm trying to find

I know I'm not in this alone

I am much stronger than I ever thought

I know that I can do this

I'm smart and I'm strong

I know that I have the perseverance to simply
go on

Please be a teacher

Please be a friend

I need the support

So that my damaged soul can mend.

My Journal

SUNNY PLEH, ST. PAUL

Almost six years ago was my big day for immigrating to a third country legally. Many American people do not know who we are and what our identity is because we are new immigrants in their country. It was a big shock for me to deal with Americans. For example, social communication was difficult. Even to have a meal with my family

was difficult on the first day. I still remember the first night sleeping in a bed. I could not sleep at night, I could only sleep during the day. I woke up in the evening around 5:00. Everything was different in this country. I realized how my life was challenged so much more than I expected.

On the other hand, I am very happy to be living here because I think I am free emotionally and can renew my life, and I can do what I haven't done before. Then I decided I can do use what I have learned from my whole life and be like many other people. So, I will never give up figuring out what I must do, and remember I'm still learning. Finally, I know getting the best quality of life is the biggest challenge for me.

Sunny Pleh is originally from Burma.

Story of My Life

HASSAN AHMED HASHI, MINNEAPOLIS

We used to live in a refugee camp called Ali Addeh. It was hard for people to live there because we had to build our own houses with our own materials. There was no food or water. On November 20, 2012, we came to the USA. Our airplane landed in New York. It was winter and it was very cold. We didn't have jackets. We sat in the airport for an hour because we were waiting for a car to come. We lived in Massachusetts one year and a half.

On May 30, 2014, we came to Minnesota. We lived in a place called Mary's Place. After three months, she kicked us out of her place, but we found our own house. We live there right now. We are living happily in Minneapolis. We have a car. Nothing is missing for us. We have a good life. Thank you teacher.

Hassan Ahmed Hashi is 42 and originally from Djibouti.

Moving from Country to Country

AHMAD SHAH, ST. PAUL

I am starting this story of my life from age seven. When Russian forces invaded my country, Afghanistan, my family moved to Pakistan, in 1978. In 1988, when Russian forces left Afghanistan, we went back home. My childhood life was full of sorrows and troubles during our time as immigrants in Pakistan. I was a child, and my father didn't have a job there. We were living in a refugee camp.

One great opportunity I had during that time was graduating from high school. This gave my life a boost. I finished high school in the field of Pashto literature, and I got my diploma in 1992. I returned home with my diploma and presented it to my parents. I thought I would serve my country, but the situation was the same as during the Russian occupation. There was no hope for the situation to be changed in the future.

I was very disappointed, because there was no chance for educated people to get jobs and support their family. In 1996, the Taliban (a so-called religious fundamental group) came into power and started hard rules. Their first step was to close girls' schools, stop women from working, and force the local people to keep long beards and do whatever the Taliban wanted us to do. I became sociologically under pressure. Once again, I decided to go back to Pakistan and keep working and studying there.

After 9/11 great changes came to my country. The U.S. forces crippled the Taliban and its support of the Al Qaida Network. Once again I returned to my country, but at this time there was a new government in power. All the people were very happy and everybody had a smile on their

face. In 2001, I started working with the U.S. army and served for 13 years with U.S. forces in the combat zone. Because of the bad security in my country, the U.S. government granted my family and me a visa to the U.S.

On June 16, 2015, we came to Minnesota. We started our new life in freedom. Life is tough here, but safe. My children go to school. I also go to school at the Hubbs Center to study English. I hope to improve my English skills. I know this is a new beginning for us and that this new life has started from zero. I hope it will get better step-by-step and that we will adjust to this new culture.

Ahmad Shah is originally from Somalia.

Journey of Chance

MARIA DAMIAN, EAGAN

I am from Colombia, South America. I grew up with my aunt because my mother died when I was five years old. The transition from my mother's home to my aunt's home was difficult for me and my siblings, one sister and two brothers. I am the youngest. My new family now is bigger: my aunt, her husband, and nine cousins. During those long years I felt very sad and quiet. Although I did not grow up with my own parents, in my new home I had love, care, and protection.

In my teens I started thinking that I wanted to study psychology to help someone else with emotional problems. I got a degree in social psychology in my country. My goal now is to continue to help other people, especially people who have lost their parents when they were kids. To do this, I meet with families at my church that need my help.

Maria Damian is originally from Colombia.

My Story

HERSI FAWSIYA, EAGAN

I was born in Somalia. I grew up in a big city, Mogadishu, with the best family in the world. I came first to the city of Nairobi, Kenya in January 1991. I lived there until 1994. After that, we moved to the United States. In early 1995, I became hospitalized. I was sick on and off until 1999. Finally, and right now, I am okay.

After that I went back to school, got a new job, and got married. Now I have a big family. My husband and I have four beautiful children, three boys and one girl. I like my life here in the United States. I am happy in my life.

Hersi Fawsiya is 45 and originally from Somalia.

Thoughts

NICHOLAS LEANNAIS, MINNEAPOLIS

Hello, my name is Nick. I have positive thoughts about a lot of things. I was adopted when I was four months old to a white family. The positive thought about that is that they took good care of me. Coming up under their care I was quite a stick of dynamite in a negative way, so from my later teenage years I became the black sheep of my family. Faced with a lot of trouble, I thought, "How am I going to get myself out of this situation?" So I escaped to Job Corps, thinking I could get a trade and my GED at the same time. My negative thought process took over me in my young adult years though and I quit Job Corps.

Then a couple years later I met my first love and her daughter; from there I have made a family with her and had my first child, who is a boy. I started my own family. My thoughts about it are that it was very good until I ran into my enemy: drugs. I lost my family for dealing and using drugs, and mixing and working with a lot

of people who called me a hood-rat. After that, I met my wife of thirteen years. Throughout those years, I never went to the doctor, so I caught an infection in my feet and my right leg. They had to amputate all of my toes and below the knee on my right leg.

Bouncing back from all of that in a nursing home setting now, I'm into a more independent setting in a one-bedroom apartment on my own. I've started to do more positive things for myself, going back to church and school to get my GED and my thoughts are good thoughts.

My Story

SHUKRI ALI MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

We were in Somalia with my family. My father was working. My mother stayed home. I remember my mom got up every morning at 6:00 a.m. She cooked food and dressed us. We went to school. After that our country got into a civil war. I felt sad. My mom said you have to go moving. My dad said okay. That day I was so sad because I lost my house, car, my friends. That time was seven years ago.

Shukri Ali Mohamed is 33 and originally from Somalia.

Untitled

KHADRA ABDIRAHMAN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Khadra Abdirahman. I was born in Somalia. My mother raised me. I grew up in a good life. I had three sisters and four brothers. I am married and I have five children. I moved to the U.S. in 2010 for a better education. My life was hard here. At first the weather was cold, but, after a little bit, everything worked fine as I hoped it would be.

Khadra Abdirahman is originally from Somalia.

My Journey

ANGEL MOROCHO, MINNEAPOLIS

I left my home in San Juan Bosco in November 2009 after my birthday. I was extremely sad for leaving my mother, Mary, my pregnant girlfriend, and my whole family. I came with a cousin, Segundo. We left only with a small suitcase, \$300, and a small cellphone. We traveled by plane to Honduras. When we arrived in Honduras, a person was waiting for us and we went to a house and waited six hours before leaving. We didn't eat anything before we left Honduras. A car came to pick us up. We went to Guatemala. There, we ate bread and black beans.

After three days, we left Guatemala for Mexico by car. We met more people who came with us. Sometimes we had to get out of the car and hide from immigration control. We spent time sleeping from house to house all the way to Mexico. Some days we ate and some days we did not eat. We had to learn many customs in Mexico. Finally we crossed the Rio Bravo, only in underwear. Then we had to run because a car was waiting for us. At the time, we were very scared. After that, we were in a house for six days. We walked one day and came to Texas. Finally we came to our destination. My journey was not very dangerous, except that the food was new to me.

My dad's friend picked me up near Florida. When I saw my father for the first time in 15 years, it was weird. After that, I found a surprise for me. My dad told me a secret. He had another family here! I just wanted to go back to my country, but I had to pay \$15,000. I could not do that, so I met my brother and sister and stayed at my dad's house for two days. Because I

felt very uncomfortable, I went to live with my aunt. After one year, I came to Minneapolis in November 2010.

I lived in a studio and was looking for work for six months. I found nothing at first and then finally found a job in Minnetonka for two days. After that, I worked at Applebee's in Brooklyn Center for 10 months and then started in my present job. I felt better working and spending time with my wife and son. I think I'll return to my home country before I am 30 years old.

Angel Morocho is 27 and originally from Ecuador.

Stranger in My Own Land

OSCAR FLORES REYES, COTTAGE GROVE

After 15 years, I went back to my country, El Salvador. Last February I went to visit my family in my country. As I boarded the plane at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, I was very, very nervous about the trip. Eight hours later, the plane's captain said we were in El Salvador. The temperature was 90 degrees. This was nice weather! I couldn't believe what I heard! I was in my country again—wahoo! It was incredible after 15 years to see my mom, brothers, and sisters again.

When I met with them at the airport, we cried with joy at meeting again. At the same time, I felt strange because when I left my country my brother was nine years old and my sister was seven. Now he is 24, and she is 22! My beautiful mom has white hair and sagging skin, not at all like my young mother of 38 whom I left in El Salvador when I went to the U.S. 15 years ago. Everything was different. The saddest part is that my dad passed away two years ago. I couldn't

go to his funeral because I didn't have all of my documents to leave the U.S. I never saw him again but I remember, like it was yesterday, his last hug.

When we were in the van to go home, all the streets were different. They built a lot of new buildings and new houses. It was unrecognizable! During the next nine days, I realized that all my friends were no longer there. All my neighbors were different and I didn't know them. I enjoyed my family and my country but everything was different. I felt like a stranger in my own land.

Oscar Flores Reyes is 36 and originally from El Salvador.

Change of Life in a New Country

JAMES SHOMBE, RICHFIELD

I came to the United States in 1999 from Kenya. Adjusting to a new life was very difficult and stressful. I was living alone in an apartment. I had difficulties cooking as well as taking care of myself, for I was young. I knew a change of life was important for me, so I began to learn about other cultures, make new friendships, and hang around with American friends. Then I began to learn a new life and a new language. After two months in this country, I started a full-time job at Federal Beef Processors in South Minneapolis, and I went to school part-time.

Soon after, I got my driver's license, and I bought a used car. Life was going well for the first six months. Then I had an accident, and I lost my first car. I had no transportation to go to school or to work, but friends helped me sometimes. Later, I began to feel stressed, and I lost my job. I didn't have enough money to

keep up with my rent, so I got kicked out of my apartment. A friend helped me move into his basement until I could find another job.

I got my second job as a forklift operator in Northeast Minneapolis. This time, my attitude and behavior had changed. I learned something different on this job. There were good friends, and they gave me rides to work. My situation started to get better and I began to improve my way of thinking and opinion. At the end of the following year, I bought my second vehicle. In 2004 a friend and I decided to share an apartment. I am pleased about all the things I have done in this country, such as learning a new language, improving skills, and having an opportunity like everyone else. What a great place this country is. If you work hard, you are going to make it through.

Now I am studying at North Campus in Minneapolis and working at Sterilmed Medical Health Company. Minnesota has become my favorite state. I will be glad to buy a house in Minnesota someday. Because of what I have learned in this country, I am able to take care of myself and my family. A change of life in a new country is not easy, but it is a good experience.

James Shombe is 48 and originally from South Sudan.

An Important Part of My Childhood

YUSUF ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

My family is very large. My father has two wives. My mom had five children, two girls and three boys. I am the youngest in my family. When I was five years old, my father died. I don't know what happened after my dad died, but I know that my mom cared for me so much. After six

years, my mom died too and my life changed so much. I don't think I have had a bad life. My siblings are older than me, and they didn't have as hard of a life.

When my mom died, my siblings sent me to a camel. The camel lived in the forest. I didn't know how to handle the camel and I didn't really want to be there. My oldest brother hit me too much and I ran away. I walked all the way to a city called Qabridahare. I didn't have any family or relatives in the city and I didn't have a place to sleep. Sometimes I slept in restaurants when they were closed. One day a man saw me and gave me money. He told me to go to the restaurant and eat something. I said thanks, and I went to the restaurant and ate rice. I don't know what food I ate before and after, but I remember that rice and the man that gave me money.

After a couple of months, I walked to my sister's village to live. I lived there for only a couple of months when my oldest brother came and got me and forced me to go back to the camels. I was very sad. After maybe a couple weeks, he hit me again and I ran away. I went as far away as I could in Somalia. When I ran away, I came to close to a village but didn't go into the village because my brother was there. I was afraid to go back to the camel, and I slept outside of the village. When morning came, I left and walked very far away from the village. This was a sad part of my life. But this was a small part of my life, and now I am happy for a good life.

Yusuf Ali is originally from Somalia.

A Man No One Knows

DENNIS BENNETT, BURNSVILLE

Chicago, Illinois, 1974

I started my life, I think I said this before

October 1 is really my birthday

Here's my story, there's something I have to say

I grew up in the suburbs, Markham and Harvey

I got hooked on music at the age of three

But I had issues when I was growing up

My parents raised me, although they went their separate ways

I had to face a whole lot of challenges everyday

I was shy to express and expose how I feel

But you can't satisfy everybody, that's the deal

I got to clarify the fact that the Harvey P.D. destroyed my life

They beat me until I was in critical condition, they were not nice

I've been rejected by women almost my whole life

I guess you can say that it led me to suicide

Tried to focus on school, but I was bullied like a fool

I was a laughingstock, that wasn't cool

My strategy today is to work on my GED

That's the only way to transfer to plan B

Music really saved my life at the age of 17

I was thinking of suicide, now I want to come
clean

Therefore, I drank a lot and smoked marijuana
to overcome my spirits

So I adjusted my ways and wrote a lot of lyrics

To make a long story brief, I'm now 41 years
old

I pray every day for God to save my soul

There's a justification why I'm persistent

I'm faced with challenges and more events

I am a diabetic, I'm also a married man

To conclude this poem, I hope you understand

I had to express the ethical side of me

I'm just a man no one knows, as you can see

Dennis Bennett is 41 and originally from the United
States.

Unconditional Love

BOUN XIONG, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in a refugee camp

In the summer of 1989.

It was a time of hardship and war,

Which took me by surprise.

That means my mother must have carried me

Across the border to Thailand.

I couldn't imagine how she felt

When she was running for our lives.

Not to mention all the pain she felt

When I entered this world screaming,

She breastfed me and saved my life

While I was blindly dreaming.

She managed to beat the odds

And brought me to America.

Land of the free, home of the brave,

I'm proud to be a Hmong American.

She's always teaching me what's right from
wrong,

But I was never really listening.

Even when I knew what I'd done,

I'll just consider it tripping.

Over the years of pulling my ears,

When she yells in one, it went out the other,

Even though we never really said we cared,

I knew that that's my mother.

She cooked for me, she cleaned for me,

And she did it without any hesitation.

Even when all I gave her was heartache and
pain,

She never stopped for medication.

And then one day, she abandoned me,

Still yelling from up above.

The most important lesson she was trying to
teach me

Was Unconditional Love.

Boun Xiong is 26 and originally from Thailand.

A Great Accomplishment

OLIVIA VITAL, BLAINE

The last time I accomplished something great
was when I was pregnant. It was the happiest
time of my life because I could not get pregnant
for a long time. When my baby was born I was
the happiest woman in the world. Since then I
feel I am recognized as a mother. I felt like I had
truly accomplished something great.

A Little Child Slept with Rain

NAE NAE AYE, WORTHINGTON

A little child slept with rain in her house and not enough food to eat. The great sorrow overcome with grief. The bullets were flying like shooting stars. It was a spectacular but terrible sound and made my heart pounce. I can imagine myself at three years old. I didn't have a chance to see my mom and dad. I stayed with my older brother. At that time he was only 14 years old. When my brother went to school, I was with him because nobody could take care of me if he left me at home. My parents went out looking for food to feed our family. They went on long trips. It took two weeks by foot. Day by day, they climbed up and down each mountain.

When I was four years old, my grandmom tried to register me for school, but she didn't know my date of birth because she was uneducated. Different schools have different uniforms. My school had white and green uniforms, but I couldn't afford one. When I was eight years old, I had no brother, and no rice. Our main food is rice. In order to survive, I had to dig up bamboo shoots and cut them into pieces and cook them to eat.

In my home country there are three seasons. There is rain, winter, and summer. I hated the rainy season because I didn't have enough roof cover. If it was raining I had to sleep with rain. I couldn't sleep, but I had to sleep. I was always careful to listen for the enemy. My circumstances were not sufficient for food, shelter, clothes, or education. This was terrible for me, no money, no education.

When I first arrived in the U.S., the language barrier made my life more difficult, but good people were doing good things, getting us good

jobs, so they deserve everything they want. I thank the United Nations a lot for sending me here to this country. I live in a fulfilling, homey country. I stay comfortable in life.

Nae Nae Aye is 33 and originally from Burma.

Childhood and Education

NAZRA MOHAMMAD, ROSEVILLE

My name is Nazra. I am from Somalia. I was born in 1983. My family and I left Somalia because of the war. The war started in December 1991. I was young but I remember the destruction of the war. People were getting hurt and killed. It was risky even to go outside to get food. There were not many shops open. Schools were closed. Everyone remained in hiding in their homes. Many people were at the hospitals, but there were not enough doctors and nurses. It was very scary. Our parents kept us together. They kept us safe. I remember our father used to always try to be positive and tell us we will be fine. He gave us hope.

However, the war was not going away. We realized that this was just the beginning of a disaster. In 1992, we fled the capital Mogadishu. I was nine years old. I was in second grade but there were no schools open. We left behind our home and belongings. At that time I did not think it would be the last time I would see our home, our friends, and our neighbors. We left by car from one town to another. Sometimes we walked when there were no cars available. Every time we stopped in a town, we would make a makeshift hut using tree branches and leaves. We kept moving from one place to another until we ended up in a refugee camp in Kenya.

The camp was safe to live in. The U.N.

brought us food and water. Schools were built. My parents enrolled me. I was excited to go to school. We learned reading, writing, and Arabic. I remember I was happy to learn a different language. The teachers were nice. Some of them were from a different part of the world. My parents were excited as I memorized the alphabet. They helped me with my homework and always motivated me. I stayed in the camps until 1998.

Nazra Mohammad is originally from Somalia.

Overcoming Obstacles

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was younger, I can remember always wanting to finish school and go to college. But as life progressed, that did not happen. I had children at an early age and dropped out of school to take care of them. But I never gave up on maybe going back to school. Again, life's ups and downs came my way.

I got hit by a truck and car which left me in a coma for six months. When I woke up, the doctor said I would have some brain damage. That was not what I wanted to hear; I was very depressed. I had this big cast on my leg and couldn't move. I had to have my head elevated for about a couple weeks before I left the hospital. When I did leave, my spirits were very low, so the doctor gave me some pills to help me sleep. That's what I did for some time because my thinking was, "Why stay awake if I can't think?" All I focused on was that I have brain damage and maybe I will not walk right again because my leg was crushed.

When I got a wheelchair, I had a friend wheel me around to hang out in the streets drinking in the park. But that did not give me any

satisfaction. Now I am doing better and signed up for my GED. I went to different schools but couldn't find my balance. Now I am at another adult education school in Columbia Heights, and I really feel good about myself.

My First Day in the Hospital

LUIS CEPEDA, ST. PAUL

About three years ago, I was very excited and nervous because it was my first day to work officially in the hospital. I was ready to practice all that I had seen in college about my career. I was sent to the ER; the place was a mess, a lot of people were running and screaming. My first impression was to get out, running to home. Fortunately I wasn't alone; my friend also began that day in the same area.

The chief nurse gave us a list of things to do in the area. Everything seemed too easy: check vitals, help other nurses, observe carefully procedures, and help patients. The day went well, until the afternoon when my friend and I were taking a coffee break and the chief called us. An ambulance brought a rugged family: a mom, dad, and a boy.

We were a little bit scared because it's not too easy to work with children. I was sent to help the doctor who was treating the child. Quickly I checked vitals. The pulse was going down, and he was cold. He needed a blood transfusion as soon as possible. The blood was sent to the ER. I was in charge of administering it, but my mistake was I didn't check first the blood package. The blood type was not consistent with the child's blood type. About 15 minutes later, he was going into shock. My mind was frozen; I really didn't know what to do or say. The doctor was so mad, but he didn't let

me go. He advised me to pay attention and observe carefully everything that we do, always checking our procedures.

I was still tense so I asked for a break, but the chief denied it. She said, "That's not a solution. There is no time to cry. If we fail, we solve it and keep working. Patients can't wait until we feel ready again." I continued working and giving all the best. When the time to go home finally came, I was really tired. Maybe it wasn't an amazing first day, but I learned that failure happens, and we can't run and give up. It's hard sometimes to feel secure again after a mistake but it's my obligation to leave that behind and continue and get ready to make feel my patients feel good.

Luis Cepeda is 27 and originally from Mexico.

Missing My Mom

MARYAM ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

I lost my mom to liver cancer when I was 15 years old. I still remember her every day and miss her every moment of my life. I pray for her and hope to meet her in heaven. She suffered from all the side effects of the chemo, like her hair falling out, lack of desire to eat well, change in mood, and being more nervous than before. At first she did not show anything to us so we would not feel sad. She was happy and doing a mother's job very well. She was teaching me how to cook, listening to all my problems and advising me, and helping with our homework while she was struggling with the disease. In the last month of her life, she was staying in the hospital. Then we realized that our mother had a serious illness in her body.

Despite all of the suffering and pain, she always kept happy, laughing and enjoying life

and sharing everything happening in our days. We were visiting her every day, which made us feel good. It was 4:00 a.m. and we were sleeping when my aunt got a call from the hospital to come fast. So my aunt woke me up and my brother. We rode the car and my aunt and my cousin were sad, hiding the tears from us, but I felt that something bad happened and my heart beat very fast. When we reached my mother's room, my second aunt and my father were there and crying badly, and my mother's face was covered. I realized at that time that my mother was gone forever and I would not see her again. I laid next to her and kissed her as I cried like I never had before in my life.

After that I went through a psychological shock, where I sat without moving, eating, or crying for days. It was the most difficult moment of my life. I had lost someone I loved, the one who supported me, the one who cared for me, who had advised me and helped me. She was my everything.

Miracle Babies

PHALLIN KEO, NEW HOPE

I have been married for 11 years, since 2005. I tried to have a baby after I was married, but whenever I tried, I always failed. Before I had my daughter, I had a lot of miscarriages. I finally had my daughter in 2013. While I was pregnant with her, we were under a lot of stress. A doctor advised us to abort her at 16 weeks because she might not survive or might have Down Syndrome. I talked to my husband about not letting her go. If something happens, let it be, but I am not going to abort! From month to month everything had changed. Her birth was a miracle because

while I was pregnant with her, I had a lot of problems.

An ultrasound in the first trimester showed that she was smaller than she should be; in the second trimester, there wasn't enough fluid around her. And she was sitting on the umbilical cord. In the third trimester, her heart was too small for the blood and her lungs were not developed properly. By week 34 I had very high blood pressure so I had to deliver earlier than we expected. After she was born in 2013, she had no illness or problems.

After having her I became pregnant with a baby boy in 2014. His heart stopped beating at 18 weeks so the pregnancy was terminated.

Later on in 2015, I got pregnant again. I wished and I prayed for my baby to be safe this time. I had been hiding my pregnancy from everybody, even my husband. I kept it a secret from him because I didn't want to make him worry and I would feel sad if I miscarried again. When I was 28 weeks pregnant, I took my husband to the clinic with me. We looked at the baby and gender by ultrasound. It was a big surprise for him. He was confused, scared, awe-inspired, amazed, and wonderful. My son was born early at 33 weeks and weighed four pounds and 15 ounces.

Now my daughter is two and a half years old and my son is three months old. They are healthy and happy babies. We are a happy family.

Phallin Keo is 32 and originally from Cambodia.

This Is My Real History

IMELDA ESPARZA, WORTHINGTON

The thing that hurt me in my life is I have been a victim of domestic violence. I studied for nursing, but I could never work. He told me that I just had to cook and clean the house. It hurt me. I bowed down and could not speak to anyone in or out of the house if I was not with him. He told me that if I called the police, they would deport me and I would lose my children. I was extremely scared. He did drugs and drank too much alcohol.

He was a permanent resident and petitioned for my residency. But for seven years I didn't hear any news from immigration. He hid all of the mail. He was sent to Mexico for over a year and that was when a letter arrived in the mail telling me I had an appointment for fingerprints. The letter said this was the last time they would contact me. They had sent many letters before and he had hid them all. I went to the fingerprinting appointment.

When he came back he found out I had a work permit. He said he wouldn't sign for me and was going to contact immigration and ask for me to be deported. He hit me. For the first time, I was filled with courage and called the police. He fled and that night came to my house drunk and abused me again. I went to information professionals and they told me what to do. I got divorced and sent my request to immigration as a victim of domestic violence, and I thanked God. Right now, I'm in my citizenship class.

I want all these people who are victims of domestic violence to know: do not be afraid to call the police. A violent person never changes. Withdraw from these people. I am a survivor of domestic violence. I am divorced from the abuser. I am very happy to be a part of the best country in the world.

Imelda Esparza is originally from Mexico.

My Family Life

MUE BLE, WORTHINGTON

When I was little, I lived in the small village called Nu Thu Ta. My family was poor but we lived peacefully. My family were farmers and we planted some vegetables and rice to eat every day. Even though the village was small, it wasn't safe to live our lives there. Because of the enemy, our family always had to run and hide in the jungle to be safe. One day the enemy came to our village and burned our village house and church, so my family had to run to the jungle. Some families were captured and some families were killed by the enemy. I thank God He protected our family and we were all safe in the jungle.

After that we moved to another small village called Baw Pae where we were safe. One year later in this village, the sickness came. Most of the children and adults were dying. I lost one lovely sister. So we could no longer live in the village. My family moved to the Karenni Refugee Camp in Thailand where we lived peacefully. We got food and my family planted vegetables again. My family was poor, but we were happier than we had been in the other village. My family lived safely because of God's love, mercy, and protection. My family lived in the Karenni Refugee Camp for six years peacefully. My brothers and sisters and I went to school, and we had time to study.

After six years, I thank God a lot for the open American government's heart and the call of refugee people to arrive in America. My family arrived in America in 2010. The first years in America were not easy, but we had a lot of opportunity to gain an education. Now my family lives in a free country. My father, my older

sister, and my middle brother all have good jobs. My little brother and little sisters go to good schools. My father works at a fruit company and my older sister is a graduate of Job Corps, got a CNA certificate, and works with people with disabilities. I was working before, and now I'm using my time to study and learn English. We are all happy together in the United States now.

Mue Ble is 23 and originally from Burma.

Challenges of My Life

URID LUCAS LOPEZ, BROOKLYN CENTER

My name is Urid Lucas Lopez. I am from Mexico. One of my challenges was coming to the USA. Without knowing, I was promised that someone was going to help me so I worked over 14 hours a day, seven days a week for this family. One day I decided to escape, and that's how I came to Minnesota. In Minnesota, I started a new challenge. I started looking for a job. My English was very poor. I will never forget this stage in my life. I said I needed a job. Here in Minnesota, I found friendly people. These people helped me survive without my real family. I adopted a new friendly family. For five years, I worked at two jobs. I helped my mom when she was sick and helped my brother and sister finish high school. This is the reason why I came to the USA.

In 2005, I met Miguel, my partner with whom I have my two lovely children. When my first child Angel was born, it was another challenge. Having my son made me try to be better each day. My second child, Jesus, inspired me to be a better mom and person.

In 2014, I started a new and scary challenge when the specialist doctors found something abnormal inside my head. They called it a brain aneurysm.

This caused my headaches. They prepared an emergency head surgery. They told me, “Don’t be scared. After three days you can go home.” On April 14, 2014, I underwent a nine-hour surgery. When I woke up, the pain was terrible. After four days, I came back home with the same pain. I was in my home for two days and returned to the hospital again. The doctors found liquid draining from my nose. I underwent another surgery. I stayed in the hospital for 18 more days in bed with many devices connected to me. I will never forget when one specialist told me you will be dead in no more than 42 hours. I was thinking, “I can do it. God will help me.”

I want to see my children grow up. My family has been a big part in my recovery, and this is a challenge of my life. After my surgery, I could not work. I decided to come back to school to learn more English. My challenge is to improve my education and acquire a GED. These are some of my challenges.

Urid Lucas Lopez is originally from Mexico.

The Gift

LUZ QUINTANA, SHOREVIEW

I was born in Michoacán, Mexico, in 1976. I have been in the United States of America since 1992. I have three precious kids. Brayan, who is 22 years old, is a pleasant gentleman to be around. Dyanne is 17 years old with a beautiful heart and a sweet and peaceful personality. My 12-year-old Amy is funny, explosive, and full of love.

My life has been full of challenges. The most painful challenge was when my father passed away when I was a child. We had to learn how to live without him. A few years

later, doctors diagnosed me with a rare illness called Myasthenia Gravis, or MG. It is a chronic autoimmune neuromuscular disease characterized by weakness of the muscles.

Life has taught me that if you want something, you have to fight for it, and I wanted to live to see my kids grow. Life is so beautiful, and it gave me the most wonderful gift of all to walk again, talk again, and see my kids grow. Life is beautiful. Sometimes, the little things in life can be the most precious jewels, and we don’t have the right to take it for granted because they are gifts. Now I can see life in a different way. Now I know that you have to enjoy every single moment because we only have today. Tomorrow is something that we have to put in the hands of our Creator.

My dream is to go back to school and be a social worker to help others. I want to thank my ESL teachers who gave me this opportunity to express a little bit of who I have become. Thank you Laurie and Roberta.

Luz Quintana is 39 and originally from Mexico.

Story About My Life

MARCO YUNGA, BROOKLYN CENTER

My story is about my life. My name is Marco, and I’m from Ecuador. I come from a small state, and I grew up in a small town where we all knew each other. I come from a big family. My parents worked so hard to support us every day. Our economy sometimes was very poor because sometimes we didn’t have enough rain, and so the crops weren’t really good. My parents always worried when things happened. Although, for them, education was the main plan.

Sometimes it was hard for my parents because

the school asked for money for uniforms and for other things. After two years in high school, I decided to go to the army. I spent one year in the army. I learned a lot about weapons, tanks, and other military stuff. After I finished a year in the army, I decided to move to the USA. We came with my uncle, along with random people; we were totally nervous, and we barely talked. Once we got here in Minnesota in June of 2000, we went to my dad's friend's apartment because he was the only person we knew here. After that, our second challenge was language. We did not speak English, and it was hard to talk to people and find a job. When we walked on streets, some people wanted to make conversation but we pretended not hear them and walk away.

After a month, we decided to look for jobs even though we did not speak English because we needed money to survive. Finally, we got jobs at a restaurant, but it was more difficult because all the recipes were in English. Therefore, we had to wash dishes or help cut the vegetables. Another problem was taking the bus home because all the buses looked the same; we did not know the bus routes and which bus went close to our apartment. We got lost many times because once we were on the bus, the bus driver was talking in the microphone but we did not know what he said and we realized we were totally lost. After that, we realized that the buses had numbers.

After all these things happened, I decided go to school. My goal is to get my GED and go to college to get a good future for me and my family.

Marco Yunga is originally from Ecuador.

Ode to a Past Life and Love

DAVID MORROW, ST. CLOUD

You once told me that I was your treasure

No one could replace me

But in all honesty, we are all replaceable and interchangeable like gears in a clock.

Of course, back then we were both burning the midnight oil, a.k.a. meth, or whatever you want to call it.

I am calling it the drug of destruction and corruption, as it destroyed our beautiful relationship we once had.

Yet the drug remained a mainstay in our lives until I got locked up.

So I am locked up, and what do you do? You continue making bad choices.

If I am your treasure, how can you not stay loyal, faithful, and honest?

I may be in jail, but I am sober and am committed to staying sober.

I wanted to stay committed to you as well

But you have moved on with someone else, and all you are really committed to is meth.

What about me? More importantly, what about your kids?

But scariest of all, you have given up on yourself.

Is meth really that powerful? Is this the life you want to live?

Someday I hope you will be able to reflect on all your lost treasures and become that person I once loved.

David Morrow is originally from the United States.

My Three Little Pigs

KELLY PORTER, MINNEAPOLIS

Who are the three little pigs in your life?

Who is that big bad wolf, always in sight?

When I wake up, I hear the voices of three little pigs and the big bad wolf; who are you today?

Am I the house of bricks or maybe sticks?

But really, I am the house of straw. Will I make it today without thoughts of the wolf?

I will not because I AM THE BIG BAD WOLF!

I am in constant conflict with my mind, body, and emotions

Trying to destroy these good pigs with poison.

What will I do? I'm all alone again.

My Mom will shed tears again.

But I am the big bad wolf; I am in charge!

Nothing can bring me down, not mind, body, or emotions.

I look in the mirror; where's my crown?

I hear no more voices; I am gone.

There are no smiles, just a frown.

Now, I am like the three little pigs trying to hold myself together inside

While the wind blows outside

What's going to happen? What will I do?

At that moment I am knocked down; I can't get up, I've had enough

Yet once again, here comes the big bad wolf

Kelly Porter is originally from the United States.

An Expensive Lesson

CAROLLE AGBAZAHOU, NEW HOPE

When I was in my country (Benin, West Africa), I had never seen a toll road. In 2012, I came to the United States, and I lived on 69 Parker Street in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

One day, I used the GPS to go somewhere, and I arrived in front of the toll road. I was so confused because I saw bypass lane and cash only lane. I didn't know I had to take a ticket, so I continued driving. Moreover, the road was so large, and people drove so fast. I was so scared that my legs were shaking. Many times, I pulled my car over to the side of the road to take a big deep breath.

Finally, I was so happy when the GPS said that I was leaving the toll road. Unfortunately, when the cashier asked me about the ticket, I said I didn't have any ticket. He just smiled and said I had to pay \$20 for my mistake. I was so shocked and humiliated. Later my husband told me that the same road trip with a ticket cost \$2. I wasted \$18 for just 12 minutes on the toll road, and I learned from my mistake. That is the United States!

Carolle Agbazahou is 40 and originally from Benin.

Rudolph

S. DELADEM DOGBEY, MINNEAPOLIS

Rudolph was a big influence in my life. He brought me to America as my sponsor and enrolled me in school. He paid my tuition when I had a student status. He guided me for a while.

However, he couldn't keep up with his promises, so he stopped helping me. People say that in life, many things that happen to

us are neutral. It depends on the direction we give them that makes a difference. People don't know how strong they are until they have nothing but to be. Therefore, when I was left by myself, I chose to be content with what I had. Rudolph helped me to a point. Now, it's my turn to help myself to get where I want to be in life.

One of the reasons that he stopped his sponsorship was because he did not believe in me anymore. He had other hopes for me that I didn't feel would suit me. I know that I have great potential; I can and will do great things with or without his help, and I have. The difference is that it would have been a plus if he continued to do so! At first it was very scary, but life must go on! I felt underestimated, and I also faced the reality that life is not fair. This situation turned out to fuel me to prove him wrong. It wasn't an easy task. Making ends meet was very challenging, but thank goodness, most of this is behind me now.

For every achievement or goal in life, we do need a plan or a map to follow. Consequently, I set up small goals and long-term goals that I'm working toward. I emphasize things I can do or control. Life has been a roller coaster, but today, I can say I beat the odds. I'm a nursing assistant, work full time, and I am self-sufficient, but my journey doesn't end here. I do have a secret dream I don't talk about because people might find it unrealistic. Nevertheless, I'm confident that it is doable. For now, I'm travelling to a place called Hope. The only difference between those who threw in the towel and quit and those who used their energy to rebuild and kept it going is found in the word Hope. May God give us an energetic life to fulfill our dreams.

My Journey

MARIA ROJAS DOMINGUEZ, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

My journey in life has not been easy.

I started hanging out with the wrong crowd at a young age, started drinking and partying, thinking nothing else matters or was important to me in life until six years ago, when I was blessed with a beautiful daughter. Four years after her, I had a handsome son.

My children are now six and two years old. They keep me very busy, and I wouldn't change it for anything. Both of my children have changed my life completely.

I am currently a single mother to my two children. My children light up my days. Without them, I wouldn't be where I am now. They are my motivation. I am a hard worker. Very independent. Everything I have, I have worked hard for and I have worked for my children. I am also working a part-time job and attending school to achieve my GED. It has not been easy.

I had thoughts of just quitting due to failing scores. It is not easy, but I chose not to give up. There are times I don't get to see my children as much as I'd like to, but I know later in the future they will understand and thank me for everything I have done. All I am do is for them, to give them and myself a better future. As far as I have come, I am proud of myself and all my accomplishments.

There is no giving up for this mom. I am also thankful for my loving parents, who until this day have never given up on me and have always pushed me to better myself. This is why I am who I am now. Always remember that life is what you make it!

Ruqia Is Lost

RUQIA GULED, MINNEAPOLIS

When I came to Minnesota a long time ago, I made an appointment at the hospital. One of my family members gave me a ride to the hospital. She came in with me. After a few minutes she left. When my appointment ended, I went out the back door. After that I was lost and I didn't know where I was going. After a few minutes I saw a Somali woman. She said, "I will give you a ride. Do you know your address?"

I said I didn't know my address or my phone number. I said, "I have lived in Minneapolis for only a few days. I came from Atlanta, Georgia. I know my home is near the SuperAmerica."

She said, "Minneapolis has a lot of SuperAmericas. Let's go to my home." I said no. After that I saw my sister. I felt happy.

Tired

EBADO YUSUF, MINNEAPOLIS

I am tired.

Working, school, children's school, hospital, appointments

Food, homework, Qur'an

All I do, only one

No car

I'm tired

Ebado Yusuf is originally from Somalia.

New Driver

ANOUSONE YABANDITH, ST. MICHAEL

Hi! My name is Anousone or Ann. I'm from Laos. I came to Minnesota (USA) two years ago, and now I live in Brooklyn Park. I have one older sister and one younger brother, but they still live in Laos. I just got my driver's license within the last couple of months. It took me five times to pass the permit test and two times to pass the road test because I did not speak or read English well. I was about to give up, but I had to do it.

Now that I have a driver's license, I'm so happy and nervous, but I am very careful. When I drive, I go slowly. This is the first time for me to drive in the snow, and I don't like to drive in the wintertime. I like to drive in the summertime better. In the wintertime, the roads are very slippery and icy. I'm so scared, but I have to drive to work. When I drive, I don't turn on music. I pay attention to the road and drive slowly. This is my story about my first driving in Minnesota. Thank you for reading my story.

Anousone Yabandith is 21 and originally from Laos.

A Good Experience for Me

EMAN ABUFOOR, ST. PAUL

When I came to the U.S., I was very sad because I gave up each routine that I used in Saudi Arabia. I gave up my big family. I lived mostly alone because my husband was at school, and he was busy all day. I cried a lot, and everything looked bad.

I spoke with my husband and told him that I didn't expect this way of life, and I felt very bored and frustrated. I wanted to change my life here. My husband tried to change my mood. Every weekend we would go to a new place for entertainment.

After a year and a half, a friend told me about the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) office. I told them I needed help to get out of the sadness that I was in. They told me there were schools and I could register.

Now I've found schools for me and my children. I am studying the English language, and every month I have an important topic like health, housing, and community. I've found new friends. I will try to find a job.

Now I am doing very well, and I have adapted in most of the affairs of life. Living in the U.S. is a good experience for me.

Eman Abufoor is 27 and originally from Saudi Arabia.

Memoir of My Life

ANGELICA NOVAL, NEW HOPE

When my father was alive, we lived together as a happy family. Even though my father didn't have a nice job, he always took responsibility for his family. My life was good.

One day, when I was in high school, my father came to me and said, "Take care of your younger brothers and sisters, help your mother, don't be a naughty girl, and do all the household chores." This was the first time he had ever spoken to me like this.

On this day there was a festival in our city. My father went out to have a drink and sing some karaoke songs. Later that night, my mother

heard a lot of noise outside of our house. She went outside and found my father lying in the street, bleeding. He had been shot!

I was in a state of shock as I remembered what my father had said to me earlier that day. An hour later, my father was dead. I lost all hope and couldn't imagine what I was going to do.

The police reported that this was the work of a serial killer, and that they were actively trying to catch the suspect. We wanted justice for my father's death but my grandmother thought that the police were working with the killer and seeking bribes from us.

I tried my very best to be strong and continue to go to school even though it was hard to concentrate. I dropped out of school and turned to other friends in the internet café.

One day we received a call from my aunt and uncle from the United States. They were in the process of adopting all eight of us! The International Child Adoption Board kept us informed the whole time, but it was scary for me because I was 17 and they informed me that I would likely age out at age 18.

A month before my 18th birthday, I got the call that my papers had been approved. I was so relieved. I was finally on the flight to the United States.

I still miss my family and grandmother in the Philippines and am still adjusting to the United States. It's not like the movies. With support from my aunties, uncle, and school guidance, I believe I will be very happy here in the States.

Angelica Noval is 20 and originally from the Philippines.

My Terrible Experience

MOI LAI, FRIDLEY

This is my terrible experience. It happened on September 25, 2014, in the afternoon around 4:00 p.m. It was a busy Chinese restaurant, and that day we ran out of fountain soda so I had to go downstairs and change it. (Soda syrup weighs 20 pounds per box.) I lifted it up to the rack.

After that I felt like I pulled a back muscle, but then it hurt in my right chest and it was difficult to breathe. I resumed normal breathing in 15 minutes but then I would cough after walking a few steps. I was gasping. Ultimately, I drove myself to the hospital, almost passing out. I told them what happened to me. The nurse took a wheelchair and sent me to the X-ray room with an oxygen mask.

Soon the doctor told me that my right lung had collapsed. It's called Pneumothorax. It occurs when air leaks into the space between the lungs and chest wall. It pushes on the outside of the lung until it collapses. It can be life-threatening. In the emergency room the surgeon stabbed a long needle into my chest and used a tube to suck the air out. I was awake but they used an anesthetic.

After the suction they kept me in the hospital for eight hours and then they let me go home with a small suction. A week later I had to go back to remove the suction.

October 1: I went back and was told that it was still leaking because I had a large Pneumothorax, so they inserted a flexible chest tube between my ribs and lungs to remove the excess air in the hope that it would allow the lungs to re-expand.

October 15: I met six different surgeons in two weeks. I received bad news from them:

the leak didn't close on its own, and my lungs wouldn't re-expand. Oh, my God! It required chest surgery to repair the hole in the lungs.

October 26: The surgery was called Talc Pleurodesis. Talc powder is blown into the pleural cavity to coat the inside of the ribs and the lung surface. This causes inflammation which causes the lungs to stick to the inside of the ribcage, leaving no space for fluid.

October 31: Finally, I was discharged from hospital. That was a month-long nightmare.

My First Days in Minnesota

JAVIER LLERENA, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I can remember when I came to Minnesota. I arrived at 2:30 p.m. on October 10, 2000, at the airport, but my brother didn't come until 4:30 p.m. I was so scared because I called but nobody answered. Finally my brother came.

I came from New York, because my father lives in that city. I spent 9 days in New York, but I didn't like it because I saw a lot of traffic. When I saw my brother, I was very tired, so we went to the house. I took a shower and ate something, and at 5:30 p.m., we went to work.

I started cleaning offices. The first days for me were very hard. During the second week I got one more job, so my days of work started at 6:00 a.m. until 1:00 a.m. I worked for almost 18 hours per day.

On June 1, 2001, my wife along with my three daughters came to Minnesota. I was very happy. Fourteen years have passed, and now I have a better job. My oldest daughter is married. I have two grandsons, and my other daughters have finished high school.

This is why I say, “Thanks to God” and “Thanks to this beautiful country, for giving me the opportunity to grow.” I will love this country forever.

God bless America, today, tomorrow, and always!
GOD BLESS AMERICA!

My First Job

KHADRO MUSSE, MINNEAPOLIS

I want to write about my first job when I came to the United States.

I was seventeen years old and by myself, so I looked like a newborn baby.

I didn’t speak any English and I didn’t know American culture, people, weather, and food. After 21 days, I started work. It was very hard for me.

It was not easy at all. The people who worked there spoke English, but not I. The people asked me, “Where are you from?” I said, “No English.” They said again, “What is your name?” I said, “No English,” then I started to cry. The people talked to each other. I felt alone.

Khadro Musse is originally from Somalia.

My Life: Then and Now

ARNOLD DEEN, FRIDLEY

Hi, my name is Arnold and my home country is the Netherlands. I have two sons and three grandchildren; my oldest son has a boy and a girl, and my youngest son has a girl. I have two brothers and a sister. My dad was a roofer and my mom stayed home to take care of us. We lived in the same house as my grandparents.

My youngest brother died in January 1991, and my dad died a year later in May 1992, on my sister’s birthday. My mom passed away in November 2014 just before her 87th birthday.

At the age of 15, I started working as a car mechanic for five years. Then, I got all of my driver’s licenses and started driving trucks. I also love motorcycles. In 1969 I bought my first motorcycle. In 1977 I started drag racing; the track was a quarter mile and I tried to go as fast as I could to beat my opponent. I worked on my own engine when it blew up, then I put some new parts on it and made it ready for the next drag race. I shipped my Honda CBX six to America and left my Pro-stock Honda in Holland.

In December 2012 I retired so that I could go to America to marry my loved one, Barbara. We got married in October 2014 and I started my new life here. I am going to an adult school to improve my English speaking and writing. I got my Minnesota driver’s license in November 2015. I still have to get my motorcycle and bus licenses. I am still going to make one trip to Holland for four months to see my family and do some private things.

The Story of My Life

MOHAMED MOHAMUD, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Mohamed. I am originally from Somalia. I was born January 1, 1942, in Mogadishu. My father died while I was seven years old.

My father married my mother while she was handicapped. Therefore it was hard financially to support me. For that reason I left my family

ten years of age then became a survivor. At night I slept at the open market on top of the tables. In the morning I would wake up when people were shopping at the market. Mostly women are shopping with baskets made of grass. I would volunteer to help them carry their baskets on top of my head up to their houses. Some of them gave tips equal to 1 US dollar value today. I became well known to all people in the market, so every person asked me to help carry their basket. Then they gave me a good nickname, *Ga aliye*, meaning generous hardworking boy.

After three years, I earned good money, so I made a personal budget. While I was working the market I used to see young boys and girls carrying books and going to school. I became jealous, so I went to register for school, but the head teacher told me to buy books and a uniform. It was too expensive for me, so I went to an Adult English and Arabic Language school. After 10 years I married and had my eldest son Abdihakim.

Unfortunately my first wife passed away in 1975 in Mogadishu. In 1975, I married another wife called Khadija who gave me eight more children. All of them are alive at the present time. I am very happy that they have grown up; some of them are married, some of them are single. Some came with me to the USA through the refugee resettlement program. Now we are living in Minneapolis and are very happy. This is an unforgettable life for me, Mohamed *Ga aliye* from Somalia.

Mohamed Mohamud is originally from Somalia.

My Two Lives

WAH WAH SAY, WORTHINGTON

A long time ago when we lived in Burma, we had our parents and lived happily as a family. We did not miss anyone because we lived peacefully and there was plenty of food for everyone. We loved one another. We did not live a depressed life.

Life before the Burmese War was peaceful. But when the war broke out, we had to take our family to the jungle and hide there. We did not carry much food with us. When we were out of food, we searched the jungle and ate whatever we could find. Sometimes we ate grass, cut open tree vines for water, and ate the inside of banana tree trunks for food.

Nowadays, life in America is different and hard. When I think back about life in Burma, I miss my homeland. In America, if you don't work, there is not food on the table and no money to support your family. If you have a lot of children, they want to do their own things and don't show much support and love like the old days.

Because life in Burma is very hard, I want to let all the Karen children know that your parents risked their lives to save you and bring you to the United States. You should love them and care for them as much as they loved and cared for you when you were young.

Wah Wah Say is 29 and originally from Burma.

My New Adventures in America

NAZMOON KHAN, FRIDLEY

I was born and raised in my home country of Guyana, which is located in South America. The only language I speak is English. I was

raised in a big and beautiful family, whereby I was taught good morals and values. The best part of my life was when I gave birth to my beautiful daughter in 1998. That was the happiest day of my life. She is God's gift to me. She's my purpose for living. I cherish every moment with her. She's such a fine young lady now, striving towards excellence and achieving her goals. My new adventure began when I came to America in 2004. I was delighted when I came, because after four years I got to see my parents again. I kept my culture close to me, even though I came to America. I thank God everyday to be so fortunate to spend two weeks of quality time with her, not knowing that her death would be so sudden. I was broken, the one thing that kept me going is my faith in God.

Everyday I faced was a new challenge for me, but I continued to keep the right perspective. Everything was different in America. I had found a job, which I didn't like but I still went along with it. I rode everyday to work with my dad and I worked very hard to earn a living. I began to meet new friends at the place I worked. They taught me the ways of this country. I've never stop asking questions. I began to learn more about America. Even though the weather is very different, I accepted the fact that this is my home now. I've worked very hard to get a driver's license and finally I got it. I bought a car, gone to school, and got a new job in nursing, which I'm passionate about. I'm trying my utmost best to strive to become a nurse one day. That is my goal. I love America. It has give me the opportunity I've never thought about in a million years. In 2008 I bought my first home, which my daughter and I enjoy every day. I've explored so much in America, and I love every bit of it, and plan to do more.

Thank you for reading my story.

Nazmoon Khan is 42 and originally from Guyana.

Untitled

NICK GORDON, MAPLE LAKE



My Journey

JOHN CRUM, FRIDLEY

This is my journey. It's been hard. I moved from place to place. I'd never been stable, but I've worked all my life. I have seen the good and bad life has to offer, and I think I have come out alright. I have three daughters, and they came from Minneapolis to Milwaukee to get me and bring me back here. The reason they came to get me was because people were calling them and telling them I was drinking all day and night and sleeping in parks or under bridges. The reason I didn't want to come here was because there was nothing to do. But I am glad they did because I am trying to get my GED and I am working in the hospital. I am happy, and they are happy I am here with them.

An Adventure to a Great Experience

ANGEL GABRIEL NAULA JIMBO, MINNEAPOLIS

Adventure is what my life has been about. I am glad for the opportunities that have crossed my path. I enjoy learning new things for success.

I arrived in America when I was 15 years old without having any idea what life is about in a different country. But I was glad I had a few cousins to show me around and to help me get to places. In my journey I crossed deserts, mountains, and rivers, and I made it. At first I was frightened at being away from my family at a young age, but I was surrounded by people in the same situation. Some were from my country, Ecuador, and some were from Central and South America. We had a great adventure and a path for a new beginning for our lives. There was even a mother of children around nine-ten years old with the energy to make it. It was astonishing and beautiful to meet foreign people on the road and to share stories. Time has passed. Now I am a full-grown man in my thirties. I feel good about my experiences because they give me power to continue going with my life. It all has a reason. Everything has a meaning. I enjoy living life just like the sunlight shines in the morning and sets at evening.

For almost two decades, I haven't been back to Ecuador. I miss my homeland, family, and my school friends. I am hoping they will still be in town when I visit. Soon I'll be able to travel. I can't wait for that. and I am so excited for my trip to Ecuador. I'm thankful for the adventure I had, the strength and the challenges. I am also thankful to my good friends who supported me in my situation.

Life is full of surprises! I am glad that I went through all these challenges at a young age. I have gained skills for success and it made me stronger than ever.

Angel Gabriel Naula Jimbo is 33 and originally from Ecuador.

My Story

KEO VYLAYHONG, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Keo Vylayhong. My home country is Laos. A long civil war ended in 1975 when the communists took over the government. At that time I was in my second year of dental school, but I decided to escape by swimming across the Mekong River to Thailand. I lived in a refugee camp for one year until I received permission to come to America in November 1981. My first stop was Oakland, California, then on to Fresno, California and in 1982 to Minneapolis. It was here that I saw snow for the very first time. I was excited, it was much colder than in my country.

I got married in 1983 and have two children, but am now divorced. Of all the American cities I have lived in, including San Diego, California, St. Petersburg, Florida, and Ft. Worth, Texas, my favorite is Minneapolis.

Keo Vylayhong is originally from Laos.

My Sad History

OMAR RIVERA OCAMPO, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I am from Mexico. I left my country when I was 14 years old. I decided it was the best decision to come to the USA and have a better life. I came to the USA to work and support my family in Mexico. I started working when I was 15 years old.

Everything was good, but one day I felt a strong pain in my stomach. My brother took me to the hospital, but he had to work and he left me alone at the hospital. The doctors told me I needed an appendicitis operation. I felt sad because I saw many children with their parents and families, but I was there alone, crying, and afraid. Finally, my brother came and I felt happy. My tears went away. I had my appendicitis operation and everything went well.

I started a new life and worked toward new goals. Recently, my parents and I reunited. They are now living with me and everything is going well. Thank God for everything.

Omar Rivera Ocampo is 27 and originally from Mexico.

My Life

SUHIZA AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Ethiopia, but I moved to Kenya because the President of Ethiopia was the worst President in the world. He killed my father.

I came to Kenya in 2004. I left my family in my home country. My father died in 1995. I was upset so I prayed for him all the time. My father and my mother had eight children. After my father died, I left my school. I went to help my mom. My mom was special to me because she cared for me when I was a kid.

After a while, I got married and had two daughters. Then after many years in Kenya, I came to America in February 2010. It was very cold when I came. I was very happy the day I came to America. The refugee services helped my family a lot. They rented me a house and bought me Ethiopian food. They got me everything I needed to live in America.

Suhiza Ahmed is originally from Ethiopia.

My Life

MIRNA ROSAS MARTINEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Mirna Rosas Martinez. I was born on May 24, 1994, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. When I was almost four years old, my parents decided to move to Mexico, the country where they and my two brothers were born. When I arrived at my parent's house, I was very impatient because I was just a little girl and everything there was strange and new for me. I had never seen chickens, cows, or donkeys before. I was so afraid. But my life became better. I met new people and started elementary school.

In 2003 my parents and I moved back to Minneapolis. Again, it was a big change for me. I started fifth grade at Emerson School where the teaching was in Spanish, because I didn't know how to speak, read, or write anything in English. I started my English classes. The teacher was a Chinese woman who didn't speak any Spanish. At the beginning that situation made me feel powerless, because I wasn't able to communicate what I wanted to say. But with the passing of time, everything became better. I was learning English very fast and I made good friends.

In April 2004, for reasons beyond my control, we moved back to Mexico, and I grew up there, in a little town, Achichipilco, Puebla.

In 2011 I met Cesar and we began a relationship. He became my best friend and the perfect partner in life for me. In the same year I started studying at the University in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. In July 2015 I graduated from the Engineering Textile and Fashion Design program.

On September 2015, Cesar and I decided to start a life together and to come to this city, Minneapolis. That's why we are here learning English. We are enjoying this new experience.

Mirna Rosas Martinez is originally from Mexico.

Life Was a Challenge

AREJA BERISSO, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Ethiopia. I grew up with my family and helped them keep cattle and farm. My dad wanted me to go to school, but there was no school.

Finally when I was 16, I started school. My family lived far from the school. I walked seven miles every day. I stayed all day in the school with no lunch whatsoever. I was happy to attend the school. After school, I helped my family.

I finished and passed first to second grade in one year. Then I passed third and fourth grade in one year. Then fifth grade in one year, and sixth grade in one year with a 98%. I was so happy.

Right now, when I remember it all, life was a challenge.

Areja Berisso is originally from Ethiopia.

Journeys of My Life

KADIR BARKHADLE, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Saudi Arabia, grew up in Somalia, and traveled to different countries. After the 1991 Civil War in Somalia, my family migrated to Kenya and traveled border to border. We lived almost one year in the wild with dangerous animals such as lions, cheetahs, and snakes. Snakes were the most dangerous. We could see them everywhere. The life in wild was hard, full of problems including famine, wars, and deaths, especially young children. Later we migrated to Ethiopia. Life in Ethiopia was better than Kenya, even though we did not have a place to live. We lived outside and we believed that we were close to our home country.

We continued our travel toward my country and drove through the highest mountain in Ethiopia where the big trees seems like a tiny dots. Finally we arrived in my home country and felt so happy to arrive from a long distance through wars and after witnessing horrible situations, deaths, etc. We settled and started a new life in our home country. Life wasn't easy after civil wars, and we decided to stay till the situation got better.

After many hard years my parents decided to send two of my siblings into Pakistan. Six years later, in 2000, my two siblings got resettled to the United States. In June 2004, I graduated high school in Somalia and my family decided to move to Pakistan to get a better life. We moved to Pakistan January 2006. Life in Pakistan wasn't too bad, but not an easy one.

My two siblings in the USA decided to bring us to the United States in 2008. The process took so long since we had a long security check-up. During that time I started a Business Bachelor's and graduated in February 2012. Although the process took so long, we waited till the end. We experienced hard times as a family from the government during the process. Our legal documents weren't enough to move outside of Pakistan, but we could stay better in the country. June 2013 our process went through perfectly, and we realized we were about to come to United States. We were so excited to hear we had our flight scheduled for September 2013. No matter how long we waited, we were so excited to arrive in the land of opportunity.

My Life

FATOUMA FARADA, MINNEAPOLIS

I have a good memory of when I was a young girl. I grew up in a big family with seven boys and two girls. When I finished high school in 1996, I started to work as a cashier. I gave advances to employees, I paid the bills, and I received checks for the office.

The second job was in the police office. After that I married a strong man and now I have four children.

In August 2014, I left my country Djibouti to come to Minnesota. I am happy but I felt a difference in my life.

First, the weather in my country was very hot, but the winter is frozen and cold in Minnesota. Second, I felt more stressed living in the United States than in my country. Third, the food is much more plentiful and variable than in my country.

Sometimes my life is very hard in Minnesota because I don't speak English very well. Also, I cannot adjust to the dietary change.

Fatouma Farada is originally from Djibouti.

The Life that Almost Got Away

KIMBERLY CUNINGHAM, RICE

With every prick of the needle, my tears burn as they hit the cold floor under me

As the meth hits the vein I find myself smiling again

With each high, I am giving myself away

As the numbness takes over, it helps the unhappiness and sadness fly to the unknown

As the over dose does its killing, I silently say my good-byes

White knuckles from hanging onto the sheets as the lights get dimmer and the room becomes smaller

Taking a deep breath as my eyes close to my death

This is it, I can feel it, no pain ever again

My body is cold and my lips are stone

Forever lost with a fake smile on my face

Beep..beep..beep...I hit my flat line

This is my sweet suicide

As I fade into darkness of the pits of hell I think to myself if I could take it back

Don't let this be my sick goodbye, I beg of you

Just then, as if my prayers were answered, a bright light blinds me with halo followed

Open my eyes to see his hand reaching out for me

A voice inside said grab my hand child you are forgiven

I knew it was Jesus just by the scars on each hand from when he died for my sins

Just in time, he forgave me for the sin I was willing to cement

Never again will I have my own blood on my hands

With a strong gasp of air you hear this

Beep...beep...beep...heartbeat stronger than ever

This is when I found out how good being reborn again could be.

Kimberly Cuningham is originally from the United States.

Little Change

MACARIO GOMEZ, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

The life at the little village where I came from is so different. There, I can go where I want, not a problem. I do not need to show something to identify. If I want to take a shower, I just go to the river or creek and do that. But, the people are very poor and nobody has enough for their life. No jobs are available. Any person who is looking for a job needs to know someone in the company to get it. I would spend my whole life there, but I had a dream.

I think if somebody wants something good, they need to just make a plan and go for it. Finally, I decided to move to the USA with my family. The change is not easy, the first problem is the language, it is so hard to understand something if someone talks to you. So, the time goes faster and now we are already acclimatized here in Minnesota, my family and I, living well.

My Story

MARCH MOO, WORTHINGTON

My name is March P. Moo. My birthday is March 11, 1988, and I was born in Burma. I have four brothers and no sisters. My father died in 1996 in the Burmese Army. When my father died, my mother couldn't do anything. She didn't know where she would go. We didn't have money or a home. We stayed at my father's friend's house. My father's sister came and took us to her place and we stayed at her home. I remember her son hit me all the time.

Two or three months later, my mother's sister took us to stay at my grandmother's home. My grandmother didn't love my mom,

me, or my brothers because we couldn't do anything and we were poor. So my mom made a small bamboo house and we lived in that small house. Nobody visited my family. My grandmother never visited me. My aunt and uncle lived near my house, but they never visited my family. I was so sad because I didn't have any friends.

Then, for one year, I went to school and I got one friend. She was poor like me. We liked to find vegetables and we sold them in another village. If we got money, we would buy food for our families. After a year, we moved to a refugee camp in Thailand. We lived in a refugee camp but we weren't free.

In 2008, we moved to the USA. Now, we have freedom. Thank you God.

March Moo is 27 and originally from Burma.

It's the Mistakes of the Past that Control the Future

ANDREW JANKOWSKI, ST. CLOUD

No one knows what the future holds or what one or the other will do when those of the future win the fight; though the past makes its claim to the future.

I make one mistake and it overflows into the future; knowing that it will one day make itself known in my own life, and no one will see me for who I am but for what I've done.

Shattered for once in my life, I make the impossible decision of running through the list of mistakes of my past and see that I know how my life has changed since I was young.

I listen to my songs and hope there's some relief, but I know that in the end my body

lies in one place while my soul will continue to have a severe case of wanderlust. Moving from one place to the next with the unease of someone lost beyond help.

Andrew Jankowski is originally from the United States.

Dr. Seuss Jail (Living in a Bathroom)

KYLE MCCLAIN, COON RAPIDS

I live in a bathroom, yes I do.

I wear pajamas and shower shoes.

There are two bunks, a toilet, a desk, and a sink.

And just enough room to pace and think.

It's not a lot but it's too much for me.

In the middle of the night I hear my celly pee.

I live in a bathroom, yes it's true.

Please courtesy flush if you poo.

There's a shiny piece of metal that they call a mirror.

It looks so blurry; is that me in there?

Oh, there's also a window too small to see out.

I'm living in a bathroom without a doubt.

One bathroom, two bathrooms, three bathrooms, four

There's a toilet just inside every door.

So many bathrooms, what a bummer.

Instead of a criminal, I should become a plumber.

Kyle McClain is originally from the United States/.

Asylum in America

MARIA ALVAREZ, ST. PAUL

When I was nine years old, my family suffered

an assault. Eight men with big guns asked for a lot of money. We did not have any money. They hit my dad and said they were going to take my sister. When they went out to talk together, my mother closed the door immediately. They said they would put a bomb in our house and we were all going to die. Thank God that did not happen. We left our house and went to an empty house belonging to my grandparents.

The house was old, dirty and had insects like scorpions. We did not have anything to sleep on, so we slept on the floor. My father went to the police to file a complaint. The police arrested one of the criminals. After that, the other criminals were looking for my dad to kill him. He had to go to Honduras, and we lived alone with our mother. She started working. When I was just a little girl I walked without shoes for hours from El Salvador to Honduras with a basket on my head selling oranges and bananas. With the money earned, I saved to buy a pair of shoes. My mom enrolled me in school. All the children were very mean to me, so I did not want to go to school. They treated me miserably. I felt that everyone was against me. I asked God to take me.

At the age of 12, I went to work in the city for a family. They were good people, but she was very demanding. Sometimes she made me clean on my knees. When I was 14, I begged my dad to help me to come to the USA. He didn't because it is very dangerous and costs a lot of money which we didn't have. After a while my dad got a loan and hired someone to bring me here. It took five weeks. It was very difficult because I didn't know how to read and could only write my name. I was afraid. People told me I could not work because I was too young. I started to work after after a month at a McDonald's. I

saved money to pay back the \$6,000 loan and helped my family in El Salvador and Honduras. Thank God, I paid all the money. I think in life, no matter what, we have to keep fighting and persevere. Always ask God to help you with his guiding hand. Now my dream is to get a high school diploma and go to college.

Maria Alvarez is 30 and originally from El Salvador.

My Life

CHAI YIN LIM, LINDSTROM

Chai Yin Lim is my name. I was born in 1960 in Malaysia. One girl and one boy, this is my family. My husband passed away in 1988. God helps those who help themselves. Thankfully, they are all grown up and my daughter lives with me in this country now. She has a husband and a daughter, my sweet lovely granddaughter. My son works in Singapore. It's a long and winding road, full of tears and pain since their father left. No one could believe I could raise them up. My girl even applied to college to study in the U.S. There was no other choice as a mother but work and more work afterward. Always a pile of bills in front of you to pay and jobs to do, never ending. Let's drop this. Let bygones be bygones.

U.S. Citizenship was passed in September 2015. My friend in Malaysia asked my impression or comparison between our two countries. People here are much more educated. There is never enough learning about this world until the last of your breath stops on this earth. In all, here is much better for living. There is security of human rights. We learn weak from strong, right from wrong. And simple is much better than complicated for a human being.

Chai Yin Lim is 55 and originally from Malaysia.

God Has Always Been With Me: An Essay

ALICIA WEBB, MINNEAPOLIS

Every household has qualities and a uniqueness that can cause dysfunction. Mine, on the other hand, was just outright crazy, which kept me confused a lot as I was growing up. First, my parents were never together. They were friends and on New Year's Eve of '88 they had one too many drinks and then came little baby girl Alicia Webb. In my mom's house I had a stepdad and in my dad's house I had a stepmom. I had four parents. I lived with my mom, and I could only visit my dad's house on weekends and when school was on vacation. I could not wait for the weekends to come so I could go to church with my stepmom. She was awesome, and her birthday was the same day as mine. She always made me feel good. She taught me a lot and always treated me like I was her child.

One year, she paid for me and my step sister to go to Bible camp where we studied Bible Scripture. At this time, we were no older than 12 or 13. We had a ball. Even though it was a Bible camp, we still did swimming, canoeing, and other outdoor activities. This was a special summer for me because I was with my dad and stepmom for most of the summer vacation.

While attending revival at my stepmom's church, I got to meet some special people. There was a visiting preacher who I will never forget. My stepmom, stepsister, and I were sitting in the second row. I don't remember what she was preaching about, but I know that she came right to our section and asked if I would come to the stage. I wasn't scared, more excited, so I followed her to the stage. Once up there, she put her arms

around me and she said the Lord told her to tell me that I was going to be a powerful woman of God. She prayed for me and anointed me with oil on my head. She said life would be hard but that God will always be waiting for me.

As I got older, my life got crazy and I got into drugs and all kinds of worldly things that eventually led me on a dark road where I was lost. Finally, I got arrested. I was on my knees praying and reading my Bible, and that is when I found myself. I could see my hunger for the Lord. While in jail, I have ministered to a lot of women. They have all been born again and they all know Jesus Christ no matter what happens. God will be calling for them too.

Alicia Webb is originally from the United States.

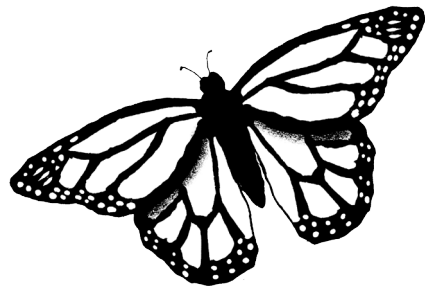
My Journey to the United States of America

ISMAIL NUR, COON RAPIDS

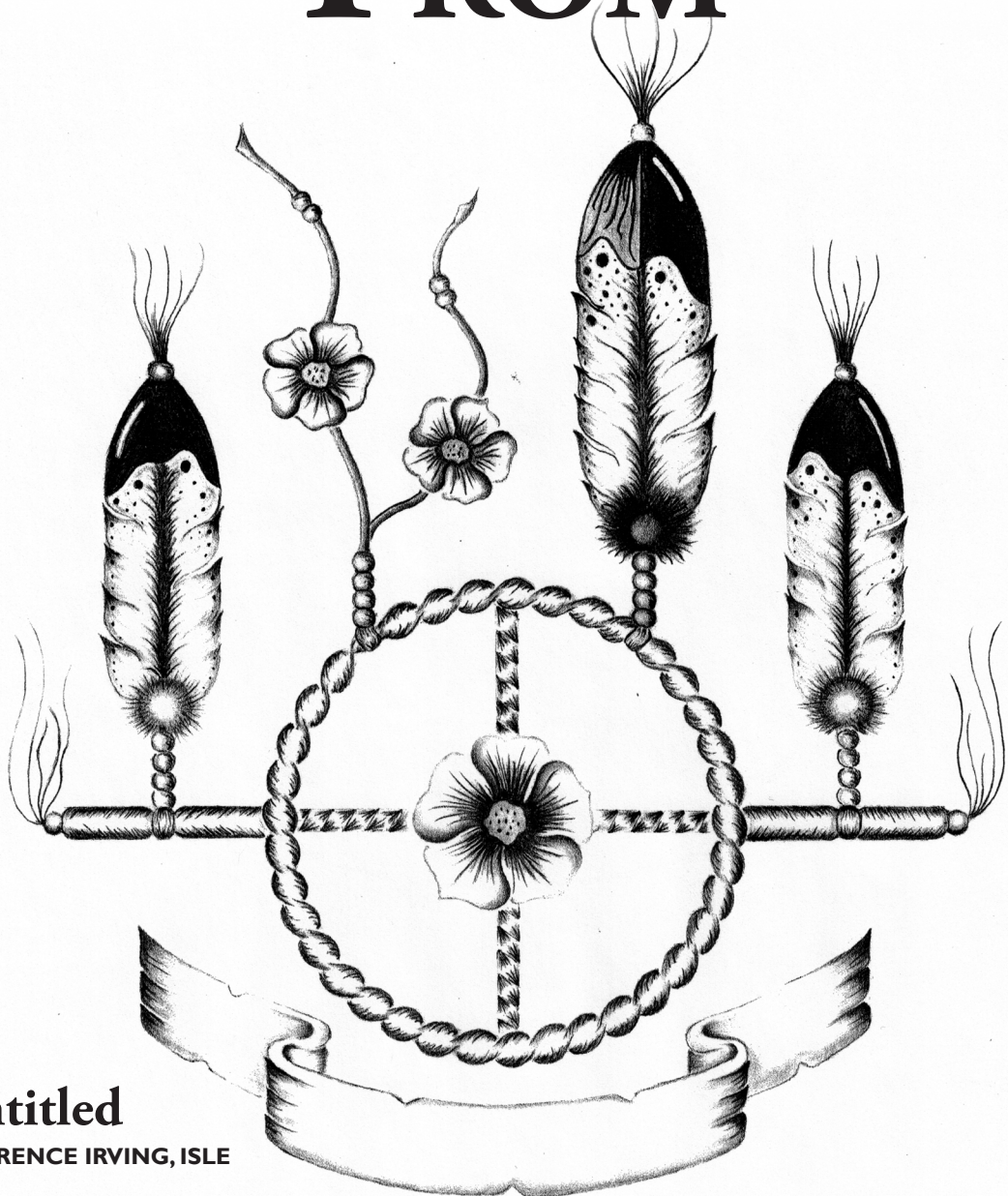
It was 2004 when I won the visa lottery to come to the United States. I picked my visa up from the American embassy. I got ready to book a flight and bought a ticket for \$1,300 from Mogadishu, Somalia, to Minneapolis, Minnesota. When I arrived to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, they told me that my ticket would get me to New York only, and after that I would have to get myself to Minneapolis. They said that I would get a \$50 refund and try to travel from New York to Minneapolis on my own. It was very bad news to me, but I decided to accept the \$50 refund because it was too late to argue. I believed that it wouldn't be a problem if I could just get to anywhere in the United States, and that \$50 would cover my ticket from New York to Minneapolis.

As I arrived to New York, I tried to purchase a ticket to Minneapolis, and they said it would cost about \$600. That was my wake-up call! I almost cried, but I didn't, and that was the day I realized that Americans are nicer than what I originally assumed because there was a man who helped me for two hours to find a cheaper way to get to Minneapolis for \$139. I rode a Greyhound bus for 29 hours to my final destination, Minneapolis. Thanks to God, and thanks to those who helped me.

Ismael Nur is 42 and originally from Somalia.



WHERE I'M FROM



Untitled

LAWRENCE IRVING, ISLE

Featured Author



CLAIRE YOUNG

was born and raised in northern Minnesota before moving down to the Twin Cities in 2009. She spent a lot of her life in a dance studio as a competitive dancer and now holds three jobs at Calvin Klein, Pacsun, and Caribou Coffee. She also has begun taking classes at Inver Hills Community College, and she plans to transfer to the University of Minnesota and major in psychology. She hopes to find a career that will feed her curiosity as to why hard criminals such as murderers and rapists do what they do.

Where I'm From

CLAIRE YOUNG, EAGAN

I am from black and white piano keys
From the notes that echoed all through
the house
I am from a small red log cabin
And that small town where everyone
knows your name
I am from grand oak trees
Whose long limbs seemed to reach
toward the stars
I am from wood stoves and deer stands
hiding high up in the trees
From hopeful blue eyes and sandy feet

And from frozen lakes in the winter
I am from big spaghetti dinners every
Sunday night
I am from Rosemary and Jerry Young
From farm-fresh eggs and organic fruits
and vegetables
The last Christmas spent with John
And from the long lines at the funeral
home
I am from these moments of a loving
family and dirt under my nails
I am from these moments which made me
who I am today.

Claire Young is 17 originally from the United States.

Mixed Feelings

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

I am from Burma. I'm happy to be in the United States, but I miss my sister, brother, and dad in Burma. My country is so bad and people are poor. They don't have food and clothes or a place to live. We live differently but I still miss my home.

The Long Way Home

ABDIRIZAK JAMA, ST. PAUL

The past and today are very different. There was pain, sadness, and now a happy life.

I grew up in a middle-class family and everything was peaceful. Then a Civil War started in Somalia. People fled to countries all over the world. After years of war, I couldn't take the pain and casualties any more, so I left my mom, sister, wife, and family and went to Kenya.

Kenya was a struggle. I had no permit to stay there, no job, no food, and no place to sleep. Everything was really tough to survive. If the police caught you, you had to pay money. If you didn't give them money, you had to go to jail.

I couldn't take this life. One of my friends from South Africa told me life would be easier there. So I decided to go there. It was a long trip. It took me 32 days to get there.

I started my new life, but it was not easy there, either. I didn't know anybody, and had no money to survive. I did get a permit to live there, and free health insurance. I slept in churches, and did what I could to make money. Then, I started my own business and

three years later brought my family there. We stayed there for 13 years. After that the UNHCR gave us resettlement in the USA. It was another step toward a better life. Now I have a good job, good education, and a lot of opportunities. This is a simplified version of my story. One day, I hope to write a book about this long journey home.

Abdirizak Jama is originally from Somalia.

Me

YIRGALEM TADESE, ST. PAUL

My name is Yirgalem. I am from Ethiopia. I came to the U.S. on December 2, 2015, almost two months ago. My mother and father and two sisters live in Ethiopia. I learn in English class.

My free time is spent listening to instrumental music. I don't work. I would like to have all of my family in the U.S.

Yirgalem Tadese is 41 and originally from Ethiopia.

My History

LIDIA MARUTOVA, ST. PAUL

I was born in 1941 in Odessa, Ukraine, but I lived in Vladivostok, Russia for a very long time. That was where my children were born—my son and my daughter.

Vladivostok is a sea city. Vladivostok is a green and clean city. There were theatres, schools, a university, and businesses. There were very kind people. I love my city and it is always in my memory.

There were my friends, my heart.

Lidia Marutova is 75 and originally from Russia.

My Culture and Tradition

BEZAWIT MEKONEN, MINNEAPOLIS

I would like to share about my culture and tradition. My name is Bezawit Girma. I'm from Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a big country with nice cities. There are different languages and cultures. There are 88 individual languages of Ethiopia. Amharic is the official national language. Ethiopia has 13 months per year. It follows the Julian Calendar, 12 months of 30 days, and a thirteenth month of five or six days in a leap year. Now I live in the USA. The calendar here and in other countries is not the same as in Ethiopia. Now it is 2016, but in Ethiopia it is 2008, a difference of eight years and nine days. Because of the different years and days, I celebrate Christmas and New Years and other holidays two times a year. It's so funny and I enjoy it.

The climate in Ethiopia varies according to different areas and states. The dry season is usually from October through March, which is the best time of the year. The winter and rainy time is from July through the end of September. In general, Ethiopia has very good weather.

Religion in Ethiopia is Christianity and Islam. We respect each other and we celebrate holidays together. The population of Ethiopia is 94.2 million. Ethiopia has more than 80 different ethnic groups and each has their own language and culture. Ethiopia has a lot of history and culture. That is a little bit about my culture and tradition. Peace and love in Ethiopia. God bless Ethiopia.

Bezawit Mekonen is originally from Ethiopia.

Chickens

SHER NAY, ST. PAUL

In Burma, sometimes chickens live in the house. They are small. They eat rice. They eat bananas. They eat vegetables.

Sher Nay is originally from Burma.

Burma

EH SAY, ST. PAUL

In May, I planted corn and soybeans. In August, I planted rice. In October, I harvested beans and corn. In January, I harvested rice. My grandmother said she remembered my father and mother.

Eh Say is originally from Burma.

My Story

HUNG LA, ST. PAUL

Usually, buffalo live in the forest. Sometimes, buffalo live in mountains and rivers. Buffalo never live in the city. People and children ride buffalo. Buffalo have a long tail. They are loud and big. Buffalo eat grass and plants.

Hung La is originally from Burma.

Dah Khaw Deer

KAI WAH, ST. PAUL

Dah Khaw deer live in the forest. They live in the mountains. They live near the creek. They never live in the city. They are big like people. They are tan and white. They have a short tail. Dah Khaw deer eat corn. They eat rice. They eat plants.

Kai Wah is originally from Burma.

I Am From

NAWYIN, ROSEVILLE

I am from the top of the mountains.

From fresh and soft air.

I am from the sunrise and sunset of love.

I am from the natural hard rain with all the dirt
and trees falling.

I am from the talking and caring family.

From a lovely father and lovely mother.

I'm from family, a really warmhearted family.

I'm from finishing what I started and being loud.

I'm from a small family with a small town and
romantic place, eating sweet fruit.

From a bad memory behind the tears.

I am the youngest girl in the family, the whiniest
one and the one everyone takes care of.

Naw Yin is 16 and originally from Thailand.

In My Country

MUE BLE, WORTHINGTON

In my country, the houses are made of wood and bamboo. Most of the people in my country are poor. They don't have money to buy meat or vegetables. They are hard workers. People plant vegetables and farm. We only have gardens with vegetables and fruit. We don't have any flower gardens. If we like flowers, we have to plant them in front of the house or near the house. When everyone comes to visit, they can see the flowers making the house beautiful. In our country, we plant

tomatoes, potatoes, green beans, cucumbers, and a lot of spices. Each house has their own garden beside the house. Some people grow tobacco for smoking. We use bamboo in our gardens in our country. In my country, we have a lot of different foods and fruits. Some people have shops, and some people work at school.

In our country the education is so poor. In America the teacher graduates from a college or university, but in our country the teacher can't speak English. Most of the people don't have money to go to another country to get an education. We don't have a government or people who support us to get an education in our country. Most of the children have to stay home and take care of their brothers and sisters when their mother goes to the farm. All of the children in my country help their parents. In my country, people are persecuted by enemies, so they don't have freedom. They can't do whatever they want.

Mue Ble is 22 and originally from Burma.

Burma's Cows

LAH KU, ST. PAUL

Cows live in the mountains. They live in the forest. They live near creeks. Sometimes, cows live in the house. Cows are white. Sometimes, cows eat rice. Cows never eat trees.

Lah Ku is originally from Burma.

October and November in Burma

REE LAH ST. PAUL

I remember Burma.

I remember October and November.

I harvested rice, corn, tobacco, beans, and tomatoes.

I saw Burma.

My family planted corn, chilis, and vegetables.

I saw small flowers.

I miss Burma. It was beautiful.

Ree Lah is originally from Burma.

My Country

DI KAY, WORTHINGTON

In the Burma Karen state, we have only three seasons. We have summer, spring, and winter. November, December, January, and February are cold. March, April, May, and June is the really hot season. July, August, September, and October are really rainy and windy. If winter comes, we don't get any snow. It's only rainy and windy. People plant fruits and vegetables and so many other things to eat when the hot season comes. On the weekends, we would go to the lake with our friends, and fish. We would go to the fields and get some vegetables and some fruit, and sometimes we would go fishing in the river. We have a lot of trees and plants. The streams and rivers are so beautiful and so wonderful. We have a lot of creatures in our mountains, forests, and in the jungle.

In my country I had a little garden and coconut trees, banana trees, and mango trees. When I left my place and the country where I grew up, I really missed my father and mother and brothers and sisters and friends. They were really upset, and they cried for me. And I missed my buffalo, too, and goats also. When I was in my country, I kept them every Saturday and Sunday.

Di Kay is 45 and originally from Burma.

My History

ETALEMAW MENEDO, ST. PAUL

I came to America from Ethiopia with my husband. I brought traditional clothes and cultural food and documents. America is a very nice country, but I was very sad when my cousin died in a car accident soon after we arrived.

One year later, my lovely baby was born. So after that, I became happy. I am a mother, a student, a nice woman, and I want to speak English well. I learn by coming to English class.

Etalemaw Menedo is 38 and originally from Ethiopia.

Burma's Ducks

CHEP YAR, ST. PAUL

Usually, ducks live in the river. Sometimes, ducks live in the creeks. Usually, ducks are loud. They are beautiful, Burma's ducks. Ducks eat rice. Sometimes, ducks eat fish.

Chep Yar is originally from Burma.

Where I'm From

SARA CHAMBERLIN, ROSEMOUNT

I am from morning cartoons on Saturdays
From pancakes and sausage, vanilla-scented candles
I am from the home with a big green bush out front
The basketball hoop in the driveway and fire pit out back
I am from pine trees and birch trees,
Whose branches swayed back and forth like they were dancing
I am from cooking family meals and ice cream for dessert
Every night
From smiling and laughing
And cracking jokes around the dinner table
From talking super loud or mumbling
I am from a loving, caring family
I am from the Chamberlins and Pechoniks
From any kind of hot dish to steak or pasta
From loving to have a drink
And from having a big breakfast the next morning
I am from those moments in too many pictures to keep track
Never forgetting all the amazing times I had in life.

My Country

KOE DER HTOO, WORTHINGTON

There are a lot of countries around the world. Some countries are poor and some are rich. My country is very small and located in part of Asia. Today the world knows my country as Myanmar. My country isn't like other countries. It is a very small country and full of vegetation and plants. It has a lot of natural resources, such as trees and underground treasures. As a country we do have our own government and some organizations to build up our country. Some of the organizations are the Karen National Union (KNU), Karen National Liberation Army (KNIA), Karen Women Organization (KWO), Karen Youth Organization (KYO), and the Karen Education Department (KED). All of these organizations are the main organizations in our country.

The thing that I miss most in my country is food. When we lived in our country, we ate a lot of meat, vegetables, etc. And we do like to cook what we want to eat. During the winter season, we went to the jungle and hunted for wildlife. Sometimes we went to the river and fished. We could get a lot of vegetables in the forest. During the rainy season, there is a lot of rainfall, and it's good for planting grain, vegetables, and fruits. During the hot season, we feel hot and the leaves fall down and it is very dry. During the cool season, there is plenty of snow on the earth's surface and we feel cool also.

Koe Der Htoo is 29 and originally from Burma.

My Goal

MU BER, WORTHINGTON

I want to talk about my country in Thailand. My country is a very beautiful place. It has a lot of fruits and vegetables and plenty of animals. My country has beautiful flowers. Some of the insects are nice-looking. We have three seasons in my country. There is winter, summer, and the rainy season. In the summer it is really hot. When we go outside, we have to use an umbrella all the time. In the winter it is really cold and we have to wear a sweater all the time. In the rainy season we have a lot of food. Some of the foods are plants. We eat different kinds of young plants from trees. And we eat fruit with rice. For some of our food we go to the jungle and collect vegetables. When we come back home, we cook rice and curry and then eat with our family.

My country is a very beautiful place, but the Burmese soldiers came to my village and burned the place where I lived and killed some of the Karen people, but some of them escaped. I can't live there anymore. We had to move to another refugee camp. The camp I was moved to was the last camp they called to bring people to America. My family lives in Thailand, and my sister and brothers live in Thailand. I arrived here by myself. After that, my older brother came to America, but he lives in Boise, Idaho. Sometimes I miss my family so much. I miss my mom and dad, but they both passed away. I miss my relatives. I hope someday I'll go back and see them. That's my goal.

Mu Ber is 27 and originally from Thailand.

Lee Baw

SWAY PLAW HAN, ST. PAUL

Lee Baw live in forests. They live in the mountains. They are small like people. They have long tails. They eat plants. They never eat dogs. They eat apples.

Sway Plaw Han is originally from Burma.

My Morocco

LATIFA MOULAHID, FRIDLEY

I am Latifa, and I am from Morocco. Morocco is a very beautiful country located in northwest Africa. My country has different cultures and traditions, especially among the mountain people who live a simple life without any technology.

The diversity in Morocco is more accepted because people didn't suffer from racism for centuries. The native people of Morocco are not Arabs. There are Amazegh. After Arab people came from the Middle East 1,400 years ago, they worked together and merged without any problems.

The weather of Morocco shifts from north to south. You can ski in the north of Morocco during the winter season, especially in a city called Ifran. At the southwest of Morocco, you can discover the beauty of the Sahara Desert where sand dominates the entire land, and you can enjoy the view of oasis and palm trees.

Morocco has two shores; one is the Atlantic Ocean and the other one is the Mediterranean Sea. Because of that, people enjoy the beaches during summer time.

The food of Morocco is so healthy. In the market there are many kinds of fish plus fresh fruits and veggies. I really miss that. Morocco is the only country in the world that produces Argan oil. The Argan oil is a very expensive oil. It can be used in cooking, but more recently all the Argan oil goes into beauty products around the world.

Although Morocco is a developed country, I can say the government needs to work hard to improve the economy, especially because we have a large youth population. Morocco is a peaceful country compared to the surrounding countries. I hope the best for my country.

I Miss My Country

VERONICA HERNANDEZ, MAPLE GROVE

When people ask me if I miss Mexico

My answer is

I miss the food, the people, the good weather
all year

I miss the music, the dance, the traditions

I miss the beach, the colonial cities, and the
archaeological sites

In Mexico you can find all this and more

Mexico is a magical place

But what I miss most is my family. The
afternoons all together, talking, eating, and
enjoying

For this reason, whenever I can return to
Mexico, I will.

A Story of Men in Djibouti (Africa)

HODEN DOUALE, MINNEAPOLIS

I am Hoden, and I am from Djibouti, East Africa. In my country, it is very hot—opposite of the country that I currently live in, the United States. In my country, many years ago, women had to stay home and men had to work to feed their families. Children went to school.

But in the afternoons, men went out to buy some khat, also called salad in Djibouti. It is a plant that contains a hallucinogenic substance and refers to the psychotropic substance contained in the leaves of this plant. In Djibouti, this substance is legal by the government. The men meet up as friends or colleagues somewhere. They will be quiet to consume the khat.

One day, the plane and train carrying khat missed, and then every man was nervous and mad. They finished every cake in the shop, so I understand that men in our country can't live without this substance.

San Juan de Gualaceo, Ecuador

MANUEL QUICHIMBO, MINNEAPOLIS

My special place is a beautiful small town where I was born and raised. It is called San Juan de Gualaceo, Ecuador. My town has beautiful places, cultivates vegetables and fruits, has different kinds of weather, and has many types of houses.

The small town of San Juan has a big church in the center. Behind the church, there is a

school. In front, there is a beautiful park. On the right side, there is a community building where the people gather for big meetings. Across from the park is a government building. In the front of the church and all around, there are beautiful hills. In two miles there is a river where the people go to have fun with their families. Also, half a block from the school there is a clinic building, but three blocks from the clinic there is a cemetery. The cemetery has a fence in a square. The fence is made from adobe. Also, it has a big door entrance.

Beautiful San Juan still has some old colonial houses. Some old grandparents still have adobe houses. Now people are building houses from bricks, blocks, and cement as well. All houses have tile on the roof, but the old houses have different tiles. The brick houses have different tiles: modern and shiny.

In San Juan, most people cultivate corn, beans, peas, squash, spinach, carrots, beets, lettuce, onion, garlic, broccoli, cilantro, etc. San Juan also produces fruits like tomatoes from plants, plum cherries, apples, peaches, avocados, and strawberries. San Juan has the nicest people. The people are friendly, helpful, and talkative.

San Juan has four seasons. In winter, it is hot when the sun is shining. During the night it is cold. In spring and summer, the weather is rainy, and the sun is shining and cool. Fall is rainy, but sometimes the sun is shining. It's windy, and the leaves fall from the trees.

In conclusion, San Juan produces many kinds of fruits, grains, and vegetables. It builds many

kinds of homes. The people are kind, and the weather is nice.

A Lil' About Kat

YOCKETTA MAYS, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I am from where it is OK to be yourself.

I am from being shy because I am very shy when it comes to meeting new people.

I am from music that I listen to almost every day—mostly rap.

I am from style—a different type of style, a mix between tomboyish and girly.

I am from being alone because I like my space and keeping to myself.

I am from hard work, where you look for jobs and work for your money.

I am from electronics—when they change, my brain quickly adapts.

I am from Gwen and Yockie—my two parents whom I love dearly.

I am from my granny—a wise woman full of wisdom and knowledge.

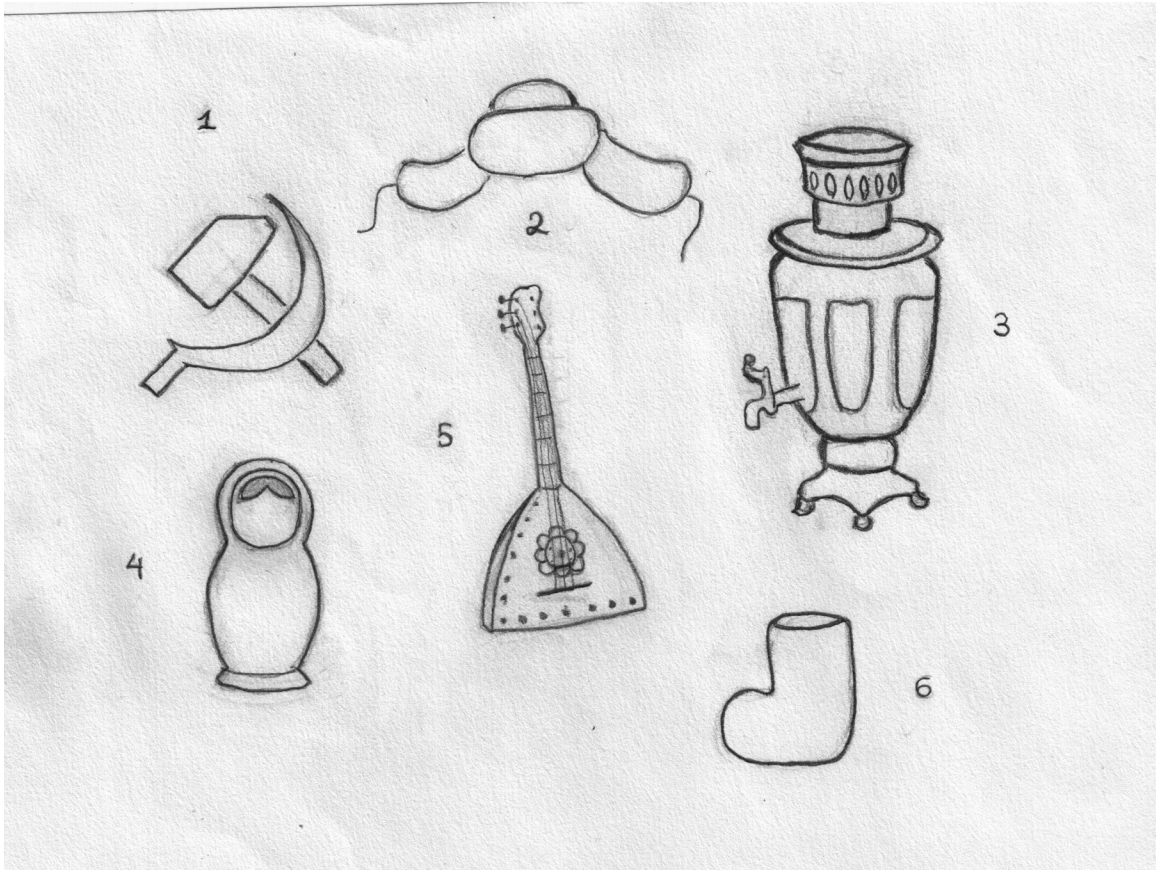
I am from being nerdy because I am a very smart person.

I am from laughter. I laugh almost every day—I love to laugh.

I am from being an aunt, leading by example, teaching them right from wrong and just being that person they can always talk to.

I am from being me—the best, acceptable person I can be.

Some of the Russian Symbols



1. The sickle and hammer
2. A winter hat with ear flaps
3. A samovar, a metal container for boiling water and a fire-pan with a tube.
4. Matryoshka, a set of nested wooden dolls
5. The balalaika, a string instrument
6. Valenki, felt boots made of milled fleece

Sickle and hammer, winter hat, samovar, matryoshka, balalaika, and valenki have more or less become symbols of Russia rather than attributes of everyday life.

Zukhra Gabdrakhimova is originally from Russia.

I Am Blessed Every Day

ARACELI RAMOS, WORTHINGTON

I am happy because I have a beautiful family, and I have a house and food. I am blessed every day. My two daughters have made my life because everything is different. I'm happy with my two girls. My challenges in the U.S. are learning to speak English, driving a car, and needing to play and spend more time with my two girls.

I like my country of Mexico very much for the food and family. The typical food is pozole and tamales, and I like chiles, rellenos, and enchiladas. May 1st is the holiday I celebrate with my family by cooking pozole.

There are many different places to visit in Mexico. I like my home there because it is very comfortable, not too hot and not too cold. It's very nice. I say, "Thanks God, for everything."

Araceli Ramos is 34 and originally from Mexico.

America and Liberia

PATRICK JOSIAH, WORTHINGTON

I like America because it changed my situation. I am a United States citizen today. I really thank God for America. My country of Liberia is a pretty nice country to live in because we grow our own African food to eat and many other things. We have gold and diamonds in Liberia. We grow different kinds of crops and have animals. In my country we have different cultures. We speak different languages and we have different tribes and 16 different counties.

Other people from different countries admire us because we all speak English and when people from overseas come to my country they see that all the people speak English. The condition in my country is good because there is no more war and we have a peaceful government. The Liberian people are happy with the government.

Patrick Josiah is 46 and originally from Liberia.

A Little About My Country

ABDIKARIM ALI, ST. PAUL

My name is Abdikarim S. Ali.

I was born in Somalia and grew up there.

My country is called a poet nation.

The reason it is called a poet nation is many Somalis are poets. Also, my country has a large ocean and camels.

But, that nation has been in a civil war for more than 20 years.

And it has broken everything in the country.

But, I hope one day it will be peaceful like the USA.

Abdikarim Ali is 43 and originally from Somalia.

Abdi Bile

HAWO ABDULLE, MINNEAPOLIS

Abdi Bile was a sportsman I knew when I was in my country. He was a great man, younger than other sportsmen I knew at that time. I liked when he played basketball, but he knew many different kinds of sports. I still remember him because he was a runner. He ran faster

than friends and others like him. When I heard sports play today or tomorrow, I was ready to go. I remember him, what he did, and I don't forget because I believe in him. He is the best sportsman I saw when I was in my country.

In Paradise

VERÓNICA VILLA-SALCEDO, ST. PAUL

I love the fresh air, the work on the farm in the mountains, and walking down to look all around. I love pine trees, apple trees, and animals, but I love the hot water spring most. I love swimming there even more. My father has a dairy farm in the mountains. He owns agricultural land on which he grows corn. He also has cows. This land has the best memories of my childhood.

I remember when I was seven to nine years old. I came to the farm with my father and my three brothers to help him. I have two sisters, too, but they usually worked at home with my mother. At 5:00 a.m., when it was still dark, we went to the farm and all my family started working. I liked hearing the sounds of cows ready to get milked and then took a warm frothy cup of milk like a glass of hot chocolate, but without chocolate. I could hear all the sounds of the farm: chickens clucking, dogs barking, donkeys braying, birds chirping, workers hammering, and someone laughing. The sounds seemed like music to me.

When my family and I finished the work, we went to swim at the source of the spring that formed an extraordinary mountain stream, like water to pluck chickens (*pela pollos* in Spanish). I remember one time it was a bright, breezy morning in late summer and we were going to the spring to swim and wash clothes. My basket was full of laundry to be washed, but I did not

mind. I enjoyed going to the stream on a day like this. The sky was a deep, strong blue. I wished I could touch it. I was sure it would feel smooth and cool.

I liked to stand just in front of my house, where the life of my father's farm was going on all around me. The farm had belonged to my father's family for more than one hundred years. All those years they had cared for the animals and the land. It was not an easy life. Everyone had to work hard. Some years there was plenty of rain so that the crops grew and the animals were healthy. Some years there wasn't any rain. Then the soil was dry and animals went thirsty. But through good times and bad the farm went on. I loved the farm. It was my home. I believed that it was the most beautiful place in all of Mexico and all of the world. It was my paradise.

Verónica Villa-Salcedo is originally from Mexico.

My Country Belarus

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My country Belarus is beautiful. We have many traditions from a long time ago. One is Kupalye. The first Sunday of July people gather in the square or on the beach of the lake. We play national music and sing nice songs. Young girls place wreaths of flowers in the water. When it becomes dark, people look for the Paporot flower. According to legend, whoever finds this flower becomes happy. It's a very nice Belorussian celebration.

History of My Home

ZAMZAM HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Zamzam Hassan. I am from Somalia, a very good country with nice weather. Somalia has the Indian Ocean and two big rivers. The country is mostly green. We have very nice trees. We also have fantastic culture. We visit each other regularly and we cook nice food and have a nice time. I miss my country so much here in America. The weather is different than Somalia. Lots of people visit Somalia because we have different wild animals that you can see everyday, and beautiful mountains. I like when it rains and I stand out in the rain and enjoy it. So I would say Somalia is a very beautiful country in Africa.

Laos and the United States

CHANSAMOUTH (THOMAS) KHENKITSAK, WORTHINGTON

My country is not very big like the United States, but my country has a lot of fruit, like papayas, coconuts, bananas, mangoes, and pineapples. In my garden in the United States I grow lots of vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, and corn. My country has only three seasons: fall, winter, and summer. America has four seasons: fall, winter, spring, and summer. My home wasn't big or small, but it was a very nice home. My family has nine people, five boys and four girls. I was very happy with my family.

I like living in the United States because the United States is a beautiful place and I have a lot of friends. In the United States I have lived in Oklahoma City, Stockton in California, Storm Lake in Iowa, Sioux Falls in South Dakota, and Worthington in Minnesota. My wife is in

Spencer, Iowa. I have three kids with her. I have one girl and two boys. On the weekend I go to visit my family in Iowa. Then I take my family out to eat at a Chinese buffet. After we eat, I take my family shopping in the mall and get something for my wife and my kids. My wife and my kids are very happy on the weekend because I go to visit them.

Chansamouth (Thomas) Khenkitsak is 56 and originally from Laos.

I Am From

EMILY ZHANG, ROSEVILLE

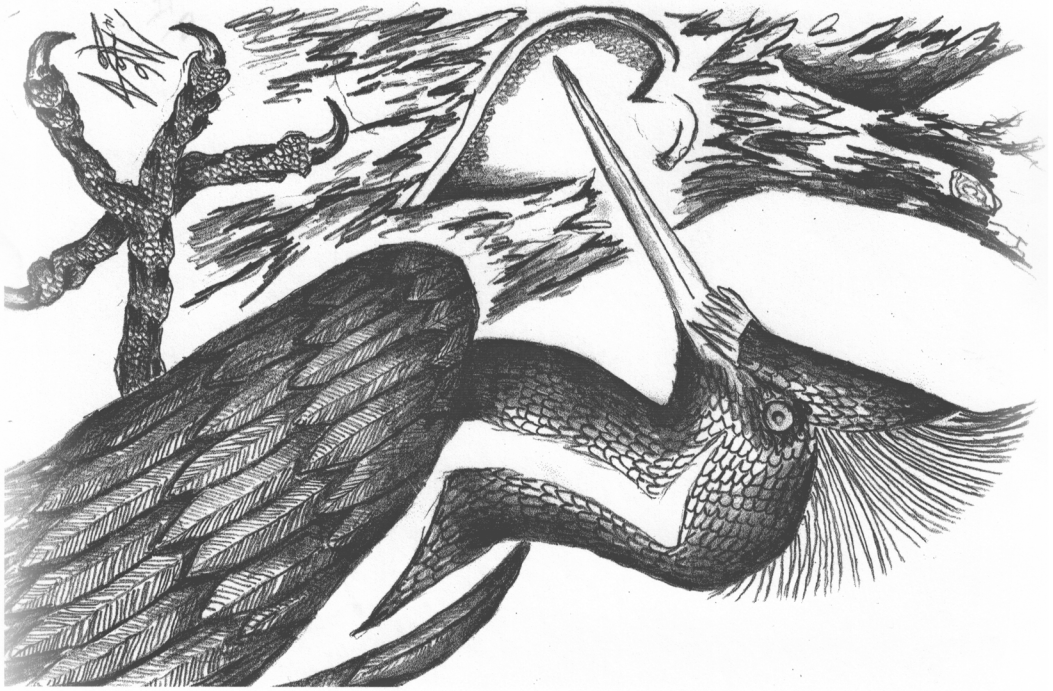
I am from the universe
From galaxies and planets
I am from the busy Earth
From the urban city
A place where everyone works hard
Nice, Gentle, Polite!

I'm from the future and dream
from now and past
I'm from 1999 in the midnight
and from my lovely family.

I'm from the colorful and peaceful
environment
I love the environment
It is my warm shelter
I'm from the sky and freedom and independence
I'm from the rainbow
Love, art, and sweet
I'm from the ocean
Blue and big
With a great hope of the world.

Emily Zhang is 16 and originally from China.

FAMILY



Untitled

MICHAEL ANDERSON, MOUND

Featured Author



KARNJANA AMPHAIRIN

was born in 1988 in Thailand. She has two older sisters. In her childhood, life was boring because two of her sisters were sent to school very far away. She had nothing to do, but then she started reading a book and fell in love with books. Her father always encouraged her to read and write because her family is not rich. The only thing to make their lives better was to have a good education. Karnjana graduated with a tourism management degree from a university

in Thailand. Her life in the United States is totally different. She has to work harder. In 2015, after been working so hard, she got the opportunity to go school to practice English at Open Door Leaning Center. She has gained a lot of confidence to read, write, and speak English.

One of My Favorite Places in the World

KARNJANA AMPHAIRIN, MINNEAPOLIS

I wish I could go back to when I was a little girl, and do everything that I used to do and of course go back to my grandma's house. It was one of my favorite places to go to.

I loved Fridays, especially when my parents had to go out of town for the whole weekend. They would send me to my grandma's house. I didn't feel sad while they were gone because I felt so comfortable staying with my grandma. She was very nice to me, and she was a kind person.

She was a skinny lady but strong. I saw her working hard all the time, taking care of a watermelon field and a pig farm. Grandma taught me how to check on watermelons to see if they were ready to collect. She also let me feed the pigs at the farm. I didn't like the

smell of the farm but it was fun taking care of the pigs. My cousin was at my grandma's house most of the time because she lived close by, and I used to play with her whenever I went there.

My grandma's house was big and built of wood. Behind the house there was a small river. My cousin and I used to go swimming there, it was so fun. My grandma grew a flower called "Jasmine." Grandma loved the smell of jasmine. Sometime she asked me to collect it to put in a closet to make all the clothes smell fresh.

One of my favorite things at grandma's house was Friday night dinner. It was very good; grandma cooked hot and spicy soup with fresh fish from the small river behind the house and picked some fresh vegetables that she grew. My grandma loves to eat vegetables and taught me to eat different kind of vegetables even some that taste a little bit bitter. That is why I can eat any kind of vegetables.

Grandma always had an exciting tale to tell before putting me in the bed. She never woke me in early morning; she let me enjoy my bed till I got enough sleep. I loved to stay at grandma's house. I wish I could go back there and give grandma a big hug and tell her "I love you, Grandma."

Sacrifice for a Better Life

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

I decided to come to America because my mom passed away in my country and my father said that he can help me continue my studies. It was not easy to travel to this country because I had to cross the desert. I was only 17 years old and it broke my heart to leave my family behind especially my little brother and my father. I want nothing in my life besides my family. It hurts so much to live far away from them but I sacrificed my happiness so I can provide for them in the future.

My Children

KAWSAR MUSE, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Kawsar. I am from Somalia. I was born in Somalia. I have two children and five brothers and two sisters. I'm the eldest of my family. I love my mother and father very much. I remember when the civil war broke out in 1991 in Somalia. In the year I flew to Yemen. I lived in Yemen for 12 years. Then I got resettled in the United States in 2010. I am trying to bring my children here.

Kawsar Muse is 39 and originally from Somalia.

My Family

LILIJA SHMAKOVA, ST. PAUL

I came to the United States from Lithuania in May 2011. I came to my daughters through a program for family reunion. My daughters have lived in America for 15 years. They had student visas. After university, they had good work and excellent English. I'm so happy, because it's my dream come true!

Today I'm learning my third language, English. It's my favorite; it's my life. I'm so excited.

Lilija Shmakova is 66 and originally from Lithuania.

Through the Eyes of My Son

REYNA MATA, SARTELL

Through the eyes of my son
Bright colors are intense
Like needles inside his head.

Through the ears of my son
Loud sounds are scary
Bouncing in his brain.

Through the skin of my son
Itchy, rough clothes
Assault him like switchblades.

Through the mouth of my son
Spicy and sour flavors
Offend his palate.

Through the nose of my son
Odors are unbearable
Strong and revolting.

His autistic song
Runs through my senses
And I accept this fragile miracle,
My son.

Reyna Mata is 45.

Meeting My Father

ARIANA VÉLEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

Two months ago, I met my father. I still remember perfectly that Tuesday, November 17, that day filled with mixed feelings. Once I arrived at the airport in St. Paul, Minnesota, getting off the plane, I said, “Finally.” The day finally arrived and I got to see my dad. The day I always dreaded and waited a long time, after 15 years, but it is better late than never!

I was walking at the airport in search of my bags, when suddenly, I heard a voice that said my name. I felt paralyzed for some seconds. I didn’t know what to do. I turned around and it was my dad. I ran to hug him. I cried with emotion because I never thought this day would come.

I didn’t remember much of him, I was a very little girl when he migrated to the United States in search of a better job to give me everything. He didn’t miss anything; although he was far, he was always present in my life.

My birthday is close, and my dad can’t believe that I’m a young woman. He says that I will

always be his baby.

I love my dad. He is the best!

Ariana Vélez is 18 and originally from Ecuador.

Family Reflection

MARÍA DE JOSE PÉREZ, MINNEAPOLIS

Although my parents lived during an age where misery reigned and school education was minimal, they tried to fight and worked hard. In the family of my mother, they were living in extreme poverty.

My grandfather worked with his brother, who had money and paid him only with beans and corn. This caused him trouble with affording clothing and other necessities for his family. Four of his children starved from malnutrition and starvation.

My mother tells me that they were so poor that they only had three dresses. The best was just for Sunday. This day was special because they went to church. They would not let my grandmother go, they could only leave her at home. My mom only learned to read a little and write. All of this happened during the years 1885 to 1907.

Today, my purpose is to study and be a college student. I’m married. I have three daughters: Violeta, Gema, and Luz. I am very proud of them. Two of them went to Mexico City to attend college. The youngest stayed with me. She is married now and has two children. Luz has three professional certifications, as a Health Information Technology Specialist, for tax preparation, and for interpreting. All of my daughters

graduated with diplomas.

I am happy for my daughters because they studied and have different lives. I am grateful for the opportunities in this country. This country is beautiful, and I give thanks to God for all my family and for staying here in this country.

María de Jose Pérez is originally from Mexico.

My Family

DANIEL ROCHA, MINNEAPOLIS

It is difficult and painful to write this for me because it's my true story. When I talk about my family, I remember that I never had much time with them. My father always returned to the USA. He would come to visit us in Mexico. But always he returned to the USA. He took some of my brothers with him. I was alone with my mother at age 8. When I was 12 years old, my father came back to Mexico. He spent one year with us and then returned to the USA again. It has been 13 years since I saw him. I miss him and my mother. I love my parents.

Daniel Rocha is originally from Mexico.

My Achievements in the U.S.

MARIA ELENA RODRIGUEZ, WORTHINGTON

When I came to the U.S.A. on November 6, 2001, I had been married for five months and was four months pregnant. It was very hard for me because I didn't know the language, but my husband helped me because he spoke the language. He lived here for five years before we were married.

Two months before my first daughter was born, I stopped coming to school. In April 2002, my first daughter, Natalia, was born. My second girl was born in September 2004. Her name is Rosamaria. When my second girl was one year old, I started back to school.

For my oldest daughter, I came to the program called Early Childhood Family Education and the next year I started another program called Even Start Evening.

It was very important for my daughters and I because I started learning English and worked for my GED and for my citizenship. My teacher, Dorothy, helped me for both classes.

When my son, Alejandro, was one year old, I had my interview for citizenship and I got my citizenship certificate. Three years ago, I finished my GED.

For me, it's very important to be involved with my kids in the school because I am learning the language. I can help my kids with their homework and I can talk more with their teachers.

Now my kids are older. Natalia is 13 years old. She likes mathematics and she is very shy. Rosamaria is 11 years old and she is good at school. Now she plays hockey and she loves the sport. My son, Alejandro, is also good at mathematics and he plays hockey, too. My little girl, Marcela, is very loving and smart and learns very fast.

I love my family.

Maria Elena Rodriguez is originally from Mexico.

My Family

SAHRO MAHAMUD, MINNEAPOLIS

I have a big family. My father's name is Abshir. He's married to my mom. My parents have six children. My oldest brother's name is Aydarus. He's married. My sister-in-law's name is Nasra. They have four children. My second brother is married too. He and his wife have four children. My third brother is married. He has 10 boys and seven girls from two different wives. He is divorced from his first wife. My youngest sister and I are both single.

Sahro Mahamud is originally from Somalia

My Family

RUUN ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

I have a big family. My mother's name is Amina. My father's name is Guled. I have 16 sisters and brothers. For many years we didn't see each other because we lived in different countries. But I am not alone. I have a husband and a child. Also, I have a job and a good life. I am so happy. When I came to the United States I went to the English as a Second Language class but I did not finish. After many years I couldn't learn anything. But this year I am ready to learn English because I have many opportunities. This time I want to try to take the GED. After that, I want to go to college. Then I will look for a good job.

Ruun Ali is originally from Somalia.

My Family

EDITH VASQUEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Edith. I have a big family. I'm married. I have three children, two boys and one girl. I have seven brothers and three sisters. Eight are married and two are single. My mom is very happy that she has a large family. I am also happy for my big family. But, I am also very sad because it has been a long time since I have seen my family. When I came to America, my girl was seven years old. Now she is 23 years old. My life is very sad without my family. It has been 16 years since I have seen my daughter. Now she has two children, a girl and a boy. I have six grandchildren in total. I hope to see them soon.

Edith Vasquez is 46 and originally from Mexico.

About My Son

MARYAM JAMAC, MINNEAPOLIS

Not all memories are happy ones. I remember the terrible time when my baby fell out of bed. He was four months old. I was trying to get a little sleep. I reached out to touch my baby, but he wasn't there! I was shocked! I didn't see my baby and I started crying.

I got out of the bed to find my baby. I looked down and there he was on the floor. He was sleeping.

When I saw him I felt happy. I picked him up and I held him for moment, then his father woke up because he heard my crying. He asked me why I was crying. He said, "Don't worry. Hassan is okay." Then we all went back to sleep.

Maryam Jamac is originally from Somalia.

Thoughts of an Absent Dad

JOSEPH OPHEIM, BUFFALO

I look forward to Tuesday every single week

We get to talk about your smiles, little hands,
and little feet

Your accomplishments, milestones, and your
voice, if you speak.

I hear you say cookie and boy, is that neat!

You won't understand this until you get
older;

Me and your Mommy, we tried, but our
feelings grew colder.

Life is full of losses and wins,

There are peaks and valleys, frowns and
grins.

And I, myself, am learning this too,

But I'd be a bad dad if I didn't teach it to you.

It's hypocritical to state, "Just do as I say, and
not as I do."

For the most part I can define what's right
from wrong.

I promise to learn and teach as I go along.

But son, to me, being a dad is something
incredibly new.

I wouldn't trade it for anything; that much is
true.

I sat down to write about you,

We don't know each other, and that makes
me blue.

But, you see, there's always the future to look
forward to.

I guess what I'm trying to say is

I'll be behind you every step of the way.

I'll be there for you no matter what the
decision.

For you to be happy and successful, that's
my mission!

The day you were born, that's the birthday of
my best friend.

And I'll proudly boast that until my very end.

No matter what, your mother is your mother
and I am your father.

I'm gonna be your lifejacket in the absolute
toughest water.

I just ask you to come to me for help and
advice

I want to always help you because I never
had that in my life.

Try it if you must, but avoid the drugs and
the sauce

Cuz it gets you nowhere when you are
already lost.

I traveled that road and at such a drastic cost.

Son, my little boy, I could write about life for
days

I can warn you of a million things, but it's
you out there making the plays.

Just try, son, to give life your absolute best

Because if you give it you won't fail the
test.

You're one year old, and you have no idea
who I am

That kills me everyday, son, and I'm sorry ,
and darn.

Don't think for one minute or one second

that I didn't want to be there
You truly are my life, though we live so
separate.
I'll be your dad soon enough, and you will
be my son
The road will be tough, and worth it when
it is finally done.
I'm feeling the tears roll down my face
I'll say another prayer for us and our future
Hail Mary, full of Grace.

Untitled

MARY BRYANT, BUFFALO

I feel pathetic and sad
Counting down my days on a paper bag.
I can't stop crying today.
My heart must be talking to Jesus, hearing
all he has to say.
I put our family through so much in 40 days.
I do promise, Mommy has changed her
ways.
I know this is my fault and my cross to bear.
I'm still so sad; I put my family in despair.
Counting down the days on a paper bag.
Everything happens for a reason, no
matter how sad.
I learned my lesson is a very hard way.
I'm just grateful I have my kids to come
home to on Monday.
My Babies: I'm so sorry for this. I won't leave
again, I promise, I promise.

Peace

OLGA CANAR, MINNEAPOLIS

Having children is like in home
Having children like is funny
Happy is sometimes angry
Sad peace love

Olga Canar is originally from the United States.

My Family

JUNJIE MAO, WAITE PARK

I'm from China. My parents met in Qingdao. Qingdao is a beautiful city. They married there. I like Qingdao, but now I live Minnesota. I have a family. It's not big, it's a small family. My mother, father, me, and mom's other son is a dog, Peewee. My father is a quiet man, but he is very stubborn. My mom loves to laugh. Me? I don't know. I am me.

Peewee is a Chihuahua. He's a dog, but has the highest position. He eats the best food. He has a dedicated diaper. He likes plush toys very much. In the morning there is often cotton on the floor—a lot of cotton! He is very timid, and he often barks. Recently he is afraid of thunder and trembles in a storm. He's just a dog. But he is my family. I love my family.

Junjie Mao is 22 and originally from China.

My Family

MARIA RAMIREZ, WORTHINGTON

My name is Maria Ramirez. And I am from Mexico. I have been married to Luciano Murillo, also from Mexico, for 21 years. We have five children, three girls and two boys. They are Jennifer, the oldest child; Rosangela, the second one; Ashley, the third child; and my twins Christopher and Abraham, the youngest children. We all came here together seven years ago. It was difficult to come here because we did not have anything. However, nothing is impossible when you have a wonderful husband who is doing everything for his family.

Grandma's Little Teacher

SARAH WU, WASECA

When my two-year-old son Luyi came to United States, he spoke Chinese with a cute Beijing accent. He had learned many songs and poems in Chinese. In the two years that have passed, he has lost the cute accent as well as most of the poems and songs, because he spoke English in school for the most of the day. With his English getting better, he was not willing to speak Chinese with me since he knew that I could understand him in English. As a result, he spoke Chinese less and less. The worst part was, often (occasionally) when he spoke Chinese, he unconsciously used English word sequences in sentences. For example, he said, "I met a new friend at school today" as the exact order which sounds weird, because in Chinese it would be "Today I at school met a new friend."

When his grandma came all the way from China to visit us for six months, I realized it was a great opportunity for Luyi to regain his Chinese speaking, because Grandma doesn't speak English at all. As expected, Luyi was so proud to become Grandma's English teacher. "Grandma, I am going to teach you English words now," he said in Chinese excitedly, "Read with me, this is an 'apple'." He pointed to a picture of an apple on the wall with his small teaching stick.

"What is 'apple' in Chinese?" Grandma asked.

"It's 'ping guo,'" he replied patiently. Like this, he has taught Grandma English words and phrases, from the simplest fruit, color, animals, to "see you later," "excuse me," and even longer sentences. He also told Grandma the meaning in Chinese. In the four months Grandma has come, Luyi spoke Chinese for at least two hours every day, and the practice made a huge difference. He has not only regained Chinese speaking, but also learned a lot of new Chinese songs and stories.

"Thank you Luyi, for teaching me so much English," Grandma said gratefully.

"You are welcome Grandma," Luyi replies with a warm hug, "I also thank you for being my Chinese teacher!"

Sarah Wu is 33 and originally from China.

Memories of My Brother

ALFREDO CASTELLANOS, EAGAN

One day my brother decided to come to this country, because he wanted to give a better life to our parents. He was 20 years old when he

left by himself to this country. He promised our parents he would return soon to stay with them. Eventually, he arrived here. He found a job very fast, he started to work very hard, he never went out by himself. Also, we spent a lot of time together. He was really a nice guy until he started to meet other people. Sometimes, we would do some sports together, like play soccer, run, or walk.

I couldn't imagine what destiny was to be. I never thought some day I was to stay by myself, because tragedy approached our family. I remember the day when he came back from work. He told me, "I want to go dancing tonight." He said, "Why not?" He went dancing that night. I said no because I was tired. This was the last night I saw him.

I couldn't sleep that night. He didn't come back in another day. I woke up early, and I went to his room to try to find him. When I woke up, his other friends were there. At the time they told me he was in a crash accident last night, but they didn't know where he was because he never answered the cell phone. About an hour later, I received the phone call from the hospital. They told me my brother had died in the morning. My reaction at the time was to cry. How is it possible this young person is dead?

After that, I had to find money to send him to Mexico. It was the most terrible moments of my life. My family also remember him with the greatest memories of his life. A lesson to learn from this and not forget is drunk driving is never good.

The Best for My Family

EISSA ALEID, APPLE VALLEY

I'm from Saudi Arabia, I came to America to change my life and my family's life. I have a wife, two daughters, and son. My daughter is at St. Thomas University, my son is in high school. I want to learn English because I want to speak and communicate with people. My wife loves to bake. She has a master's degree in business. She was working in Aramco oil company in Saudi Arabia before we moved to America.

We opened our shop (Sweet Treasures) for cakes, cupcake, and coffee. We got top rated by wedding vendors in Minnesota in 2014 and 2015.

I hope to get the best life for my family.

A Story About My Kids

RAHIMA AMAN, MINNEAPOLIS

I have three children. My son Mathew is a smart boy. He graduated at age 16 from high school and then he graduated from college in three years. Now he has his own studio. He is working on filming. My dream is for him to have his dream come true with filming.

My other son Tiger is 13 years old. He is a national chess champion. He is working on his big dream, too. He is wrestling at his school. My daughter Helen is 11 years old. She likes sports. She is an "A" student. Her dream is to be a doctor.

Their father passed away from cancer. As a single mom I am raising my kids to

be successful. My dream for my kids is that maybe someday they will be world leaders and peace makers. I love peace. God bless America.

Rahima Aman is 45 and originally from Ethiopia.

My Childhood

ERIC PHIPPS, FRIDLEY

My name is Eric Phipps. I was born in Milwaukee, WI. I spent most of my time with my brothers and sisters. My mom worked at JCPenney's and my dad was an auto mechanic so they usually weren't home. On weekends we had family functions, camping and fishing. School was always fun from preschool to middle school. High school is when I got to hanging with the wrong crowd. When my dad passed away that's when I didn't care anymore about what was going on. My mom was devastated about the tragedy. She stayed in her room for three months. So I felt that I had to be there for my mom.

To the day now I still think about the memories my family had with my dad. He is truly missed. My family and I still celebrate every time we get together. Nowadays I have eight kids who I really enjoy and I let them know that life is short. Take advantage of your life because you never know when it's your time. That's why I take life as a learning process.

Eric Phipps is originally from the United States

My History

SEE VUE, ST. PAUL

My name is See Vue. I grew up in Laos. My father married a second wife when I was five. They had their own kids, so that is why I have had to deal with a crazy life. My mother and I worked very hard growing vegetables to sell so we could buy what we needed. In 2004 I immigrated to Thailand. I got married and we went to the U.S. in December 2010. Now I feel a little better about my life, but I am trying so hard to learn English. I will never forget how difficult my life was with my parents.

See Vue is 29 and originally from Laos.

I Am Thankful

IBADO AHMED, ST. PAUL

I am thankful for my son because he is funny.
I am thankful for my daughter because I missed her for eight years.

I am thankful for family because they are nice. When we are together it is fun.

Ibado Ahmed is 52 and originally from Somalia.

My Country is Morocco

KHADIIJA AMMAR, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in a nice family that raised me good. My father wanted his kids to be perfect people. He worked hard to support us. My mother worked at home. She sewed clothes for people and gained enough money. We were four kids, three girls and one boy. All of us were so educated. We attended high school. God bless my family.

Khadija Ammar is originally from Morocco.

About My Beautiful Family

SADIYO DAHIR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Sadiyo Dahir. I was born in Somalia. I have three brothers and two sisters. My siblings are in Somalia and my mom and dad too. They live together with my siblings. The first child in my family is a boy and the youngest child in my family is a girl. Her name is Fatima. We have great parents. I believe that my mom and daddy are very, very strong people because they raised me and my lovely siblings very well.

MY MOM IS LIGHT OF MY LIFE!

My mom is very special in my life. When I was young, she helped to cook, clean, and take care of me. She taught me how to survive for the future, and she gave me a good ethic. My mom is a generous mom all of the time. She is friendly and a very sweet mom.

My mom made me who I am today. I really love you Mom. You are always in my heart. I believe that you are the light of my life.

MY DAD IS MY HERO!

My daddy is an amazing dad. My dad is a very strong man. He worked hard to raise me well. My father is the only person who is my real friend in the world. My lovely dad is friendly. He covered everything I needed as a child. I can't imagine how much my dad loves me. 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 miss my dad, the last time I saw him was March 12, 2012. My daddy is very

amazing to me in my life. There are no words I can use to describe him. I love you so much Dad. You are always in my heart. My dad is the light of my life. Every day he brightens my life in some way. Daddy I believe that you made me who I am today. I would like to say thank you very much to my father. I hope to see you soon and I really love you so much. I can't imagine a day in my life without you.

Parents' love is strong.

Parents' love is special.

Parents' love is important.

Parents' love is amazing.

Parents' love is unconditional.

Mommy's love is kind.

Daddy's love is fun.

Mommy's love is sweet.

Daddy's love is powerful.

Parents' love will never be forgotten.

Sadiyo Dahir is originally from Somalia.

About My Life

FADUMO FARAH, MINNEAPOLIS

I grew up on a farm house with my parents and five kids. I was the oldest of my siblings and I had to help my parents on the farm. The older you get, the more responsibilities and chores you were given. My parents were teaching me the most valuable lesson a person could learn. I understood the value of hard work, commitment, and good character.

Farming is not an easy task. My mom used to make the best home cooked meals and

I used to help my dad with the farm work. Growing up on the farm was a privilege and an honor because it taught me how to work hard, be independent, and to value money.

My Grandma

LASHAWN TURNER, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was kid my mom walked out on me and my sister. My dad came and got me and took me to his mom's house. She was an amazing lady. Every morning my grandma would make me breakfast. On winter days she would make me eat vaseline so I wouldn't get sick, and put it all over my face. And when I got out of school and came in, lunch would be ready. Then I got my school clothes ready for the next day. My grandma would have the whole house clean and dinner ready by 6:30, and on weekends she would give me 10 dollars in cash for junk food and 10 dollars for a blockbuster card to get movies. We would have movie night.

I love the fact that even though my dad was locked up my grandma would still bring me up there to see him. During our visits, my dad taught me how to read, write, and spell. When I got in trouble in school, she would wait until he called and put me on the phone so he could set me straight.

One day I got up early in the morning and for the first time I made instant coffee for her. She had a big kool-aid smile on her face and after her first sip, she told me it was good and to keep making it every morning.

Lashawn Turner is 29.

A Small Trip to New York

CHENG PING PING, ST. PAUL

Since I moved to Minnesota, it's a great time. I could take my children together and have a trip in New York. On December in 2015, we used the winter break to take the fly to New York to visit my younger sister. I hadn't seen my sister for a year. She was pregnant and she told me I probably could see the baby born at this time. I was so looking forward to seeing my niece.

First day we arrived, I was so excited because a lot of people were walking fast in the street. I saw the children playing around and people were laughing and speaking my first language. It made me realize that I was coming back to my Chinese hometown. I saw many Chinese restaurants surrounding me and many little food markets for shopping, bakery stores, and fashion stores. We can buy everything so easily!

The second day was my son's birthday! My sister ordered a nice mocha cake, and we waited for someone to deliver it to us. We decided to go out having dinner together! We were at a little Chinese restaurant. There were many delicious foods. We enjoyed the food and we sang a birthday song to my son and ate a nice cake that we had never tried before. Although it was night, outside still had many people walking around. The weather felt so warm, many store lights were flashing that made the sky turned blue again!

I stayed there about two weeks. One day around the midnight, my brother-in-law and I went with my sister to the hospital. She was very excited and calm. Even though she had

a lot of pain she looked strong. My brother-in-law and I were beside her in the labor room. Finally, the precious moment came. I saw the doctor hold up the little baby. It was a healthy and beautiful girl! Everyone was happy and grateful! My sister changed her tired face back to normal, no more fear and worry when she saw her baby!

All of women are mighty when they have their baby. I couldn't forget this moment!

Cheng Ping Ping is 30 and originally from China.

My Family

ROSARIO CORTES, MINNEAPOLIS

I love Mexican music because my father is a Mariachi musician. He sings at every family birthday. My dad can play the guitar, trumpet, and big guitar, and practices every day. My mom says, "No more songs, I have a headache!" But when my dad was sick, my mom said, "I miss your dad's singing. I have the hope to one day sing together as before."

My brother is very smart. He finished his university education last December. I am very proud of my little brother. When I'm sad, he always has wonderful words for me.

Also, I have a sister. We are very similar. We think the same way, and we like the same things. She is married and has three children whom I love. She lived here in Minneapolis, but she is now back in Mexico. I miss them a lot.

I have been married for 11 years. God blessed me with two beautiful children, and a husband who loves us and cares for us. My children are very happy because I am studying English. To be funny, they ask me

what I want to be when I grow up, but I reply that I want to be a teacher because I think it is never too late to dream.

Rosario Cortes is originally from Mexico.

My Parents

SHARIFO AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Sharifo, and I'm from Somalia. I miss my parents and am thinking about them when I'm alone. I have lived with my parents for the last 20 years. I spent eight hours a day and weekends with them. They are my best friends. I love them and I miss them more than anything.

I'm not good at making friends. I have trouble socializing because I'm a huge introvert. I can socialize, but I get very tired afterwards. The time I lived in Thailand was the first time I lived alone. It was so sad and so hard. All the time I felt alone. I'm actually crying now while I write this because I'm alone and can't stop thinking about my parents.

I'm sure they feel the same as our lives fall into new routines. The most beautiful thing in this world is to see your parents smiling, and knowing that you are the reason behind that smile. They are very special to me. I would love to be in their company. We will see each other soon, Insha Allah.

Sharifo Ahmed is originally from Somalia.

My New Life

CELIA ALANOCA, LONG LAKE

I am from Chile in South America. I have two children. My daughter came to Minnesota for a year when she was a student in high school. She loves this country and wanted to learn English. She returned to Chile where she began at the University. But her life changed when was 18 years old, she decided to return to the USA. That situation was difficult for me because I thought she was very young, but she could make her own decisions.

I visited her sometimes in different seasons. I like Minnesota. Fall is my favorite season because the trees have beautiful colors. I can go with my grandchildren to the park. We walk or ride bikes, which is very nice. I collected leaves of different colors and I prepared a picture with beautiful leaves.

Two years ago I retired from my work and I wanted to come here to enjoy my grandchildren and help my daughter while she studied. Recently she graduated with a nursing degree. My daughter has a beautiful family with a husband and two children. Andrea is eleven years old and Leonardo is eight. Both are entertaining and loving with me. My daughter and her family received me with love. When I arrived the kids had for me a gift with a message that said: "Welcome Grandmother," I was excited and I cried with emotion.

Nowadays I am like a daughter to my daughter because she goes with me to different places for to help with the language. I am very happy in new life, I can enjoy my family and I have the challenge of learning a new language.

Celia Alanoca is 63 and originally from Chile.

In Memory of my Beloved Mother!

JANE FUNMILAYO AGNATODJI, HUTCHINSON

I would like you to meet my mom, but she has gone to her everlasting home! She was unique. There was nobody I knew quite like her. She was one of a kind. She was the earth and was full of goodness, warmth, and strength. She was also like the sun, rising in the early morning, lighting up the dark corners and gently coaxing us, her grandchildren and neighbors. She would prod the fire and soon everywhere would be filled with the smell of food. You could always look up and see her busily knitting, crocheting, singing, reading, cooking, or doing something else with a smile on her face. On Sundays you'd see her in her best clothing going to church. As the sun starts its day and the flowers burst open, I always think of her sweet memories. Like the sky, she's always there.

Maman, rest in everlasting peace. A lovely mom who cared a lot for her children, grandchildren, family, and neighbors. I won't grieve too much, because I know you're going home to rest from your weary years. Your creator has come to claim you because you are His own. Maman, I don't think of you as gone—I know you are the soft stars that shine at night and in each new dawn. I will always remember your kindness and all your good deeds. Your death was not sudden as you passed away peacefully into the loving arms of your maker.

Grandmaman, as everyone called you, you are gone, but not forgotten. I miss you so much. Your memories will never grow old. Rest in peace till we meet to part no more.

Where you are now, you are free from all foes and worries of this earth. No more pain and no more sorrow. We deeply love you and sadly miss you. Rest in everlasting peace until we meet on that bright, bright, golden shore. The years may wipe out many things, but they will never wipe out my memories of you when we were together! R.I.P.

Jane Funmilayo Agnatodji is originally from Togo.

My Daughter Salwa

AFRAH ELMI, MINNEAPOLIS

My daughter is a smart young girl. Her name is Salwa. She is 21 years old. Salwa goes to St. Paul College. She is majoring in Finance and International Business.

She speaks three languages: Arabic, English, and Somali. She studies the Chinese language in her free time. She wants to go to China to study Chinese culture in the future. Salwa works at her college as a math tutor. She helps other students who have difficulty with their subjects. On the weekends, she volunteers with programs that help new immigrants learn English and help them with their homework. When she graduates, she wants to take her master degree. She wants to become a business woman.

Salwa is a friendly girl and studies very hard. Salwa and I are close friends, not only a mother and daughter relationship.

Afrah Elmi is originally from Somalia.

My Son

LAURA REYES, MINNEAPOLIS

Since I got pregnant my life has changed in a very good way. I had a good pregnancy time with everything normal. I could not wait for the moment to see my son's face. We called him Carlos because in Spanish each letter in his name has an interesting meaning. When he finally was born, this was the most difficult and beautiful experience I have ever had.

Now he is six years old and I am so impressed with the way he talks to me or anyone. He is a dinosaur lover. He can tell you the name of each one. He knows everything about dinosaurs and sharks. Sometimes we think that everything is in his imagination but it is not. He has only lived four months in the USA. His first grade teacher told me that he is unique. He is not shy at all and his English is improving in an amazing way. I don't know in which moment we lose such great innocence.

I know I am not perfect but I am doing my best for him. Every day I learn something for him. One of the reasons that I moved to this country is for my son's future. I am so proud of Carlos and I will love him forever and ever.

Laura Reyes is originally from Honduras.

Second Chances

JASMINE DAVIS, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I believe in second chances, I believe people are capable of starting over. Why should my past determine my future? My brother is the second oldest of four children. I always looked up to him even though I'm the oldest. He was strong, a fighter, and a provider, my

role model. But he was a bit rough around the edges.

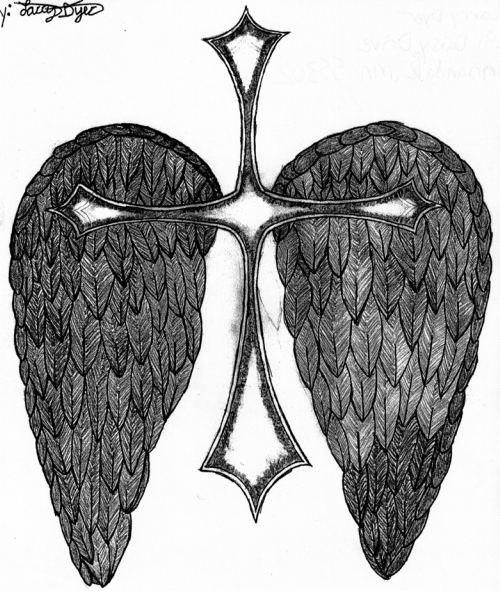
He was always in and out of jail, no father figure, no one to look up to, so he became his own man. He loved the street life. So many restless nights shared between my mom and I praying for him to walk in the door safe. He loved the money, the fancy cars, and women that came with the lifestyle he lived, but he always said his life he lived had a purpose—to make sure his family never went without. No matter how much he enjoyed it, he needed a purpose for him to risk his life and freedom. We never had much growing up with mom on drugs, a single parent household. But we had each other. One thing he taught us to value most is family—always look out for family. I adored his ambition.

But years down the road he became a father so that lifestyle had to change. Three beautiful princesses changed him forever, so he decided to become a business owner. He never like working for anyone so he got his business license. One fatal night he decided to go celebrate with our little brother who adored him. They went to a party which ended in a fatal shooting and a few days later my brother was indicted on murder. But who would have known that night would change everyone's life forever. I believe in second chances but maybe it was too late for him because he wasn't given a second chance. One look at him and he was sentenced to fifty years to life only at 24 years old. I've learned time waits for no man but again, I do believe in second chances. I believe he's innocent but he was guilty before proven innocent. He will always be my hero.

Untitled

LARRY DYER, ANNANDALE

By: Larry Dyer



My Sister

YASMIN ARAB, ST. PAUL

Her name is Nasro. She is joyful and nice. She is from Somalia. Her hair is black. Her eyes are brown. She wears a black hijab and black boots.

She likes to work and cook. There are ten people in her family. My sister, she is an important person in my life. Other important people for me are my brother and my other siblings.

I love my sister. Thanks.

Yasmin Arab is 28 and originally from Somalia.

The Lost Child

MARTELL BURSON, ST. CLOUD

On my way to prison
Who am I missing?
My loved one, my children
Who would have ever thought
A Long Fight
I never gave up, I fought
Waiting on change, my biggest fear
All these lonely nights plenty of tears
Son crying out, "When are you coming home?"
All I can say is it won't be long
Son, I know I've done you wrong
Back to my family, where I belong.

Martell Burson is originally from the United States.

An Important Person

AMINA YUSUF, ST. PAUL

An important person in my life is my daughter. Her name is Idil. She likes to wear a tan shirt, red scarf, and black boots.

She was born in Minnesota. Her eyes are black and white. She likes helping me. My daughter is always close to me.

Amina Yusuf is 37 and originally from Somalia.

My Mother

JUAN CARLOS GUTIERREZ ARELLANE, ST. PAUL

An important person in my life is my mother. Her name is Belem. She is happy. She is from Mexico. Her hair is black. Her eyes are black. She likes to cook and dance.

Juan Carlos Gutierrez Arellane is originally from Mexico.

My Son

AH HANG THAO, ST. PAUL

My name is Ah Hang Thao. I'm from Thailand. My son is very important to my life. He is funny. For example, he said he misses Thailand. He liked to play with the chickens. He wants to go back to our home country again. But right now, he likes to stay in the United States.

He likes to take pictures with chickens. He is very nice to his siblings. He likes to go to school. He likes to cook, fry rice, fry eggs, and fry meat. He is the most important person in my life. He wants to go to college. He loves his siblings so much and brings them together to play.

Ah Hang Thao is 34 and originally from Thailand

An Important Person in My Life

OSCAR PEREZ, ST. PAUL

An important person in my life is my son. He is named Braulio Emanuel. He is smart and he likes to play outside in the snow. He likes to read, spell, and watch Animal Planet.

He is a good brother. He likes to play with Lulu, his sister. He smiles a lot and he has a good heart.

Oscar Perez is 44 and originally from Mexico.

Her Last Hug

DEYSI MEJIA GONZALEZ, WORTHINGTON

El Salvador 2002.

I was 21 years old and I had decided to travel to the U.S. My parents agreed, they wanted a better life for me.

I woke up early that day and immediately started to get ready so I could start on my way. My father came toward me and told me, we have to pray together before I leave.

We both fell down on our knees and prayed in front of a picture of Mother Mary. When we finished, I had a lump in my throat and my eyes were filled with tears. Then I hugged him.

After that, I went to the bathroom to wash my eyes because I didn't want my mom to see me crying. I wanted her to see me strong so she felt a little better and less worried about me. She was standing in the dining room because she knew I must pass there to get out of the house. Her eyes were red. That told me she must have been crying before. She told me how much she loves me and hugged me so strong.

In that moment I felt like it was the last time I could feel her arms around my body, so I hugged her strong and I told her "I love you, don't worry, everything will be fine. We will meet each other again as soon as possible." I made an effort to separate from her and leave my house without saying anything.

My mom died last year and I couldn't go back to say goodbye. I couldn't feel her arms again and I miss them so much. The lump in my throat is still there and my eyes are still wet when I remember her.

Especially her last hug.

Little Man

LEAH VOELKER, FARMINGTON

I sure went through pain

For you to be here

But once you were in my arm

All that pain went away.

I haven't gotten sleep since

I'm up feeding you when you're healthy

Or up with you when you're sick

Or when you can't sleep at night.

You're up at the bright of dawn

With so much energy

Wanting to go, go, go.

And sure, you have no idea

You're pushing my buttons

Or driving me crazy.

And sure, I clean up everything

And turn around

And you have every toy back out.

But you are my world and

Everything that I work so hard for

And you make me want to be better.

You make me smile

No matter what mood I'm in.

Your giggle is contagious

To put everyone in a good mood.

You're my other half

For sure

I wouldn't be where I am

Without you.

Leah Voelker is 25 and originally from the United States.

My Other Half

TASNIM RAHMAN, APPLE VALLEY

My older cousin Leyla is one wild character. Leyla and I would fight like cats and dogs. We would always bicker over the TV to see who watches what show first. We shared a room, so some nights I'd go to bed early, and she'd stay up late with the lights on, and we would start from there. She's loud and obnoxious and swears all the time.

Although we have our differences, we still love each other. We somehow always find a way to compromise with each other. I remember a time when I broke my ankle. She took care of me and stayed by my side. We both know we'll always be here for each other. Although she's loud and annoying, she'll always be my favorite cousin.

Tasnim Rahman is 21 and originally from the United States.

My Family

MAGDALENA TALAVERA, WORTHINGTON

My name is Magdalena Talavera. I'm from Nicaragua. I came to the United States on February 10, 2014. I live with my husband and my two daughters. My other family lives in Esteli, Nicaragua. My mother's name is Nohelia Gutierrez. My father is Mr. Talavera. I have eight siblings: three brothers and five sisters. Our family is wonderful. We live in the northern zone in my country. The weather is good in the summer. My family goes to the beach, and we go swimming together. My mother is happy that we have activities when we visit.

For example, when I'm staying in my country,

I wake up, brush my teeth, praise the Lord for a happy day, and then my little baby wakes up at 5:00 a.m. My other daughter doesn't wake up early. She needs her mother to call her to start the day. Later we take a shower together, and then have a good breakfast, and then go to my mom's house, where she gives me a good idea for a good day together with the family.

The idea is to go to the farm because we need to check up on the animals and plants and the brothers, Mr. Marlon, Wilmer, and Elmer. You need to work at the farm because your mothers loves planted coffee, and the coffee needs care. And my sister and I are together making cookies and cleaning at the farm. Oh my goodness, we have a day full of much work. I think that a family is incredible.

Magdalena Talavera is 30 and originally from Nicaragua.

My Family

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I have a mom and dad. They have eight children. Four of them are boys, and four are girls. My oldest brother has 10 children, eight boys and two girls. My oldest sister has 15 children. All of them are alive and healthy. Then I have two more brothers and three more sisters. Including my own children, there are 19 more children. Of those children, there are 11 girls and nine boys. The total number of children in my family is 44. In other words, my mom and dad have 44 grandchildren.

My Family

RAHMA DAHIR, MINNEAPOLIS

I have a small family. My father's name is Dahir. My father passed away. My mother's name is Muna. My mother has five children. I am the oldest child. My sister is married to Abdi. They have six kids together. One child passed away, and they have five kids now. My sister's name is Tusmo. She is the third born. She's at the university studying journalism. My brother is Yasin. He is my fourth sibling, and he's in seventh grade. My brother's name is Adam. He is my youngest sibling, and he is in sixth grade. My sister's name is Safiya. She is my half-sister. My other sister's name is Aisha. She is my half-sister as well. We have the same father but a different mother. They live in Canada. I have never met them in my life.

Rahma Dahir is 27 and originally from Kenya/

Someone I Admire

AHMAD KATHEM, FRIDLEY

I admire someone in my country. This person has a big family. He worked as a farmer, state employee, and a businessman. This person worked as a farmer in the daytime and an employee from evening to night. In the afternoon, everybody needs many things, like furniture, clothes, any piece of electric, etc. This person has eight sons and five daughters. He has five engineers: two sons are electric engineers, one daughter is an electric engineer, one is a mechanical engineer, and one has a university degree in architecture engineering. At the same time he is the dean at an engineering college in Iraq.

But this person (the farmer) has a surprise. What's the surprise? The surprise that this person has is that he cannot read or write. He doesn't even know how to write his name but always encourages and urges others to study. This person's life has been tough on him a lot, and he is considered a large leader in his family (I mean over all his relatives). However, if any person has a problem, marriage, death, and needs to find a solution to disputes, they go to this person. This person is not a stranger to me. This person is my father Jawad, or Alsayed, as they call him.

My Story

CHU MU DAH, ST. PAUL

I am Chu Mu Dah from Burma. I came to the United States seven years ago. I am married and have one son. He is beautiful. Now, I am happy because my son and I can go to school together. We are in a family literacy program. I study English while he is in class with other teachers. After school, we go home, and I cook dinner for my son and husband. Then, before I go to work, my baby hugs and kisses me. I am so happy with my family. I hate to have to go to work. I miss my baby all the time. I think of him every moment. I want to go back home, but I have to work.

When I get back home at 7:00 a.m. I take a shower then get into bed and say good morning to my husband and son. My son gets up, and I try to sleep a little before the bus picks us up for our 9:00 a.m. class. I dream that one day I will be able to go back to my country when there will be peace, and my story will continue in my own country, where I will buy a house.

Chu Mu Dah is 25 and originally from Burma.

Family and School

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My family still misses me a lot. I call my mom. “How is my son?” my mom says. My son has two kids. I’m called grandfather. I told my son to give me a kid for Christmas. He says yes. I’m happy and keep a big smile. I am still a little sick for one week now. My sister just talked on my phone. She is just a little worried about me. I told her, “Please stop. I am still fine.” My brother moved to Alabama three weeks ago. I am still learning. I try to teach myself and make me understand. I am not sorry. I smile. I still keep going. I like to go to class and keep learning something to educate my brain.

My Family

PRAY MARO, ST. PAUL

My name is Pray Maro. I am happy because I have this opportunity to inform you about my large family. I have one parent living, four brothers, and four sisters. We live together in peace, love, and happiness. My mother could sew so sometimes she would teach us sewing. My father is a soldier and he works for our country, Burma. All of my brothers and sisters are going to school because of my mom’s struggles.

Now, we are all apart. Some are in Thailand, and others are in America. Sometimes I miss the good old days when we were all together. My mother passed away while we have been living in the USA. I am still really sad and I wish I could see her again. I would tell her, “I love you so much, Mommy.” I hope you have enjoyed reading my story. Thank you and God bless you.

Pray Maro is originally from Burma.

My Best Friend

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My best friend is my sister. We grew up together. She’s my little sister but I like how she thinks like a grown person. I tell her all my secrets. I love my sister because she is my best friend and my sister too. My sister has best friends, but she doesn’t trust them. If she has secrets she told me, she is open-minded. She’s short, fat, and she has a nice body. I like her body. A lot of people, they tell us, “You are not sisters,” because we do not look like each other.

Thinking of My Family

PAOLA VARA, HUGO

I am a mother, daughter, friend, and wife, all at the same time. My family in the U.S. is my husband and son. My family of origin lives in Mexico. Some of the holidays in Mexico are September 15, which is Independence Day, when Mexico became independent from Spain. Another holiday is Day of the Dead, which is a day we remember people who have died. We also celebrate Christmas and New Year’s much like the United States. Days I will never forget are the days my grandparents died. One of life’s important lessons is to help everyone in our family. I hope to return to Mexico to unite with my family of origin. My biggest dream is that my parents and my brothers can get a visa.

Paola Vara is 25 and originally from Mexico.

I Am Thankful for My Mother

ZEMZEM ADEM, MAHTOMEDI

A person that I am thankful for is my mother. My mother's name is Faxuma and she has nine children. I am really thankful to my mother for everything that she did for my siblings and I am always proud of everything that she did for us. When we used to live in Ethiopia, my mother used to have a small restaurant and also a grocery. I still remembered that it was not an easy job, but my mother did that hard job to provide for us. She strived very hard to work so we can have a better life. She always made sure that we were well-fed and sure we have good clothing. She always wanted us to get education.

Owning a grocery and a restaurant was not easy. We used to live in a small city, so my mother used to travel two days or three days to get supplies for grocery. We did not have our car so my mother took a local car, which was not safe, but she did not have another way to get stuff for the grocery. Also for a restaurant there was not electricity. My mother used a wood fire. She used to walk two or three hours to get wood for fire. I still remember when she got home from collecting wood for fire. She was very, very tired because she carried the wood on her back. Also when she cooked food for us or a restaurant she used to get very sweaty and tired because of the hotness. There was no air conditioning there.

My mother did all that hard job to raise us. My mother is always a loving, outstanding,

caring, and special mom. I cannot thank her enough for what she did for us and I'm really happy to have a mother like her. I am really thankful for what she did for us, and I cannot be the person I am today if I did not have her.

Zemzem Adem is originally from Ethiopia.

Someone I Admire

MAKEEZ AZIMI, BLAINE

The person I admire, I would have to say, is my mom because she is a hardworking woman who does everything for her children regardless of the cost. She is an amazing woman and I am glad to learn so much from her. Regardless of all the challenges she has faced, she is still strong, positive, and will fight for her children. I would love to become a mother who has some of the qualities my mother has.

Most Important Person

MARICRUZ RIVAS CRUZ, MINNEAPOLIS

My important person is my mother. Her name is Sonia. She is important for me because she always helps me. When I have problems I can talk with her. I decided to talk about her because she is really important in my life and my role model. She is working hard for my sister and me. I love my mom! My mom is my best friend.

Maricruz Rivas Cruz is 24 and originally from El Salvador.

Most Important Person

JOSEFA RODRIGUEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

Important people in my life are my daughter, my son, and my father. My father is important in my life. My father is respectful person, and very friendly. Usually if I need some advice, he says to me good things. It is important for my life. When I did wrong things without thinking, we call attention. He is a hard worker.

Josefa Rodriguez is 38 and originally from Mexico.

Who Got My Prize?

HTEE KEE, WORTHINGTON

One day I planned to teach my three children how to read and write in their language. They're nine, five, and four years old. But I wasn't sure they were ready, because the littler one is only four years old. I talked to myself and thought about it for one week. Later, I started to teach them and do the activities and let them practice reading and writing with the alphabet. They were all interested in my teaching.

Three days later, I tested them and gave them a prize. But before I tested them, I thought the oldest one would get my prize. But the littler one got my prize! How come I didn't know that before I taught them? I thought my littler child was too young and she couldn't do it and she wouldn't be interested. I learned many things from my children. Now I know that younger children learn other languages more quickly than older children.

Htee Kee is 27 and originally from Burma.

My Family

MAY HTOO, WORTHINGTON

I have three brothers and four sisters and I'm the older one. We have lovely brothers and sisters. My family is very poor but we are a sweet family. Now I moved to America. I'm a Karen-American. I'm the only one in my family in America. My mom and my dad, brothers, and sisters, they are all in Myanmar. I miss them so much.

My mom and my dad, they are so nice. My mom, she only stays home and takes care of our brothers and sisters. For my dad, he is working in a school. Next year, in 2017, he will retire. I'm so proud of him. I'm so happy to tell about my family's story. Thanks to everyone who reads about my family. God bless you all.

May Htoo is 30 and originally from Burma.

My Grandchildren and I

SONJA SAVIC, CORCORAN

My grandchildren are the joy of my life. Each one has a special place in my heart and my mind. Every one I love without limits. I have a special feeling in my mind and heart for one of them. His name is Felix. He is my firstborn grandchild. When we got Felix, that was happiness without limits for all our family.

Felix was beautiful and very sensitive. He beamed, shined, and sparkled from the first day when we got him. He had a warm look. Oh, he was so pretty. He and I took a walk every day through Eltham Park for two to four hours in Melbourne, Australia. He slept while

I drove him in his pram. He was one angel, so sweet, so calm, so beautiful. That time I never forgot. That was peaceful, relaxing for me to have this gift in my life. This experience will forever stay in me.

Felix was so strong. He liked to run around in the park. One time he ran into the water. There was water for birds and ducks in this small artificial lake. When he came into the water he just stopped running and looked around. At this time he was two years old. I came after him. I took him out of the water. He was wet to his navel. I took him to his pram and we walked home. I have many experiences like this. He was like a little angel.

My memories stay forever in my mind: my Felix, my dear prince. I pray all the time to Almighty or God Jehovah to protect all my children and grandchildren. They are my lifeline, everything for me. I brought Felix nice clothes from Sweden. He was already a little gentleman. I had lots of time with him, the most of all my other grandchildren. I have four grandchildren and the fifth is on the way. I am a happy grandmother in my life. My dear children and grandchildren gave me an extension on my life when I was sick. Without them I would never have survived. I am a happy mama and grandmama.

Sonja Savic is 67 and originally from Bosnia.

My Life

RA KEE LA, ST. PAUL

I was born in 1986 in Burma. I came to the United States three years ago with my friend. My family still lives in Burma. I have two brothers and four sisters. Some of them live

in Burma and some live in Thailand. I am the only one in the United States. I am married and have one daughter, Say Lweh Myaw. She is so cute. I want the best for my children. I am happy because I am attending a family literacy class with my child. It makes me feel proud as well as happy.

Ra Kee La is 30 and originally from Burma.

My Life

DAH MU, ST. PAUL

I was born in Thailand. I have two brothers and two sisters. I came to the United States almost eight years ago. Before I came to Minnesota, I lived in Texas for one year. I am married and have three children, one boy and two girls. They are loving children. Right now we rent a two-bedroom apartment, which I like very much. We are a loving family.

Dah Mu is 24 and originally from Thailand.

My Family

SAMI JABER, NEW BRIGHTON

I actually have a big family. I have four boys and one girl and, of course, a nice wife. Their names are Hassan, Bader, Hiba, Basem, and Ibraheem. The boys are working in different jobs. Hassan, the eldest son, is working as an airplane mechanic at the Seattle airport. Bader is working as a catering supervisor in Minneapolis. Basem is working in the Federal Bank of Minnesota. Our daughter Hiba is married to a very kind man, and they are living in Jordan. They were planning to move to Canada. They got the landing

permissions, but they didn't find jobs there yet. They decided to stay in Jordan until they find jobs in Canada.

There was no idea to have more kids after the fourth child, but without a plan my wife got pregnant with our fifth beautiful son Ibraheem. At that time nine years back, my wife was sick. She had breast cancer. Doctors asked her to terminate the pregnancy in order to give her the radiation and chemotherapy she needed, but she refused. Something strange happened that time. First of all, she dreamed with the prophet Ibraheem and the Aiah in Qur'an, and that says to the fire to be cold and peace on Ibraheem. In the morning she opened the Qur'an, and it was on the same subject. Then she went to her job and opened her computer to find the same subject on the screen! So she told the doctors that she will keep the pregnancy, and she will have a nice boy, and she will call him Ibraheem. And that is what happened.

Family

FUZHENYANG, BROOKLYN PARK

My name is Fuzhen. I am from a small village in China. I've been in the United States for nine years. I have two children. It has been many years since I've been here. I've only gone back to China once, in the year 2013. When I got there, I saw many things changed in my family. My mother and father were getting old. They had white hair and lots of wrinkles on their faces, but they still looked very healthy. I miss them and love them very much.

Fuzhen Yang is 37 and originally from China.

My First Teacher or My Family's Queen

SAW MEH, WORTHINGTON

Everyone who is living in this world has to move somewhere because we're the guests of the world. But some things we can forget, and some things we can't. I want to share with everyone what I can't forget. It's the main thing and the most important thing in my life. Someone will ask me "What is it?" I will answer that, "It is my mother's love."

Whoever has already grown up needs to rethink their lives. For some people, it's too late for them, and for some people it's on time for them. We need to rethink our lives starting when our mother started expecting us. I want to share about myself with other people. My mother loves me so much. When she expected me, she worried about everything concerning me. Because she wanted to eat something when she got hungry, but she couldn't eat. If she ate something it might be wrong for me. She tried to eat the healthy foods. She wanted to see a perfect boy when I was born. I was born in a tent without the doctor. Most people who lived in the village were delivered by the midwife. During the time I was born, Burma (Myanmar) had a civil war. It meant I was born in the jungle. During that time, if the government's soldiers saw the villagers, they'd kill all of them. That was why my mother needed to take care of me more and more.

When they heard the army coming close to them, they started packing and evacuated to another place. Sometimes at

night, sometimes in the day. She put me on her back, and sometimes she held me on her cheek. I didn't know anything yet. When I was a child, I was a very sick boy. I got the disease malaria at that time. I almost died. My mother needed to take care of me more and more. My mom dropped her tears when I felt so bad and prayed for me all the time. Our lives were very challenging. Someone can die of malaria easily. Not only me, but I have four brothers, and my mother needed to take care of them, too. But they were different than me. They were healthy. I'm the youngest in my family.

It took us too long in the jungle. Sometimes we didn't have enough food. Later she heard about the Karen leaders making treaties with their leaders. They accepted the Karen people building the refugee camp. My mother took us there, but we didn't want to move far away from her, and that's why my mother hated what happened to me. I didn't have a passport, and I wasn't a citizen of Thailand.

Later, I applied to come to the United States in 2008. I came here in 2009. It took me a year to apply. When I left the refugee camp, my mother dropped her tears. She told me it will be hard to see each other. I felt so sad. I knew my mother loved me so much. We can't compare our mother's love with anything because it's higher than the sky and deeper than the ocean forever. I thank Anna Jarvis, who started Mother's Day in 1908. We shall celebrate Mother's Day every year. May God bless all of the first teachers or family's queens who live in the world.

Saw Meh is 34 and originally from Burma.

Niin'de (My Heart)

FRANK BIGBEAR, ST. CLOUD

My son, you ease my pain
You take my sorrow away,
And make diamonds from the falling rain,
That bring about rainbows every day.
Niin'de
I thank the creator for your life
I thank the creator for your mother
And pray one day she'll become my wife
To love and cherish you both like no other.
Niin'de
You give me strength when I'm weak,
You give me warmth when I'm cold,
And luck in which I seek,
You are my pot o' gold.
Niin'de
And when you fall I will be there
To pick you back up and teach you,
Braxton Jacob Bigbear,
To do the very best you can do,
Niin'de I will always love you.

Frank Bigbear is originally from the United States.

The Wisest Person

EMAN MONTASER, COON RAPIDS

The wisest person I know is my oldest brother. He understands much about the world and is always building on his knowledge. He read a lot of different kinds of books. When I have a problem or I need an opinion on any issue, I can ask him for

advice because he is wise. He is like my dad. My dad was wise, but I didn't have much time with him because he passed away when I was very young. Also, my brother is wise because he uses his knowledge to help others. In our family he is like our dad. Anyone can ask him or share their life with him. I like when people help others. He is funny, too, and we have fun chats together.

Moms are Priceless

DINA CELAC, GOLDEN VALLEY

My mom is so special to me. I love my mom because she gave me life. I love her because she took care of me and helped me grow up.

I remember the time when I was a child how she cared for me and made me delicious food. And when I was sick, she took care of me and made me appropriate food and gave me my medicine. She also taught me how to confront problems by teaching me the Bible. Since I moved to the USA, we Skype and talk about our families, her health, and the news. But her life is not so easy because now my mom is sick. My heart breaks to see her suffer.

I wish to be there when she needs my help. If I could I would take her pain, but I can only pray for her. Moms are priceless!

Dina Celac is originally from Moldova.

A Person I Admire

PHUONG NGO, COON RAPIDS

If I were asked, "Who do you admire?" I could answer right now that it is my mom. In my country, unfortunate wives usually endure

the violence of bad husbands, but my mom did not. I still remember clearly the night when my mom took us to leave the house with her wounds that were caused by a drunk person whom I had to call dad. Since then, it wasn't enough to count my mom's troubles and difficulties to rear us. I rarely saw my mom sleep. Not only working hard, but my mom also taught us a lot about love, sharing, and caring. My first writing teacher is my mom. And I want to learn everything from my mom, except for cooking. Though my mom isn't good at cooking, I love my mom very much. I love my mom even more since I gave birth to my daughter and have a deep understanding of the sentence, "The only time your mom laughs while you are crying is the minute you are born."

Story About Mothers

MAIMUNA AHMED, MINNEAPOLIS

A mother is the most important person in the family. She gets pregnant, and whatever amount of pain she feels, she still does housework and she never gets tired. She cooks, cleans, teaches kids how to speak, how to wear clothes, and how to tie shoes. Nobody pays her. Mother is a very kind member in the community.

A Blessing from God

SARAI PARRA, CRYSTAL

We have to trust in God for a blessing. When I was 34 years old, my husband and I already had four daughters. My husband didn't want to have more, but my dream was to have a boy. I decided not to take any pills. Two months later, what I wanted came true. My doctor found me pregnant but with diabetes. They did an ultrasound, and I received a big surprise. It was a boy. At four months, my doctor called me and wanted to make a second ultrasound because they found something strange going on.

He told me that there was an 80 percent chance the baby would come with Down syndrome, maybe because of my age. At this moment, my life started to change. The recommendation was to abort it. It was a hard decision for my husband and me. My husband and I were talking, and he said, "He's my boy, and I don't care the way he comes." I was crying through all of my pregnancy. When the time of birth came, the doctor made an examination of my baby. The result was that he didn't have anything wrong with him. Now he is eight years old. Each of my daughters are special, but my little man is the light of our eyes and the joy of the house and a blessing. Dedicated to my son, Eduardo Rivera Parra.

Sarai Parra is 43 and originally from Mexico

My Beautiful and Strong Family

BEATRIZ OROZCO SANCHEZ, BROOKLYN CENTER

Hi, my name is Beatriz Orozco. I have a beautiful and strong family. I have three sisters and two brothers. My older brother

is special for me. He started to work when he was nine years old to help my mom with money for food. My brother was always there to help my mom. He was my father, not my brother. That is why I always will be there when he needs me. I have 17 nephews. I know a lot, and I love them. I have four beautiful children, and I love them with my heart. My children are my motivation to be strong, and I work hard to give to my children the best. My sisters and brothers and I learned how to be strong and never be scared of anything. Thanks to the best, strongest, and lovely mom God gave us.

My mom was a single mom, but it never stopped her from working and loving us. We learned the most important thing of life: when the family is together, nothing can stop them. She always said, "If your family needs you, be there." I am always thankful with God for my family and for everything I have in my life because that makes me strong and a better person. And I make my dreams come true. Please never forget everything you past in your life is for good reason. God will be with us forever.

Beatriz Orozco Sanchez is 31 and originally from Mexico.

My Life

ANONYMOUS, APPLE VALLEY

I have a wonderful large family. I am married and have two children. My oldest child is 10 years old. Her name is Zamzam, and she is living in Kenya. I really miss her, but I think she will get her visa to come to the U.S. soon. My second child is five years old, and her name is Salma, and she lives with me. Now she comes with me to my school, and next year she will go

to kindergarten. I want to continue to go to school every day. I have a good life.

My Life

HAY BLUT HTOO, ST. PAUL

My name is Hay Blut Htoo. I am from Burma. I came to the United States seven years ago, but I have not improved my English. I want to go back to my country to visit my sister and brother. I have two children. I love them so much because they make me so happy and strong.

Hay Blut Htoo is originally from Burma.

My Story

SAW PAW, ST. PAUL

My name is Paw Saw. I was born in 1990 In Burma. I have two brothers and two sisters living in Burma. I miss them and think about them everyday. When I was nine years old, I left my family and went to live with my aunt in a Thailand refugee camp. Now I live in Minnesota and wonder when I will see my family again.

Saw Paw is originally from Burma.

My Mom

MASTEHA SALAD, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Masteha, and I was born and raised in Somalia. I come from a family who consists of eight children. I was the third child in the family. My father was a farmer. My mother was a small grocery store owner, and both my parents run a small grocery store. We lived the happiest life,

and everything was great. But the saddest moment happened October 20, 2001 when I lost my beloved mom. It was the afternoon. We were in our home, my father was at work, and my mother was in her store with her youngest kid and other one, and the rest were at home. My mom was sitting in her store chilling with babies.

Suddenly, a man with a gun came to my mom, stood at the front door, and shot my Mom in the head. We did not know the reason because no one stayed with my mom. Also we couldn't find any witness. So my mom died that day. Losing my mom changed everything. My family no longer united like before. We separated and lived different places. My grandmother took our youngest child, who was only three months old, and two others. We faced troubled times after losing our mom, although my father did whatever he could to raise us kids.

After all these unforgettable times everything came back to normal. Our family became strong and survived. All my brothers and sisters are grown up. My youngest sister who was only three months old when our mother died is 15 years old now. Every one of us is enjoying a happy life, although we missed our mom, and no one can replace her position. Thanks to God our lives go smoothly. My dad and my grandmother did everything they could to help us become who we are today. God gave us that luck to have these amazing parents.

Masteha Salad is originally from Somalia.

Thanks God for My Family

MARIA MURILLO, WORTHINGTON

My favorite country is Mexico. It is beautiful and wonderful. I love my state. It is Jalisco. All the people there are nice, and the food is delicious. I like pozole and tamales. Everything is wonderful. O God! The best day of my life was when my daughters were born. I was so happy, me and my family. I love spending time with my family. We like to go to the store together. I had a great time on Thanksgiving Day in the United States. My daughters and I cooked turkey, salad, and potatoes. I love this time with my family, sharing this with them. It is most beautiful. Thanks God for my family, and especially for my life.

Maria Murillo is 33 and originally from Mexico.

My Story

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I am from Somalia. I have lived for the last ten years in Minnesota. Also my parents and four brothers live in Minnesota. I have another two brothers and three sisters, but they live in four different countries: Kenya, Sweden, Australia, and Somalia. All my brothers and sisters are married. I have 13 nieces and 15 nephews. I have a big family and I love them very much. I am also married. I have two girls, three boys, and a very nice husband. Now I am a student. I would like to continue my education until I reach my goal. I want to be a nurse.

Ahmed's Journey

AHMED YOUSUF, MINNEAPOLIS

I have family in Dire Dawa including my aunts and uncles. I also have family in Chicago and Atlanta. I also have friends and other family in Canada. I have other family in Djibouti too and I have a beautiful wife who lives in Ethiopia in Dire Dawa. She teaches in the Mosque of Bilal. I got married in November 2013. I am still waiting for my wife to come to the United States of America. Immigration is taking forever to get her visa. This is really frustrating.

I have a big family that lives in different places. My dad lives in Somalia and my mom was born in Dire Dawa in Ethiopia. I was born in Djibouti and went to Kenya and Somalia and then to Boston, Massachusetts. I lived there for a long time and then moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota and I have lived in this state for 20 years. I have worked for Tree Trust, a landscaping company on Broadway, and Goodwill Easter Seals in St. Paul. Now I work at Metro PCS on Lake Street.

Ahmed Yousuf is 34 and originally from Djibouti.

My Family

HSER MOO, ST. PAUL

I was born in Myanmar. We lived in a small village. Every day my mother and father went to work on a farm. At sunset they came home. My sister and brother went to school. My home was near the river, so we sometimes went fishing. Every Saturday my little brother watched cows. At sunset

he came home and we ate dinner together. Sometimes I helped my mom cook, take care of my sisters, and wash clothes.

In 2005, we moved to the Thailand refugee camp. I went to school with my sister and brother. Sometimes on Saturday we went into the forest to find vegetables, mushrooms, and bamboo shoots. We went back home, made dinner, and enjoyed together. In 2007 I graduated from high school. A year later, I got married. We moved to the USA with my husband's family. My family still lives in the refugee camp. I miss them all night. I hope to see my family again. I also hope they are having a good life, good health, and are safe. I think of them every day before I go to sleep.

Hser Moo is 24 and originally from Burma.

thoughts. I arrived on a Friday in Riverside, California, and was met by my mom's family. I had not met them before, and I was nervous, but their two girls were very nice to me, and before long, I was thinking ahead to our trip to Minnesota. California is spectacular state compared to my home city. I spent a long time just looking at all the things so different from those that I grew up with. I stayed three weeks in California, and during those three weeks, I visited Disney World and went across the famous Golden Gate Bridge. When I finally arrived in Minnesota, I remember that the first thing I did was to give my mom a big hug and tell her how much I miss her and how much I love her.

My Important Person

SADO AWAD, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Sado Awad. My important is to be happy and to do something with my family. My life is to care for all of my family. I was young and my mom taught me cooking and cleaning. I am a great person.

Sado Awad is 50 and originally from Somalia.



My First Day in America

VIRIDIANA TORRES, MINNEAPOLIS

Before I came to the United States, I was afraid because everything was going to be new and different. But I was excited at the same time because I would be reunited with my mom, and that was uppermost in my

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP



NICOLE BEE
105 NORWOOD DRIVE
BIG LAKE, MN 55309

Simple Rose
NICOLE BEE, BIG LAKE

Featured Author



VOLHA SIAMIONAVA

(Olga Semenova) was born and raised in Belarus, Europe. Her family won a green card last year and selected Minnesota as a second home. English is her third language, and she often writes about her country, feelings, and friends. Olga is attending The Adult Academic Program in Robbinsdale Area School, Minnesota.

My Feelings

VOLHA SIAMIONAVA, PLYMOUTH

My name is Olga. I am almost 40. I have a nice family: my son, husband, and parents.

Am I happy? Yes. Not because I have a lot of things, money, cars, houses. Because I know who I am. I know what I like and dislike. When I want to cry, I cry; when I want to laugh, I laugh. Almost always I listen to the voice in my head. It sings. Sometimes romantic music, sometimes wild, sometimes furious, sometimes passionate. I like very simple things: sunrises, blossoms, laughs, tasty breakfast, a good book on the sofa under a blanket. I try to appreciate what is done for me every second, minute, and day.

I love people. Especially to watch them. There are a lot of sounds, expressions, smiles, and moving. With the right people we don't need words in order to know what we feel. I don't like written kinds of communication. I prefer live conversation. I have to see my best friend's eyes and their expression. I like to give hugs. I feel warmth, kindness, and happiness.

All the best of life is always simple. I don't want to change myself because I am what I am. I try to love everything and everybody. I don't regret my mistakes or the bad events. It's my life. My experience. Life is perfect. I love you!

Volha Siamionava is 39 and originally from Belarus.

Lessons Learned

NICOLE BERTHIAUME, BUFFALO

For every petal you pluck from a daisy
You're granted one measure of love.
For every rainbow you find with two ends,
I wish you two stars from above.

For every tear you brush from a cheek
I promise you kindness will follow.
Wherever you walk, under rainbows or
stars,
Over daisies or down lonely hollows.

For every child you play with and talk to
You are granted one heart full of laughter.
For every smile you place on a face
You will receive only peace ever after.

If you think that I am giving you these
priceless gifts
Take another look at yourself and your
deeds.
These gifts that you've earned are
Lessons you've learned while answering other
folks' needs!

This Girl

RANDI ROCK, BUFFALO

I know this girl who says she likes to be alone.
Says her time is spent the way she wants.
Ever since she was young she did life by
herself all right, with help from no one else,

all right.

She fought for everything she got.

She taught herself to be tough.

And so she made herself a home; she
couldn't take another on her ride.

Guess she made herself alone. No, she
couldn't take another on her ride.

Always living for herself, she finally left her
heart behind.

But there is more to this girl than meets the
eye.

She won't let me get close enough to see if
she ever gets lonely.

I am wondering if she does this just to hide
how she secretly longs to be loved.

Angel

KEVIN REYNA, BUFFALO

It must be those hazel eyes. That's why I find
myself so mesmerized.

All that we have been through, not once did
I ever stop loving you.

I long to kiss your soft, supple lips,

To hold you tight because my heart says it's
right.

A face of tears and a heart of fears because

I am imagining losing you after all these
years.

The good times I know will outweigh the
bad,

So open your heart, it's okay to be sad.

Though I would love nothing more than for
you to be glad.

Just try and see, I mean about the Good
overpowering the Bad like it should.

My Angel, please shine for me again

Please forgive me for my sins so we may walk
hand in hand til the end.

I love you more than you could ever know.

I promise from here on to never drink
another stout.

Let go of the pain and let love gain.

Let's grow old and gray together, I'm ready to
stay, always next to you

'Til God comes on that beautiful day.

Someday we will look back and say,

Thank you, God, for not letting us throw our
true love away.

Be my soul mate and look no more. Here I
am, not rich nor poor.

Love is priceless and hard to find. Be mine,
my Love, til the end of time.

My Friend: Word Portrait

NIMO HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

My friend has long black hair and she loves long hair and her husband loves long hair. She wears a long dress coat abaya and she never wears short dresses because she's a Muslim. Yes, she smiles a lot and when she sees people she smiles and she's happy. But sometimes she is angry and she doesn't smile. No, she doesn't like music, but she listens to the Qur'aan and News World. No, she doesn't like to sing. She likes to watch Steve Harvey TV programs and she watches every night. Sometimes she reads a book and she goes to visit family and friends. Her

favorite food is rice and vegetables and she drinks a lot of mango juice. Her greatest wish is to help people.

Nimo Hassan is 21 and originally from Somalia.

Love

BUNTHA KONG, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

My name is Buntha Kong. I came from Cambodia. Today, I want to write about my love. I love my mom because she is generous. She sent me to school when I was a child. She gave me clothes and jewelry. She took care of me and supported me financially.

I love my two brothers and my younger sister because we talk about the problems we have with our jobs.

I love my teachers because my teachers are very friendly. They give me many good learning experiences. I love my school because the school gives me good educational experiences and it is a safe and comfortable place. I love my friends because they make me happy. They share ideas and keep in touch with me.

I love my husband and my dog because they protect me. They share happiness and sadness when I have a problem. My husband gives me warmth and love. He takes care of me and makes me laugh all the time.

Finally, I want to say a million thank yous to all my family, friends, teachers, my dog and especially my husband for the love they give to me. Always, I tell them, I love you too!

Buntha Kong is originally from Cambodia.

A Good Role Model

SAIDA CERIMAGIC, ST. PAUL

A good role model is very important for every person. Any person could be somebody's role model, even if he or she doesn't know it. Children imitate people around them. Because of that, it's important what they see in their parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, on TV, etc.

A good role model should respect everyone. He or she should value people by what they do, and not by how much they have. When a person is feeling empty, a smile or kind word can be more valuable than all the money in the world.

My mother was my role model. She didn't say much, but she showed me how to be a good person with her actions. Many times she would give coffee or a meal to an old person who was cleaning streets in our neighborhood. Nobody left our home without at least a small gift. She was honest and saw good in everyone.

We lost everything in the war in Bosnia. Material things can come and go. What you learn from a good role model, you can never lose. I hope my son can see in me what I saw in my mother.

Saida Cerimagic is 70 and originally from Croatia.

Different Language, Same Love

IRMA SAUER, WORTHINGTON

Marrying a person from a different country, who speaks a different language, and who practices different customs, can be difficult.

This problem can be overcome; therefore, I would like to tell you my story.

At 17, I decided to come to the United States with the goal of helping my family in Mexico. In my mind, I was determined not to fall in love with an American because I thought that if I married an American, I could never go back to my country again. However things changed after I started working, met a mechanic (an American!) who worked for the same company, and I began to get to know him well. There was a big problem though as he was in love with someone else and he hardly spoke to me at all. Over the years, we remained single and we became good friends. For me that was perfect because that gave me an opportunity to win his heart. Time finally came when he told me that he fell in love with me also. We got engaged and after five months of dating, he asked me to marry him. We were married by civil ceremony.

Months later, we got the news that we were going to be parents. In May 2013, our son was born. In August 2014, we were married at the Catholic church. My story serves as proof that love can overcome diversity and cultural differences.

Untitled

TED SMITH, BUFFALO

I open my eyes and see nothing has changed.
Oh, how I wish it could all be rearranged.

But that can't be, so

I'll try to hold on and not let go.

Where it all ends,

Guess that just depends on

If my broken heart mends.

Love

LUIS CONCE, HILLTOP



God

GABRIEL CASTILLO BARRERA, MINNEAPOLIS

God is like love

God looks like Boss

God sounds like peace

God is sometimes strong.

Gabriel Castillo Barrera is originally from Mexico.

The Journey

CESAR RAMIREZ-GARCIA, MINNEAPOLIS

I like to live here

I love to be with her

Share life together

Struggling to meet our goals.

It is difficult to understand another language

But it is more difficult to express what I think

I understand most of what I hear

But I can't give a good answer.

The city is very beautiful

People are very friendly

Ten thousand lakes to visit

And the Skyway is amazing.

I want to express how I feel

I want to speak this language

I would be understood
I hope it happens soon.
I listen to my inner voice
It tells me a thousand times the same:
Nothing is impossible, nothing is impossible
You can do it!
I watch the snowfall
It gives me immense pleasure
I feel the cold in my skin
It tells me: Hey you are alive!
Far from home
Far from my family
But who cares?
I am with my lover.

Cesar Ramirez Garcia is originally from Mexico.

My Best Friend

ASYA VINER, MINNEAPOLIS

Everybody wants to have a best friend. The best friend is a person who understands you without any words. This person has the same feelings and the same opinions that you have. People find friends in their childhood playing together or studying together. They speak the same language. They have the same culture and same traditions.

For immigrants coming to the U.S. from different countries it is a big problem to find a real friend.

I'm very lucky to have found my best friend. Her name is Galina. We both come from the former Soviet Union. We both speak Russian. We have the same traditions. Our families live in Minneapolis. She has one daughter with

her family, and I have one son.

We met at school studying English. Step by step we understood that we are thinking the same. We both like listening to classical music and reading books. We found that we have the same opinion for many different problems.

Galina is a very kind person. She is very friendly and always ready to help people.

I'm very happy to have such a friend.

Written With a Pen

RON SAPP, ST. CLOUD

Written with a pen

Sealed with a kiss

If you love me

Tell me this

Do you love me

Or do you not

You told me once but I forgot

So tell me now

Tell me true

So I can say

I love you, too

And if you die

Before I do

I'll be in heaven

Waiting for you

And if you go

The other way

There is no price

I won't pay

I'll give the angels

Back their wings
And risk the loss
Of everything
Just to prove
My love is true
I'll go to hell
To be with you.

Ron Sapp is originally from the United States.

If Four 'Yes'es

DERRIK RUSSELL, ST. CLOUD

When you love someone you give your
heart
Openly to them in complete trust
You give them a map to a place only few
Can go and you have given them a means
To cripple you from the inside out.
So is it hard to love? Yes.
To give your heart to love? Yes.
It's even harder to love again. Yes.
To trust not your heart but their's? Yes.

Derrick Russell is originally from the United States.

Refining

JANET ALDRIDGE, ST. CLOUD

Pains as I come back to life
Growing love again through my strife
As bad as it hurts it's as good as it gets
Thankful actually for all these tears that I've wept
How else could love be expressed?
A good way, appreciation from my regret

I love you, you were never unlovable, I just
forgot
And as bad as it hurts, this is a good lesson I was
taught
Crucial in my eyes, because it brought me to you
It pierced through my lies and reminded me
that I love you
Pain brings beauty with the down pouring rain
My soul begins soaring on the wings of my pain
Then the voice of truth gently whispers, I'm glad
you're back and
Then I whisper in my heart, there's nowhere else
I'd rather be
Than on this track
Amen.

Janet Aldridge is originally from the United States.

I Am Thankful For

NASRIN ABDI ALI, MINNEAPOLIS

I am thankful for my car because it is happy.
I am thankful for summer because I like the
sun.
I am thankful for my mother because she
loves me.
I am thankful for my house because it is big
and very nice.
I am thankful for my son because he is a
gentleman.
I am thankful for my class because I study
English.

Nasrin Abdi Ali is originally from Somalia.

R U My Man?

NICHOLE MAHLE, ST. CLOUD

You know you will never be erased from my heart

But you can be replaced by someone who's off the charts

This is not to scare you, this is to prepare you

My heart is not a toy, so stop acting like a boy

I need a man, so will you stand

Or become sand that is blown by my fan

Will you be tall or tremble and fall

To feel extremely small, making you crawl

Will you call out to me as if you're about to bawl

That makes me stop and stall

To take the time to give you another dime

That leaves a taste of lime

The bitter taste seems to be such a waste

Which leaves me stuck like paste

I am through with all of this pain

It's time for me to have some gain

So I head down the main to get on the train

Or I cannot keep myself sane

So in the end, I love you my friend

Just keep it as you tend and hold it out for others to lend

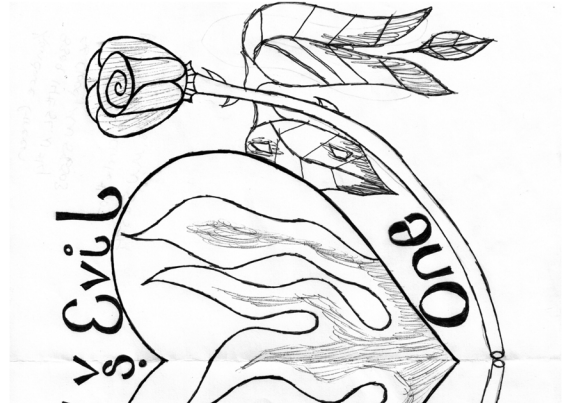
Or in the end it is going to bend and you're left

To do its entire mend

And that's all she will send.

Good vs. Evil in One

KANDACE GREEN, ST. CLOUD



Come Back

CORDNEY HOLMES, ST. CLOUD

Where did you come from? Where did you go?

Will you come back? Or do you know? Or will you get scared

And keep running away? Forgetting feelings that won't go away?

You can't shake it, or fake it, these feelings inside.

If you'd stop running I'd be on your side.

Forever your man, forever my lady, for the rest of my life,

Or until the world's end I'll love you, you'll see that

You can't hide, and these feelings are memories or moments

Lost in time. The sooner you realize, the better I'll be,

And my love will always be here, for you, from me, C.

Cordney Holmes is originally from the United States.

People and Their Pets!

DAVID QUINTANA, WORTHINGTON

Pets become part of your family. You take care
of them like your own children.

You feed them. You love them. You miss them.
You cry for them.

You receive love from them.

Some pets risk their lives for you.

That's why we should take care of the animals.

Sometimes I feel angry when I see people
hurting animals.

That's why I take care of my pet like my family.

My name is David Quintana. I would like to
say to the people to take care of the animals.

Have respect for them.

They are special.

David Quintana is originally from Mexico.

Love

ALLIE BOUTELLE, EAGAN

Lingering in open motions

And hovering

Between stares and words that haven't yet

Been spoken.

Alive in our eyes in one moment,

Perhaps dormant in another

Sometimes a disguise

And misunderstood

It stands

Flaring,

A seatbelt forgotten,

Words unanswered

It flares.

It tells you when you're wrong

And when you're right

And when you need to sit down

And relax,

Or get up

And fight.

When it's loud

And full of anger

Or passion,

All of the words that haven't yet

Been spoken

It's shared,

It stands.

Allie Boutelle is 17 and originally from the United States

The Anniversary Day

BINA WAHBI, ST. PAUL

Al and Bina wanted to go out to Dawa restaurant. They love to eat Eastern food. Their marriage anniversary is coming up so Al wanted to plan a night out. So he called a restaurant to make a reservation but the restaurant was reserved for a wedding party. He could have called another restaurant but he knew that Dawa is Bina's favorite. He had an idea. What if he cooks an Eastern meal at home?

So he started to cook and he decorated the table. He put out a tablecloth, lights, some candles, and he played romantic music. He was done before Bina's arrival. When she came back, "Happy anniversary," he said, showing their romantic dinner.

Bina looked confused. She said, "Tomorrow is our anniversary." Al paused; he looked at the calendar, and he realized that she was right. Then he had nothing to say, just: "I guess it's good to practice today!"

Bina Wahbi is 31 and originally from Iraq.

Reading About My Friend

HA PHAM, APPLE VALLEY

I read a story about my friend. He had a reunion last summer. There he met his old colleagues from college. Some of them he recognized, but others he did not. Everyone told the story from the time of graduation to present. There he met his old love. After college, they went their own ways. At the reunion, they spoke, danced, and walked in the park. Now they were both single. They called on the phone and emailed each other all the time. Three months later, they got married. Now they are very happy.

Ha Pham is originally from Vietnam.

My Best Friend

ANONYMOUS, BURNSVILLE

When I was a teenager in Somalia, I had a best friend named Aselle. We were very close and we used to do everything together, including family chores. We had fun. We shared everything in

our lives. One day, I had an opportunity to come to America and I left her. I never had a friend that close before or after. I have been calling her and sending her money. Finally, she came to America two years ago with her husband and two children. They live in Ohio, and I didn't visit them yet, but we talk on the phone a lot. I am hoping to visit her this summer. That is going to be a very happy time.

Tangled Amongst Angels

LUKE WELLER, ST. CLOUD

Tangled amongst angels I strangled for
months

A fable to chumps

Lump sums of chunks

Run the trailer park gumps

Into the dumps

Dumb to some I must admit

Be a bum or be done, I quit

Mum can't handle it

Animalish, that's how I handle this

Candle this

Like flammable piss

Miss this bliss, I wish

Kiss these lips from one miss

I wish, I wish

Wish I'd washed

Instead of kicked rocks and walked

Balked at the catch I caught

Didn't know what I had until it was lost

Fingertip grips

Shoelace trips
Dying, begging, pleading
This I can't believe, I'm conceiving
Even seeing
Devil scheming
Plotting, fiending
Contradicting things I believe in
Time to tell that prick to start leaving
Find true meaning
Knees bent
Begging, kicking, screaming
Babe, no, please stop leaving
How could I live the life I was leading?
All the lies
Behind the eyes
Of guys I truly despise
Once
Once she was mine
And I her guy
Now I sit and cry
Wonder why
Begging God that this isn't our
Goodbye

Luke Weller is originally from the United States.

Listen From the Heart

JERRY HARRELL, ST. CLOUD

Some say I am blessed, some say I am smart
Some say I really play my part.
I try my best to be the man

Who listens from the heart.

If I seem weird, or come off tough,
Just sit me down and call my bluff.
Because in the end, I'm a caring friend
Who listens from the heart.

Here's for guys who want their girl to know
their love is still a spark,
Pay attention when she speaks to you
And listen from the heart.

If I didn't speak when we first met,
Responded slow and not so sharp
I'd try to talk to you without my words,
And listen from the heart.

Jerry Harrell is originally from the United States

Jourdain's Love

SAMANTHA CLARK, ST. CLOUD

Every day I wake up and realize that you are not there by my side, that it was just a dream; you are truly the man of my dreams every day and every night. I have been blessed with your presence in my life and the love you have shown me. You gave me the most amazing love that I have felt in my life.

Our love is unconditional. Every time we part ways, you are on my mind, you are in my heart, you are my soul mate, you are my best friend, you are my destiny, you are all I have, you are all I need, you will forever have my love.

I will never meet another person like you. You are truly one of a kind—your knowledge, experience, stories you have shared. I learned a lot from you; I do appreciate everything you have done for me, and you earned my respect, trust, and love.

When I get knocked down, you are there to pick me up. When I am about to fall, you are there to catch me before I do. You are there through my toughest times; you are there through my greatest times. We may not see eye to eye all the time, but that's what makes us stronger.

Every step you took, I was one step behind; I was always right by your side. I shouldn't have run away; I was constantly pushing you away. I can't stand being away anymore. Let our love revive; we can still work through this. The storm will pass, and we will be sunny again.

I risked my all for you; I'll do it over and over again. I can't go on without loving you. The love I have for you is holding me back from moving on, but all I want is you. We deserve nothing but the best in life.

All I have are precious memories I hold so dearly. I will always be here waiting; my love for you will never, but destiny will bring us together as one once again. You taught me patience, so I will patiently be waiting for that day to come.

Samantha Clark is originally from the United States.

Open Door

MOHAMMAD H. MAJEED, MAPLEWOOD

When I was a child, every night my father told me a story. The stories were not like general stories that parents tell their kids. I remember one of them. It was about two friends. One was blind; the other was disabled. Every day, the blind man carried the disabled man outside. Each one shared what he had. The blind man helped his friend by carrying him, and the disabled man helped his friend by being his eyes, to explain everything he saw. Together they were perfect. They spent their lives in that way until the last day of their lives. This story taught me how friendship is important and helpful in our life.

I felt that feeling when I came to the U.S. in April 2012 with my wife and my son. I met many people who helped me. In the first month here, I enrolled at Open Door Learning Center's classes for adults. They teach English as a second language. There I found two wonderful friends. Those were the first friends I met. Roxanne Wieken Larsen worked as a volunteer at Arlington Hills Lutheran Church. I met her by chance. And Jessica Schachterle Jones works as a teacher in my school.

Both of them have helped me in different ways. They made me remember my father's story and to see how friendship is helpful. My friends made my life easier and shinier. Both of them worked like my eyes.

Mohammad H. Majeed is originally from Iraq.

Once Upon a Time

ANONYMOUS, EAGAN

Once upon a time, he loved a girl like he
loved life.

He gave her his world because he was poor,
She made him rich with happiness.

He always kept her close by his heart, within
his mind.

And as times became difficult

His heart never, ever quit beating for her,

As he continued believing that they would be

Together forever . . . but she shattered his
vivid dream.

He awoke to the reality of their love

For Eros blinded his sight, as his eyes and
soul cried.

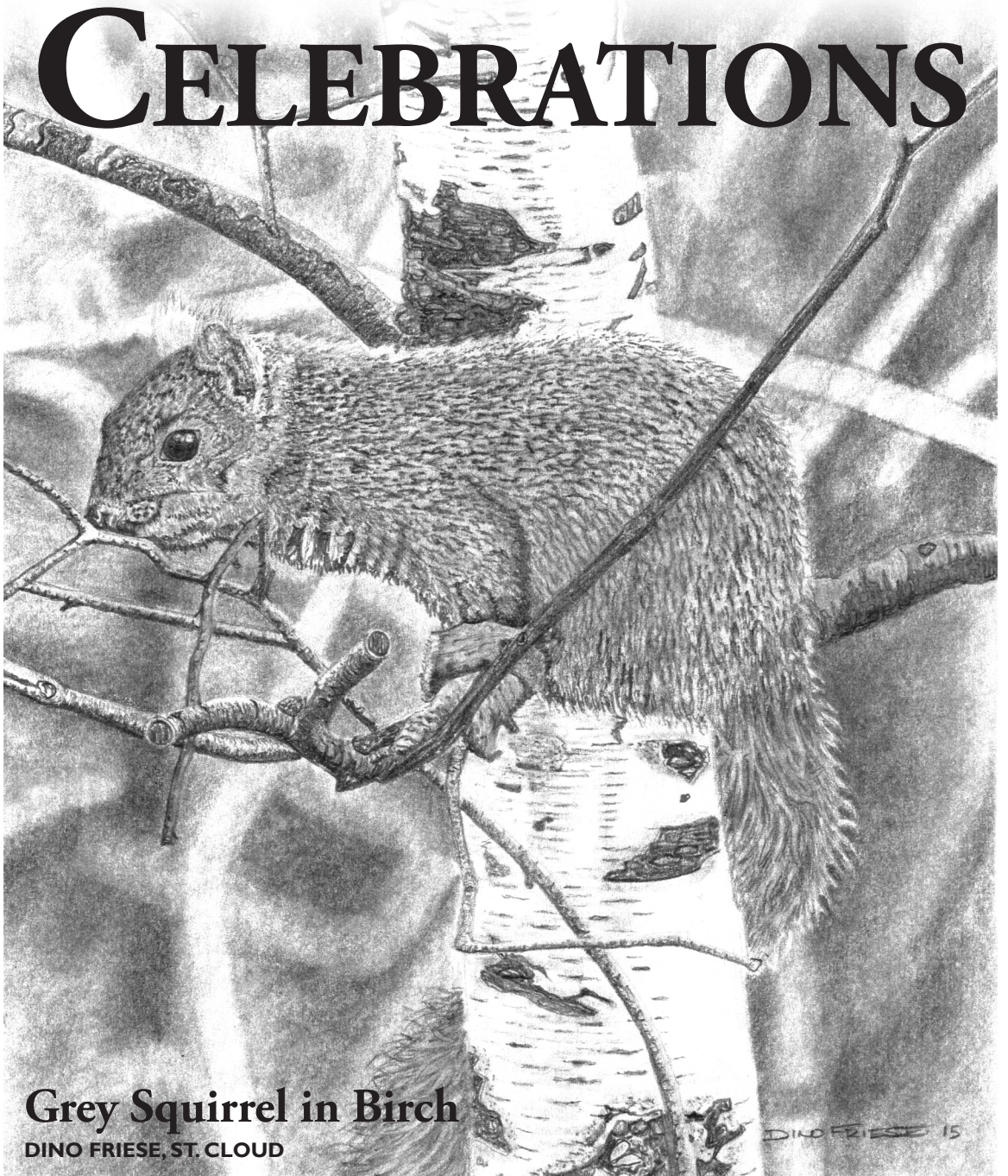
Now, he remembers many memories about
her,

He will always wonder what would have
been when,

Once upon a time, he loved a girl.



SEASONS AND CELEBRATIONS



Grey Squirrel in Birch

DINO FRIESE, ST. CLOUD

DINO FRIESE 15

Featured Author



OLESYA GOMELSKY

is 28 years old and originally from Moscow, Russia. At the age of five, Olesya started doing rhythmic gymnastics in Russia and then became a professional athlete. Since she had a busy life and always traveled so much, she did not have a chance to spend as much time as she wanted with her family. That is why it was especially memorable when the whole family gathered together and celebrated this wonderful holiday,

as New Year! Coming to the USA changed Olesya's life but did not change her love for her family. Two years ago, Olesya got married. Now her family is bigger, but she still reveres those traditions from her childhood. They cannot be forgotten!

A Family Tradition

OLESYA GOMELSKY, ST. LOUIS PARK

As an adult, I often recall the memory of my family's New Year celebration when I was a child.

For a couple weeks before the holiday I was eager to celebrate. I was always in charge of the New Year's tree. I did not allow anybody to decorate it, because I really wanted to do it by myself. When somebody did it, I was very frustrated. I had a scheme to buy presents for my parents, brother, and friends, and went to the store. After I had bought them, I hid the presents in a very secret place in our apartment.

Of course, the most interesting and unforgettable memories were on New Year's Eve. Every year on this special day I would wake up early and would help my Mom to cook all of the delicious dishes that we would always make for this amazing holiday. If sometimes we would not have any ingredients for the special dish, my Dad and I would go to the store to get necessary things for the menu. I loved to walk outside that day!

Although the streets were crowded with fussy people, there were incredible memories of that time. In the evening, when all the food was ready, all our family would sit around the great decorated table with a lot of food, and would start to open the presents, which were hidden under the New Year's Tree. It was a great time! I still remember this exciting time with the smell of tangerines, chocolate, tree branches, TV shows, and New Year's music.

I wish I was a child again!

Olesya Gomelsky is 28 and originally from Russia.

Although the streets were crowded with fussy people, there were incredible memories of that time. In the evening, when all the food was ready, all our family would sit around the great decorated table with a lot of food, and would start to open the presents, which were hidden under the Christmas tree. It was a great time! I still remember this exciting time with the smell of tangerines, chocolate, tree branches, TV shows, and New Year's music. I wish I was a child again!



A Family Tradition

OLESYA GOMELSKY, ST. LOUIS PARK

Olesya Gomelsky

Talking About Minnesota Seasons

RODOLFO VELASCO, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Mexico, where the weather is sunny all year and it's difficult to see the different seasons. Never in my life had I seen the spring, summer, fall, and winter.

I remember that I had seen these seasons only on my television or in movies, but not in my real life.

But this changed when I came to Minnesota. I can say that I liked the summer when I saw the green trees, green grass, and a sunny day.

That was perfect for me.

After that I liked the fall. Fall was the most wonderful thing I have seen in my life. I never had seen color leaves, leaves on the street, and a sky of colors that was so beautiful.

Then the winter came. It was the first time I felt cold. It was too cold but I liked to see the snow. It was a unique experience that I remember today.

Rodolfo Velasco is originally from Mexico.

Traditions

ISABEL MANRIQUEZ, WASECA

I'm a Mexican woman who came to America 12 years ago in 2003. At that time, I was married, and my only daughter was 13 years old.

After 9/11, the situation in Mexico went from bad to worse. My then-husband lost his job, and he borrowed money from different institutions. Every month the debt was getting

bigger and bigger. Two years later, he decided to move to America and work to pay all the debt. My parents lent the money to pay all the institutions. I felt very obliged to them, so I decided to work the most time possible until I paid our debt.

I was tired all the time and I didn't do much when I was home. I realized that I was wrong, and I felt empty and lost, because my only goal was to work to get the money to pay the debt. Most of the holidays that we celebrate in my culture, I totally forgot. Sometimes I didn't have family time on the holidays and celebrations like the Day of the Dead and birthdays.

Traditions are important in all cultures. I think if we forget our traditions, we get lost. I remember one day my daughter asked me if we had traditions in our family. She shocked me. I didn't know how to answer her, because at the time, I worked a lot—long hours—and didn't see her much. I worked June through October on the 10 – 12 hour night shift without days off. The other months, I worked 4:30 p.m. to 3:00 a.m., so in the mornings I was sleeping when my daughter went to school. When I went to work, she hadn't returned from school, because she had sports practice.

Time passed by very fast, and I regret the past, because now my daughter is grown up. She is an adult and doesn't live with me anymore. Sometimes I think she feels more American than Spanish, because she speaks more English than Spanish and acts more like an American rather than a Hispanic girl.

Now, I try to participate in my family reunions even if I am tired, and I teach my little nieces the importance of our traditions, starting with the language and food. My little nieces are two and five years old. Both speak English and Spanish and love Mexican food and Mexican candies.

Isabel Manriquez is originally from Mexico.

The End of Fall

SAMSAMYUSSUF, ST. CLOUD

The end of fall makes me sad because when I look at the tree and the ground, I feel so upset. It's not good to see with your eyes. I'm describing one tree near my school. I can say it's a naked tree because the limbs, branches, and twigs are bare. I think the roots under the tree are bare too. Most of the leaves have fallen on the ground. They are shriveled, and they changed colors, to light brown and purple. The trunk of the tree is full of moss. The air is dry. The weather is cool, and a little windy. Soon the snow will cover all the trees and the ground.

Samsam Yussuf is 40.

Ramadan

HUSSEIN MOHAMED MALIN, MINNEAPOLIS

My tradition to celebrate Ramadan is spend more money.

I cook great food friends and families happy celebrate.

I cook rice meat and papaqu.

All my family happy Ramadan

Celebrate.

Hussein Mohamed Malin is originally from Somalia.

Thanksgiving

MARIUXI DE LA CADENA, FALCON HEIGHTS

Thanksgiving is a very special holiday. It is celebrated to give thanks to God for all the things that we receive.

This tradition started when pilgrims arrived in America and during those harsh days they didn't have enough food, they were hungry. Then the Native Americans shared food and knowledge in farming.

Actually there are many people in need. If I have an abundance of food I can help my family and my community. I'm grateful when the people share with others regardless of their beliefs. I feel gratitude when I see my family united. I feel gratitude when I volunteer distributing food in the community, because I receive the same blessing when I give somethings to others. I have generosity when I can hug my family, specially my children and tell them I love you. To me being generous helps me feel more grateful.

This is my third Thanksgiving in United States. In my country we don't celebrate this holiday, but I understand how important it is to give thanks for everything. Many times the bad things that happen in life tend to overshadow the good things we have, for instance God's blessings in our family, a new day of life, health and so on. Every day is perfect to give thanks.

Mariuxi de la Cadena is 35 and originally from Ecuado

My First Halloween Scary Story

JIAORONG (MIA) GESCHWIND, ST. LOUIS PARK

It's Halloween this month. I am going to tell you my first scary Halloween story in the United States.

I remember when I just came here for my first Halloween. One day in the evening, I was driving my car on the street waiting for the green light. Suddenly, two horrific zombies walked to the front of my car. They blocked my way and climbed up to my car's windshield. The zombies looked so fearful. Their bodies were rotting and still bleeding from various organs. I was scared. I pushed down on the gas to drive away fast.

In that moment, I thought they were ghosts. I was shaking. They scared me. When I came back home, I called my friend. I told her what I saw and she laughed.

At night, someone knocked on my door. When I opened the door, I saw a group of children. They dressed up and looked very strange. Their costumes were special, colorful. One child wore a mask and looked like a ghost. One child looked like a funny witch. One child dressed like a beautiful princess. One child dressed like a spider-man. The children said, "Trick or treat!" I gave the children some candy. They were so happy when they walked away.

It was so funny and fun that I found some very interesting clothes and a mask and dressed up myself. I wore funny make-up such as a cute cat. After that, I went to a very interesting night club. Everyone dressed so funny and crazy. I had a great time there for my first Halloween Day.

Halloween is a wonderful holiday. Everybody enjoyed Halloween Day.

Jiaorong (MIA) Geschwind is 28 and originally from China

My Favorite Holiday is Mother's Day

CRUZ (JUAN) CARLOS VARGAS, MINNEAPOLIS

I like Mother's Day because my family has a meeting. We are a surprise for my mom and we do food. Also all the children bring a gift for Mom. We play card and fooball soccer. It's nice to share the time with my family.

Cruz (Juan) Carlos Vargas is originally from Ecuador.

Holidays

FADUMO M., APPLE VALLEY

I am talking about my Adi (my religious holiday). When I was in my country, the holiday was the best for the kids, because the kids can go to the neighbors and get money and candy. The adults can stay home and cook special food. For example, before the Adi, the family can buy one goat and cook it in the morning. First they cook liver and serve the men only. At lunch time they cook rice and whole meat. All the family eats together. The kids have no school for three days and they are free playing outside.

Burma's Climate

GUINA SHU, ST. PAUL

Burma's Story

In May, June, July, and August, my grandmother said she remembers planting fruit, watermelon, and corn. She planted pumpkin, eggplant, tomato, chili, cabbage, cucumber, and onions. She planted carrots, sweet potato, and peas. She planted Chinese cabbage, radishes, and rice. In August, September, and October, it was rainy. In November and December, she saved food.

Burma's Fruits

In May, my grandfather said he remembers planting oranges, bananas, and pineapple. He planted coconuts, papayas, durian, and mangosteen. He planted jackfruit, roseapple, and mangoes.

Burma's Flowers

My mother said, she remembers planting roses, many lilies, orchids, and daisies. She planted chrysanthemum, anthurium, and hyacinth. She planted iris, sunflowers, lotus, and marigolds. She planted shoeflowers, cockscomb, and jasmine.

In May, my father said he remembers planting apples, watermelon, and many, many strawberries. He planted oranges, bananas, and pineapples. He planted grapes, lime, lemons, and grapefruit. He planted coconut, durian, and mangosteen. He planted rambutan and roseapple. He planted mangosteen and jackfruit. He planted papaya and palmyra fruit.

Guina Shu is originally from Burma.

Affair

MIRIAM CLARA, ST. PAUL

You left without notice

My mind roared like a lion shaking every cell
of my being,

At the end cries were all I had left

Despair slowly filled my veins like lethal
venom,

Making me feeble and incompetent

Your absence torments me,

But I suffer more with your presence

Am I crazy to crave you?

My mouth is watering as if I tasted a sweet,

Bright yellow mango on a summer day

I can barely catch my breath in the vast of

Thoughts created to engulf myself with tears

If the time should come

I deprive myself of freedom and

I become numb as I see you and feel you

Once again

Stay despite our differences

This affair between us is less than perfect,

We are opposite directions but I desire what
you offer

Make me feel like an illusion,

Translucent like the snow to embrace my
beauty

I feel alive as I emerge,

Like a volcano hidden under water

I won't lie,

I despise you enough not to get away

However, I adore you
Your unpredictability excites my emotions
I will stay intact until we collide again
I brutally enjoyed your stay,
But I know that you must be on your way
Winter I will forget you not.

Burma and Thailand's Climate

MUE DAH, ST. PAUL

I remember Burma's climate is dry. I remember Thailand's climate.

In April, I remember Burma's climate was dry. In Thailand, I remember I planted vegetables. In May, I planted corn in Burma. In Thailand, we planted rice and soybeans together in June. In December, it was beautiful.

Mue Dah is originally from Burma.

Vietnam's Climate

NGOC KHONG, ST. PAUL

In January and February I planted corn.

In May and June I harvested tomatoes and spinach.

In August, it was rainy. Sometimes, it was sunny and hot.

In November and December, I smelled the scent of flowers.

I felt very happy. My country is very beautiful and warm.

Ngoc Khong is originally from Vietnam.

Winter in Minnesota

BASRA BUSHALE, ST. PAUL

White.

Cold.

Car Accidents.

I like the long nights.

I don't like driving the car.

No people outside.

The children don't go to the playground.

In winter.

In Minnesota.

Basra Bushale is 60 and originally from Somalia.

My First Winter in Minnesota

JOSE DELVILLAR, HILLTOP

My first day in Minnesota was in winter. That day I learned a few things. The first thing was it is very cool. I never feel that cool before in my life. But I like winter season. The second thing was the snow. The snow everywhere, everything was white even the trees. That day I was wearing my regular clothes, well, summer clothes. I feel like I'm wearing nothing, was too cool, super cool. My mother said, "I told you it's cool here, put extra clothes on." But I didn't listen. I learned my lesson that day. Winter in Minnesota is very cool and listen to your mama too. In the end I love Minnesota weather. It's cool but in the summer it's the perfect weather, hot but not too hot.

Jose Del Villar is 31 and originally from Mexico.

My New Year's Tradition

JOSE ANTONIO ROJAS, MINNEAPOLIS

My family's tradition at New Year's is to celebrate together and wait for a new year. We eat twelve grapes and dance all night. We celebrate that we are together. We are happy. Now my parents are in Mexico. They go every year to visit my uncle. I hope to return soon. I miss them a lot.

Jose Antonio Rojas is originally from Mexico

My Best Day

OLGA MENDEZ CERVANTES, WORTHINGTON

My best day was when I was 15 when I had my birthday party. I had a beautiful dress in an orange color and orange shoes to match. There was music and everyone was dancing. The food was wonderful. I miss my family and the food because here all things are different. In my country we don't celebrate Thanksgiving, just Christmas and New Year. In the U.S., on Thanksgiving I made a meal for my family, and stayed home with my boys over the weekend. I had fun with my family and friends. I didn't work. That was good for me.

Olga Mendez Cervantes is 27 and originally from Guatemala.

My Favorite Holiday

HIBO FAHRA, MINNEAPOLIS

My favorite holiday is Eid. After we fast 30 days for Ramadan we celebrate Eid that day. We all go to the mosque and pray. Families and friends also wear new clothes.

We give gifts to each other. We also eat traditional food. We visit the families. We spend time together. Eid is twice a year. That is my favorite holiday.

Hibo Fahra is originally from Ethiopia

Holidays

GOMEJE WORKALEMAMU, WORTHINGTON

Thanksgiving Day is a special holiday because all the family enjoys each other. In our religion all people pray to God and then prepare a coffee ceremony and then eat food. The weekend is very nice because all families are together in the same place, and you can be with your husband and play with your child at home. Christmas is very, very nice because people exchange gifts and prepare food. I like to cook cultural food, for example, injera, bread, and wat. African food is very important.

Gomeje Workalemamu is 32 and originally from Ethiopia.

Day of the Dead

EDMA SOSA, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Edma Sosa. I am from Mexico. In Mexico we have many traditions, but one of my favorite traditions is the Day of the Dead. It is on November 2. My family and I go to the cemetery to visit the tombs of the beloved people who left.

Then we put flowers and candles on the tombs, we listen to music and eat the favorite foods of family members that have passed away, and we talk about the good memories we have from them. After that my family and

I go home and we sit at a big table and we drink hot chocolate with special bread from the Day of the Dead. This day makes me happy because it is the day we remember the loved people who passed away.

Edma Sosa is originally from Mexico.

My Favorite Holiday

SEGUNDO MARCOS QUIZPI, MINNEAPOLIS

My favorite holiday is New Year's Eve. In my country we celebrate New Year's Eve with friends and family. We cook food and we slaughter a cow to eat. We start the party at 6:00 p.m. with some games and dance until midnight. Some people have a big party and they stay all night. The New Year's Eve party is the best party in my country.

Segundo Marcos Quizpi is originally from Ecuador.

Winter

TRUC NGO, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Hello winter. How are you? I'm from Vietnam. The weather in my country was tropical. It was hot and dry. That is why in February 2005, the first time I saw it snowing, I was excited and happy. Everything was new and different for the beginner. After several years, I changed my mind about the winter. In December 2009, I drove the car and I had trouble on my road. The temperature was down (It was -20 degrees); the roads became icy and very dangerous. I drove very slowly and an accident happened. I was not hit by anybody but my car was broken. I was scared for a long time when driving.

The winter in Minnesota took a long time. It began in November and the end was in April of the next year. Six months of the year. If you want to see snow, you can make a plan for travelling in Minnesota. It is very interesting, very beautiful, and dangerous for the first time. Welcome to MN. But for me, winter was enough. I want to break up winter to start seeing another season. The summer is better than winter. Thank you, winter. When will you go? Goodbye winter!

My New Year's Tradition

EULALIA (ROCIO) CRIOLLO, MINNEAPOLIS

My family tradition is to spend time together at New Year's. The family comes to my house or my sister's house. My mother is very happy when she sees children together. I cook special food for all the family. When we are finished eating we sit in the living room to play cards with the children. All these things make me and my family happy at New Year's.

Gifts

JAIME PATRICIO ASITIMBAY, MINNEAPOLIS

In Ecuador we don't give gifts to others, because we don't have enough money. People don't care if they bring presents or not. In the U.S., it's important to bring presents to the party. If you don't bring presents to the party they give you a bad look. Christmas in the U.S. is very different from Ecuador. In Ecuador everybody is going to church to spend time with the family and Christmas day we play games

and the adults still drink. In the U.S. Christmastime some people go to church but the important part is to exchange the presents. I think it's not necessary but sometimes it is good to give a present. It's important to help the poor people.

Snow

ANAB JIBRIL, ST. CLOUD

I want to write about snow. The first time I saw snow, it was October 2010. Before that time, I saw snow only in movies. Snow is beautiful and shiny. It looks like sugar. When you touch it, it is so smooth. When it is snowing it is not too cold, but when it lies on the ground three or four days it is very cold. I remember the first year I saw snow. I fell four times, but luckily I didn't get hurt. I didn't know the shoes I should wear in the snow, but now I do. So, now I don't care if it is snowing or not.

Anab Jibril is 37.

My First Snow

FADUMO FARAH, ST. CLOUD

The first time I saw snow was in 2006. At first it was fun and beautiful for me. I touched it. It was soft, nice, and so white. I had seen it on TV, but not in real life. I was so excited to play in the snow, like a little kid.

A few days later, the snow melted and the road was icy and slippery. Two of my cousins and I went to the grocery store. After we came back from the store, the road we were crossing had railroad tracks

and the road was slippery. The train was coming and the driver was hitting the brakes. I was so scared and terrified. We all were, but one of my cousins was yelling. In my mind I was telling myself if the car won't stop I was preparing to jump out of the car, but he stopped the car with the handbrake.

After that I didn't like snow anymore. Even now when I hear snow is coming, I am scared. I don't like to drive in the winter, but I don't have a choice.

Fadumo Farah is 34.

Winter Snow

KHADRA JAMA, ST. CLOUD

The tree nearby our school looks different. The last time the tree had some leaves, but today the branches stand up to the cold wind by themselves. Without the protection of the leaves, the tree looks vulnerable. Despite the absence of the leaves, the tree still remains strong and it will stand alone all winter long. The tree will remain alive and fight the cold. The tree will get back its leaves after the winter and become more vibrant.

Khadra Jama is 41.

Family Tradition

ANONYMOUS, COON RAPIDS

My family's favorite holiday is Eid-al-Adha; it is the greatest and most important in the Islamic religion. First, I wake up to the sound of my younger siblings running around the house because they are so excited that it is Eid-al-Adha. My family must hurry to the mosque because we need to find good

spots in the prayer hall. After we pray, the Imam gives a lecture which is usually about the rewards that Allah (God) will give us if we do good deeds in this world. When he finishes we all rush outside to meet our friends and family members. Second, all our relatives come over to spend the rest of the day with us. The women cook a delicious meal consisting of goat meat, rice, and vegetables. The food is delicious and is a mixture between sour, sweet, and spicy. My favorite part is catching the aroma of the amazing dessert my mom makes. She makes cakes, cookies, and a sweet bread called bur. After the meal we all drink fresh cold camel milk.

Next, the children then go outside to play soccer, jump ropes, and play card games. The old men are very noisy because they argue about politics and what is going on in Somalia and in the world. Just like the noisy men the women talk about the strange rumors being spread in the area. Before my relatives leave we hand out delicious cakes, cookies, a sweet treat called halwa and we give them tea or coffee to go along with their dessert. Finally, all my relatives leave, my family has to go visit some relatives who couldn't come to our house, and we bring them gifts, like money, cakes, cookies, and perfume and cologne. This is the unique tradition my family does on every Eid-al-Adha.

My First Winter in the United States

LEMLEM ABRHA, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was in my home country, my friend told me about Minnesota winter. When I saw the picture of snow, I thought the white snow wasn't cold. When I came to the United States and Minnesota winter season, I didn't expect that kind of cold. I was so depressed because my home country has a tropical climate. I didn't experience frost bite in the winters. I didn't have any idea what kind of gloves to wear or what kind of shoes to wear.

When I go somewhere in the winter I feel so cold and I complain most days. Once, I got frostbite while waiting at a bus stop. My fingers turned blue. After an hour, my fingers hurt very much. After that I learned step-by-step that winter seasons are very cold. It is hard to deal with those cold, windy days. Still I couldn't adapt to Minnesota winter cold, but I like Minnesota summer time.

Lemlem Abrha is originally from Ethiopia.

Christmas

FIKRIE ALEMIE, ST. PAUL

There are many different types of holidays in my country. I like them all, but my favorite holiday is Christmas. This holiday is one of the biggest holidays in the world because it's a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

In my religion, before the day of Christmas, we fast for 43 days. In those days, we are not allowed to eat any dairy products, and we also

fast the whole day and eat at 3:00 p.m. Some people choose to eat before or after 3:00 p.m., which is fine. We also decorate our Christmas tree a month early because it looks beautiful, and it also gives us a warm feeling about Christmas. We find a perfect spot for it. Next we hang Christmas tree ornaments, which will make it look even more beautiful. We also hang Christmas lights on the tree before we hang the ornaments. We also add homemade Christmas ornaments that look like snowflakes. We add as many things as we can to make it look unique and special. There is one important thing that we always hang on the top of the Christmas tree: a picture of baby Jesus and his mother Mary.

Additionally, Ethiopian Christmas is 12 days after American Christmas. That's because we have our own calendar. During Christmas Eve, we don't eat anything at all. We go to church at 5:00 p.m., wearing our white cultural cloth, and we have a special celebration in the church. We pray and sing a song. We spend the night there, thanking God for everything he has done for us. A lot of people go to church on Christmas Eve, so it's very crowded. Some people stay outside but still follow and keep up with the church celebration. The priest reads the Bible and tells stories so the little kids can know. The church celebration for the Christmas holiday is beyond what I can put in words.

The church program ends at 11:00 a.m. Then we can go home and celebrate the special holiday with our loved ones. The entire family gets together. We always make different types of food before we go to church so everything will be ready when we get back home and we can just start celebrating the holiday. The holiday celebration continues for one week.

Fikrie Alemie is 49 and originally from Ethiopia.

Special Food in My Country

ESTELA GUTIERREZ, WORTHINGTON

Hi! My name is Estela. Today I'm writing about my country. I lived outside of a little town on a little farm where about 100 people live. My house was made of blocks of earth and the ceiling was made of earth, too. This little town is surrounded by orange trees, sugar cane, corn, beans, wheat, and vegetables of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and onions. In Mexico we have different foods made of different plants, fruit, and meat. Some of the most usual foods are mole, posole, tamales, barbacoa, birria carnitas, and chicharrones.

These foods are special for parties or festivities like birthdays, weddings, first communions, and graduations. To make these foods you need meat, spices, and some kinds of chiles. When it's ready, the food is served with rice and beans and tortillas hot with salsa. On Los Santos Reyes, or Three Kings Day, we make a special bread called rosca de reyes. This bread is in the form of a circle and it's sweetened with oranges. Inside the bread are some little dolls, and when the bread is cut the person who finds a doll has to organize a party in the next month. According to tradition they must cook tamales and atole or champurrado.

Estela Gutierrez is 47 and originally from Mexico

My New Weather

HOLLY LAM, APPLE VALLEY

I'm from Vietnam, a hot and dry weather country, and I came to the USA in September 2009. When I arrived to Minnesota, I felt cold. I always wore a sweater when I went outside or stayed home, but I heard my nieces say, "Why is

the weather this year so hot?”

After a few weeks, when I went outside to wait for the school bus that took my husband and me to the ESL school, I saw a white steam appeared from our mouth when we talked. Wow, I could see my breath! I was surprised because I just saw this before when I watched some movies that took place in cold weather countries. I tried to talk, and I saw a lot of white steam around my face. It was interesting!

One day, when I woke up, I looked through the window, and I saw the top of the grass was white. I looked carefully, and I called my husband, “Come here, we have snow!” We were happy, and we walked around the neighborhood and enjoyed the snow. Every morning I liked to watch snow plows when they were working. I have this new cold weather since I live here now. I like to go to outside to deeply inhale the fresh and clean air. That’s wonderful!

Holly Lam is originally from Vietnam.

New Year Holiday

WENDY SAAVEDRA, ST. PAUL

On December 31 we celebrated, my friends and I, to wait for the New Year at my friend’s house. In this house we felt good, like family. My friend’s house is small but beautiful. There were 12 people. My friend made the food, everybody ate, and the food was delicious. That day, one of my friends wore a black dress with black shoes, and other friends wore pants with shirts and comfortable shoes. Everybody was happy. We sang to wait for the New Year relaxedly, and enjoyed the moment. When it was midnight, we all screamed, “Happy New Year” and wished good things, between hugs,

for the future of the New Year. After that we played dominoes, and others of my friends continued singing, and all ended happily.

In this New Year I want to learn to write, read, and speak English. I want my GED. And then I want to attend to college to learn more about technical computer information systems.

My Favorite Holiday

DEMISSEW HAILE, MINNEAPOLIS

I have too much favorite holidays. The name of those holidays are Christmas, New year, Easter, and Ethiopian Orthodox church holidays. The New Year is September 11th, Christmas is January 7th, and Easter is in the month of April by church calendar.

Demissew Haile is 46 and originally from Ethiopia.

New Year’s Day in Korea

EUNJIN KO, MINNEAPOLIS

In Korea, people usually celebrate lunar New Year’s Day. On this day, most families wear clean and formal clothes or traditional Han-bok and gather in their parents’ house for a family ritual called Cha-rae in remembrance of ancestors. On the completion of Cha-rae, we bow to our parents and grandparents (this is called Sae-bae) to wish them good health and luck. Parents wish their children good luck and give allowance called Sae-bae-don in return. Then all the family members sit around a table and eat a special soup called Tteok-gook (beef broth with white coin-shaped rice cakes in it) together. The color white means renewal of your mind and body, and the coin shape stands for wealth and fortune.

Eunjin Ko is originally from South Korea.

My Favorite Holiday

DONGYING PAI, MINNEAPOLIS

My favorite holiday is Chinese New Year. The date of the Chinese New Year depends on the lunar calendar, but it is usually between January and February.

On the Chinese New Year's Eve, the family members from the father's side of the family return to his hometown. We enjoy a New Year's Eve dinner together. Traditionally, everyone gets a haircut and buys new red clothes before the new year. Red means luck.

Women are usually in charge of preparing food and cooking. There are a lot of delicious foods we can enjoy. One of my favorite foods is chicken soup, which is made with sesame oil, rice wine, chicken, and Taiwan-style black cake. The Taiwan-style black cake is made by glutinous rice and pig's bladder. I also like steamed sponge cake and new year cake. We usually eat a lot of those cakes during Chinese New Year. The steamed sponge cake means you can earn more money in the new year, and new year cake means the new year will be better than the old year. Almost every food we eat on Chinese New Year's Eve has a special meaning.

After dinner, grandparents and parents give red envelopes to the children. The red envelopes have money inside, and the children have to say some lucky phrase. They may say, "Happy New Year," "Good luck to earn more money," or some phrase made by the symbolic animal that year. There are 12 symbolic animals associated with a 12-year cycle. You can say a lucky phrase of the different symbolic animal. For example, 2016

is the year of monkey, and a most common phrase could be, "Good luck in the monkey year."

During the Chinese New Year's Eve, children are allowed to play games as late as they want. Parents tell children if they stay up longer, parents can live longer. My favorite game is when grandfather rolls three die in a bowl, and we guess what the three numbers are. There is a table which has the numbers 1 to 6, and we can play a bet on that. If we guess correctly, we win money. If we guess wrong, we lose money.

There is a lot of fun during the Chinese New Year.

Dong Ying Pai is 32 and originally from Taiwan.

Mexican Independence Day

SANDRA ZARAZUA, PLYMOUTH

As the U.S. has its Independence Day, Mexico has one. We celebrate for two days and, no, it is not in May. Our Independence Day is on September 16, and we remember the war that began in a small town in Guanajuato state and spread quickly all over our country for 11 years until the new Mexico defeated Spain.

The celebration begins September 15 in the evening. We dress up, almost always with the traditional attire. The women wear a big and colorful skirt and a blouse with a colorful design. The men wear big hats, boots, the traditional tight pants, and sometimes a fake mustache.

Then we go out into the streets that are full of puestos where you could buy food or beverages, flags, and instruments to

make a lot of noise. At the schools, the festivals start with beautiful traditional dances. At the city hall, you could find a free concert while the mayor gets ready to give the speech about freedom. The night ends with a spectacular time of fireworks everywhere.

Next day we celebrate in the morning with a big parade where all institutions come to salute the flag. Then we have all afternoon free to hang around with family and friends.

Sandra Zarazua is 25 and originally from Mexico.

Thank You

GABINO HERNANDEZ DIAZ, WORTHINGTON

Thanksgiving is the day when everybody in the United States says thank you to God for all He has given during the year. In my country no one celebrates this day, but they usually say thank you to God in the New Year. In my home, my wife cooks turkey and ham. My wife has made the difference in my life. She helps me and supports me to do my goals because she loves me.

Gabino Hernandez Diaz is 32 and originally from Mexico.

My Favorite Holiday

ANONYMOUS, APPLE VALLEY

India is my country. I have two different cultures and traditions. In my country, South Indian traditions are different than North Indian traditions. The food and dress and festivals are very different. My favorite holiday is Diwali, the Festival of Lights. This is the only festival the whole country of India will celebrate. It is

the biggest Hindu festival. It celebrates peace, prosperity, happiness and no sorrow in our life. Many people who work far away will come home to celebrate the holiday. Parents will buy new clothes and firecrackers and they will prepare lots of sweets for everyone. Indians will light the clay lamps and keep them outside their home to invite our god Lakshmi. Diwali will be celebrated in October or November each year before the winter. It is a good time to meet friends and family. It is a great holiday for me.

My Daughter's Quinceañera

LEONARDA MARIN, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Leonarda Marin. I am from Mexico. The Quinceanera is the Hispanic tradition of celebrating a young girl's coming of age on her 15th birthday. My daughter, Laura Sosa, turned 15 on June 20, 2013. The day is special for my family because my daughter celebrated her 15 years.

The Quinceanera celebration traditionally begins with a religious ceremony. During the Quinceanera, the girl wears a beautiful dress and the reception is in a banquet hall. The festivities include food, music, and dance. It is traditional for the Quinceanera to choose special friends to participate in what is called the court of Honor. Usually, these young people are her closest friends, her brothers, sisters, cousins. All the young men are called chambelan or Escort or Galan.

There are many traditions in the Quinceanera. One example is the changing

of the shoes. The father or godparents change the young girl's flat shoes to high heels. This is a beautiful symbol of the Quinceanera transformation of a little girl to a young lady. Another tradition is the offering of champagne glasses. The guests are invited to offer their congratulations and best wishes. The Last Doll represents the last thing of a child now that the Quinceanera will focus on the things of a young lady.

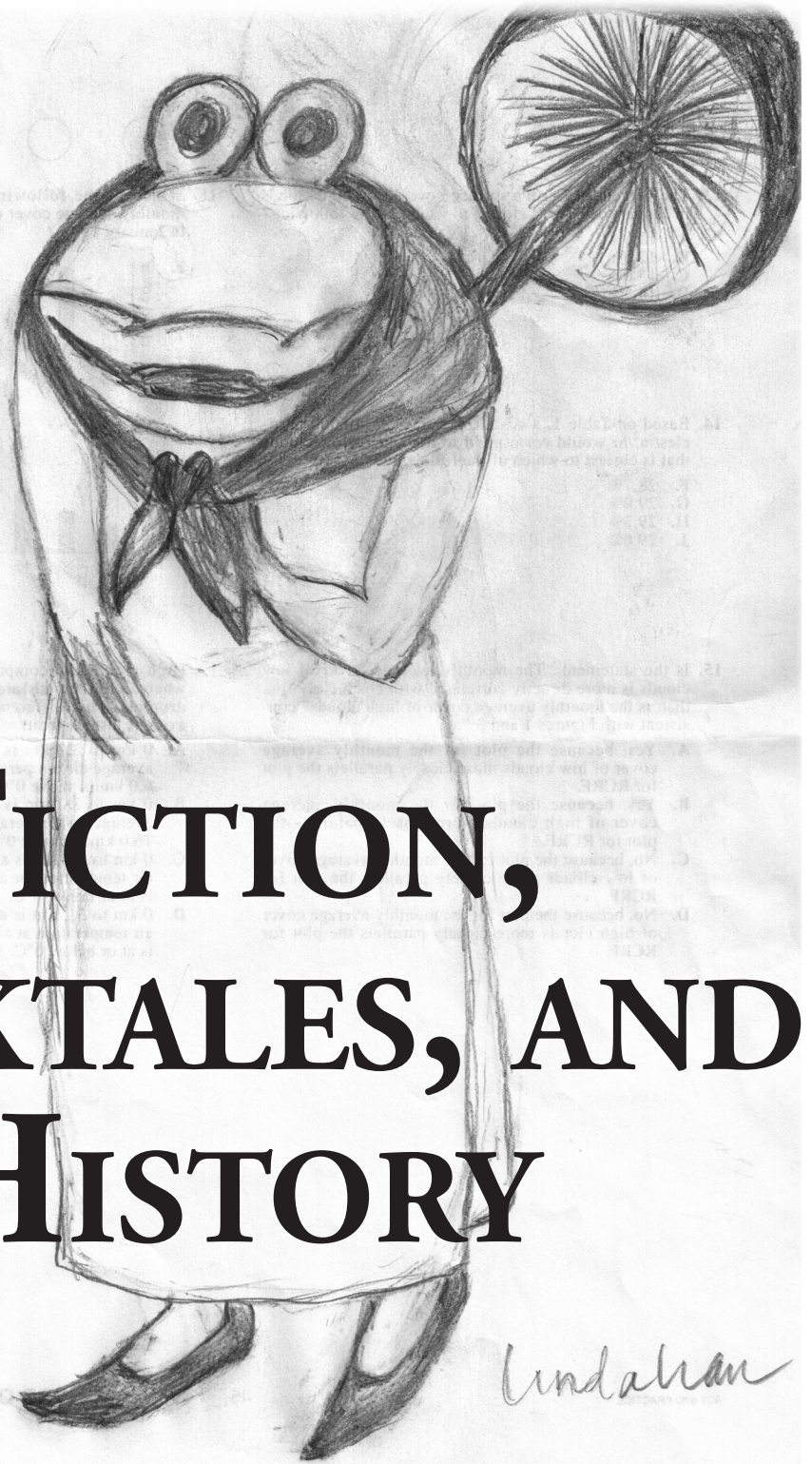
Finally, The Quinceanera dances with her father to special music to make the celebration a unique and special experience for my daughter and family. This is a beautiful tradition.

Leonarda Marin is 39 and originally from Mexico.



A Frog's Vanity

LINDA TRAN, ST. PAUL



FICTION, FOLKTALES, AND HISTORY

Linda Tran

Featured Author



MARYAMA HUSSEIN

is 53 years old and was born in Somalia. She grew up in Mogadishu. As a child, Maryama often visited her grandmother in a small village outside the city. Though she does not recall the name of the village, she vividly remembers her grandmother's stories. Maryama speaks Somali, Arabic, a little Spanish, and English. Her goal is to get her GED and pursue a career in nursing or childcare. Currently, she is a student at Hubbs

Center and Open Door Learning Center-Rondo. She came to the United States in 2006.

Dhagdheer

MARYAMA HUSSEIN, ST. PAUL

A long time ago, in East Africa, in Somalia, there was a woman called Dhagdheer. She lived in the forest. She had one daughter. Dhagdheer hunted people because she ate only human meat. When she went hunting her daughter stayed home because she never ate human meat like her mom did.

One day, three girls came to her home but she wasn't home at that time. When the girls came, her daughter was excited because she never had a friend. On the other hand, the daughter didn't have a place to keep the girls safe. If her mom came home and saw the girls she would have to kill them right away because she eats only human meat.

So, when Dhagdheer came home she smelled the girls. Dhagdheer said, "Oh, I smell some girls."

Her daughter talked to her "Mom. I want to tell you something, I have friends today. Please let my friends live and they can help us. They can chop meat and cook and clean the house and stay with me when you go hunt."

Dhagdheer accepted and went to sleep. She told the girls, "When I sleep my long ear stands up, but when I wake up my ears collapse." But when she slept, her daughter told the girls, "When my mother sleeps her ears collapse and she can ONLY hear when she is awake!"

Her daughter said "We need to boil water." When they boiled water they put it in Dhagdheer's ear and she died.

And everywhere was safe and a lot of rain came. Everyone said Dhagdheer died and everybody is safe, and the land is safe.

When I went to visit my grandmother, in the village, she would tell us this story to teach us to stay close to her home. We wanted to go to see the forest and go outside. She didn't want us to get lost so she told us this story.

Maryama Hussein is 53 and originally from Somalia.

Upon Awakening

MARK NANTZ, BUFFALO

But you must remember.
Even in dreams,
Or so it seems;
My dear Love
That Princesses
Grow into Queens.

And those beautifully vivid
And sublime dreams
Filled with psychedelic
And dark-hearted screams.
Even spiritual nightmares
Become calm and serene.

Breathe slow and deep
Eternal thoughts
To change our internal beat.

So those incubi
Are thrust
Out of our Always and Forever
With a force I will endeavor.
That stands stronger than any right terror!
After the dark void

And vastness of night
There dawns the reality
Of a new day
With cause to forget the dark
Or any other part
Of this pain.

So we will sing
Yet again and again;
Heartbeats,
Heartbeats,
Until we are one.

The Seaside

DONGHONG HAYDEN, WOODBURY

The day is a gloomy day. There is a beautiful young lady laying down on the seaside. Her name is Vicky. This time she is taking her vacation by herself because she and her boyfriend have broken up. She is still mourning very deeply. She is thinking about before how she was delighted and it was romantic. They spent time together playing, laughing, making each other feel happiness in their life. But today, she doesn't want to move at all. She is just staying on the beach letting the seawater and rain make her wet. She doesn't care. She even feels a bit chilly. She doesn't know if she will cheer up again.

Donghong Hayden is 47 and originally from China.

A Frog's Vanity

LINDA TRAN, ST. PAUL

Formerly, there was a poor frog woman who lived in an immense field. She was really pretty, when she dressed sumptuously. Her parents often disagreed. They always advised her, "You should be pleased with your fate, please" or "You should not depend on luxurious articles, please." But, she would break-off her parents' diligent instructions.

Early in the morning, she beautified to flaunt her riches and nobility. She took a big purple mint leaf to use as a scarf, two dry chilies to use as a pair of shoes, and a small mushroom to use as an umbrella. She admired herself and felt very proud of her modern style clothes. And then, she walked around gazing at a beautiful sight under the sunshine. She danced singing a merry song.

Suddenly, she looked at a fisherman who was coming towards her. She threw the umbrella and the scarf in confusion. She promptly carried out a high jump over his hand to escape. But she rolled off. Her pair of shoes was an obstacle on her feet. They were very heavy so she needed not only to jump but to run! The fisherman rolled up his sleeves and he easily caught her. He turned her head over heels. She called her parents. She cried out loud and struggled against him in hopelessness. How pitiful she was! She was very sad. Later, when she remembered what her parents advised her, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

Oh! At that time, the fisherman was very happy because he had caught a

delicious food with a frog meat and three other ingredients were ready, too: chilies, mushroom, and mint leaves for taste.

Summary, this story is an illustrated mirror for us. It is really a folktale with a worthy moral lesson for children and adults. Moreover, it praises humility at the same it resists vanity.

Linda Tran is 68 and originally from Vietnam.

Can You Imagine?

NICOLAS SABAH, APPLE VALLEY

Can you imagine?

The universe without the sun

The planets without rotation

And the earth without light?

Can you imagine?

The earth is round

The Arctic and the Antarctica

Are separated the equator?

Can you imagine?

The earth without the continents

The continents without the mountains

The valleys, the prairies, and the deserts?

Can you imagine?

The earth without the glaciers

The continents without the oceans,

The seas, the lakes, the lagoons,

The rivers and the creeks?

Can you imagine?

This world without water

Water without snow and rain

Life without water and air.

Can imagine this world without life?

The continents without the wild life

The oceans, the seas, and their sea life

The deserts with their winds and heats?

Have you ever imagined?

The earth, this world without Man

Without race: white, black, red, and yellow

Have you ever imagined what is common
among the races?

And finally, have you ever imagined

All of these without a Creator?

How is it that the rest of gorillas,
chimpanzees, and orangutans

Are still the same?

Imagine!

A Somali Folktale

ABDI BERKADLE, MINNEAPOLIS

During the 18th century people lived in the rural area because their lives depended on livestock such as cattle, camels, goats, and sheep. Igalshidal lived in that community his whole life. Igal was one of the famous folk heroes during those years. Even though some people argue he was a coward, he was not.

One time, Igalshidal tried to visit his relative that was settled 40 to 50 miles away from where he lived. Igal started walking by foot because there was no other option of transportation. He did not have a horse to ride like most people had during that time. It was sunset by the time he walked 20 miles.

Unfortunately there were a lot of clouds covering the sky and it turned dark, very dark. Moreover it was spring season. That means that the rains came often. Suddenly he heard the roar of a lion and hyena. They were not far from where he was walking. Igal saw the shape of a lion. As soon as he saw the shape of a lion, Igal started to escape and then tried to lie down. He tried to disappear but the lion kept roaring. When he heard the roaring of the lion his heart rate increased.

He spent the whole night hiding. Also, he was preparing his weapons to protect himself if the lion attacked him. He had an arrow, spear, and shield. He was exhausted physically and mentally. All night long, Igal was paralyzed by fear.

Finally, the sun came up in the morning and it stopped raining. Igal did not see a lion, he saw a tree. Igal said to the tree, "I thought you were a lion, but you are not a lion. You are a tree! This is the last time I will travel at night!" Igal decided to turn around and went back home.

Aylan Was a Kurdish Boy

HASANATAK, MINNEAPOLIS

Aylan was a Kurdish boy born in Syria, in 2012. He was a lovely baby. When he was born, everyone in his village loved him because he had a beautiful face. He was the third child in his family.

The stars started to shine more, the moon was brighter, and the sun became more orange. Birds started to sing more peacefully and clouds were more white and fluffy. Trees, oh the trees were greener. Animals were happy, and all nature was peaceful. All because Aylan was born and so innocent!

At the same time there was a horrible man called Destiny! He longed to possess Aylan's freedom. So, Destiny made a plan to steal Aylan's freedom. He sent his messengers of Famine, Pestilence, War, and Death to Aylan's village.

First, War attacked his village. Many people died, including Aylan's sister. War destroyed buildings, but Aylan's home still was in good condition. For now! Some people left the village, but Aylan's father decided to stay, for it was their home.

Second, Famine attacked. Again, some people left the village to flee from Famine's malice. But Aylan's family stayed behind because they loved their village even if they had nothing to eat.

Third, Pestilence attacked the village because there was no water, food, medicine, or anything. There were dead animals everywhere. At that point, Aylan's father said, "That's enough! We are leaving." So they left the village! They gave all their money to a man to transport them to the other side of the sea. The sea was called by his people the "White Sea" like peace's white.

The journey was going well until the last messenger called Death attacked when they were in the weak raft. The man called Death sent his other messengers, namely

Waves. The Waves attacked Aylan from all quarters because Death was jealous of him and his brightness. Aylan was a true angel from heaven, because he was only three and had no sin! But the man called Death was a real enemy and doesn't listen. So, ostensibly, the man called Death won!

Nobody knows, except you, that Aylan actually won, because his freedom came through death. Now he is free from all problems of the world and he is in heaven now and Forever!

There are many stories like Aylan's. All that happened before and will happen again.

The Animal and the Rock

GERALDINE VAUGHAN, MINNEAPOLIS

There was an animal that lived in the desert and there was a rock with a hole in it. The animal needed a home and the rock needed a friend. So they talked to each other and found that they had a lot in common. The rock said to the animal, "Would you like to use me as a house?"

The animal said, "That's so kind of you. Won't you mind?"

The rock said, "I am sure, just don't abuse me." For a while, everything was fine until the animal started acting like a jackass and the rock told him to move out. The animal thought about what he was doing wrong and they both talked about it. The rock said, "There are rules you have to follow," and they got along just fine after that.

A Story About a Lion

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

Once upon a time there was a big lion. That lion was always hunting both animals and humans. If he has a chance to kill both, he would.

One day the lion saw a Somali man who was walking from the bush area. The lion decided to kill him, but the lion didn't succeed in that operation. However the Somali man also have seen that lion.

Then the man ran to the long tree. He climbed and was really safe from the lion.

Finally the lion came under the tree. He was very sad that he saw the man but he didn't get him. After several minutes he took another direction and he got and ate a zebra.

The Fox and Crocodile

HALIMOYUSUF, MINNEAPOLIS

A long time ago there were two animals: crocodile and fox. The crocodile was named Shabelle. He lived in a Somalian river and hunted animals near or inside the water.

One day, he caught a fox named Dawo; he wanted to eat her. Dawo said, "Can I tell you a nice story before you eat me?" Shabelle was moved by her beautiful story and didn't eat her.

Shabelle said, "Please, can you repeat that story, because I enjoyed it?"

Dawo replied, "How can I repeat it for you? You wanted to eat me!"

Shabelle said, "Now we are friends. Where do you live?"

Dawo said, "I live in the forest near your river."

Shabelle was honest with her, but Dawo was a sly fox. She always took things from his house. When he asked, she said, "I will bring back your stuff tomorrow. Please wait and I will give you extra things."

When she didn't come back, Shabelle became angry. He left his river to find Dawo as she watched and laughed at him secretly. Shabelle stayed out of the water too long. "I can't do anything. I'm here until I'm dead," he thought. Dawo went to the river, played in his house, and then she carried some water in her mouth to give to him. "Dawo, thank you. You saved my life."

One day, Dawo came to Shabelle's house and said, "Shabelle, can I borrow your tongue because my sister has a wedding tomorrow? I want to say something at her wedding like, "ulu lug... You know I dont have a tongue." When he gave his tongue to her, Dawo didnt come back to his house, but she moved to another place. He didnt know where she moved. She wanted to keep his tongue.

One day, the Fox came to Crocodile's river. The Crocodile said, "Dawo give me my tongue," but she wouldn't listen to him and she ran away without water. The crocodile said, "Dawo you can't come near the river."

The Fox said, "I don't care since I have your tongue." The crocodile was sad, and he didn't get his tongue. The Fox and crocodile were no longer friends.

People say foxes are smart animals, but Dawo was a bad animal. The crocodile was honest with Dawo, but no crocodiles will be honest with her anymore.

A Folk Story

MIGUEL CHAVEZ, ST. PAUL

There was a man who was trying to have money, but he didn't like work. One day he went to visit an old man and asked him how to make money without working too much.

The old man told him, "I'll give you three pieces of advice. First, never leave a main road for a small pot. Second, wherever you go, do what others are doing. Third, you have to work a little bit for food."

Then he started to walk and the first advice came to his mind so he walked over the main road, which led right to the entrance of a castle where the king and his daughter were living.

The daughter was always sad and never laughed. The king made a promise that whoever made her laugh would have to marry her.

When the man got to the main entrance of the castle he saw the guards walking from one side of the door to the other.

He was reminded of the second advice. But he hadn't a rifle, so he took a piece of wood, put it on his shoulders, and started walking like the guards.

The princess saw him walking with the wood on his shoulder and she started laughing. Her father exclaimed, "Who made her laugh?" and went to her room and saw what was happening.

He ordered guards to arrest the man—he wanted to talk to him. The guards brought him to the king and the king explained that he had to marry the princess.

So he married her and started living in the castle. But he remembered the third advice. Therefore he went to look for work, and he found a job on the closest farm.

He started working, but he always repeated: "Arre buey porque soy hijo del rey." That means, "Keep going, bull, because I'm the son of the king." This doesn't make any sense in English, I know.

The problem was that the owner of the farm was tired of hearing the same thing every day and said, "If you're the son of the king, what are you doing here?"

He answered, "For real, I'm married to the princess."

His boss said, "If that is true, I bet you my farm against your life."

He said, "Ok, how do we prove it?"

The farmer answered, "Tomorrow, let's see who brings the best food for lunch."

So he went to the castle and told to the princess he wanted the best food. Next day by lunchtime, the food of the farmer started to come outside, but the princess came with the best food.

In that way, he won the farm and completed the advice. And he probably did some work, but not that much.

Miguel Chavez is originally from Mexico.

Slave Ship

SELAH LEWIS, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Akeema. I am about 14 years of age. I've been on this ship for about two days, I suppose, and already I know in my heart that this is only the beginning of my

trouble. The men holding the fire sticks are very different from the people from my village. They scare me the most. They speak a language very different from my own, but yet I still understand that they are very angry at me. All I can think to myself is, “Why? Why are they angry?”

As I lay here in the dark, I begin to close my eyes and try to drown out the sounds of deep sorrow, and I begin to think of my mother. The last time I had seen her. The last time she held me in her arms. Tears begin to roll down my face as I realize I’ll never see her again because those evil men with pale faces struck her down with their fire sticks.

As I drift off into a light slumber, I’m awakened by a gentle touch. I open my eyes and I see one of the men standing over me. He’s rubbing my head as if he cares for me, and my tears begin to fall again. The man begins to speak, but I don’t understand. “It’s alright. Come with me.” The man reaches for my hand. Gladly I take his hand in hopes of leaving the stench of the dark. “Anywhere but here,” I thought.

The man takes me to the upper deck. I look around, and I see my friend. She is a few months older than I am, but she gives me a look as if she were crying out for help. Her eyes are swollen and filled with tears, her clothes had been snatched off, and her hands have been tied together. The two men standing by her seem to be most amused by her pain. As I see my friend, I begin to feel scared again, like maybe it wasn’t such a good thing, getting out of the dark. The man leads me to a small room where he begins to remove garments and view my naked body. His smile makes my stomach churn like spoiled milk. I close my eyes and try to think of a better place.

Hawo Osman (Hawo Taako)

NIMO FEKOW, MINNEAPOLIS

There was a heroine woman in Somalia. Her name was Hawo Osman. In 1946, there was a war between Somalia and its colonizers (Britain and Italy). Hawo Taako (her nickname) was the first woman who fought with the colonizers. The colonizers wanted to give all the power to the white people. After that time, all brave Somalians started fighting with Italy. Somalians did not have any weapons. They only had spears, swords, and arrows. Hawo Taako was the first woman fighter against Italy. They fought for two years (1946-1948). Hawo was killed in 1948 while she was fighting. She was killed by an arrow in the chest.

Rabbit and Fox

NAJMA FARAH, MINNEAPOLIS

A long time ago there were two animals named Rabbit and Fox. They lived in the forest, but one day they fought because of milk. Fox drank all the milk and did not share with Rabbit.

Rabbit decided to punish Fox and burn a big rock until it became red. After that he waited for Fox to come and sit on the rock. It was the favorite place for Fox to sit; however, Fox got burned and stuck on the rock.

Fox said, “Please, Rabbit, help me, pour water on me.”

Rabbit answered, “Oh, I’ll go to the river to fetch water, and I’ll get killed by an enemy there. No, I’m not going to the river.”

Fox cried and then said, "Please, pour soil on me."

Rabbit said, "No, I can't touch soil with my beautiful hands."

Fox said, "Then pour milk on me."

Rabbit said, "No, if it weren't for milk, we would not fight with each other." And then Fox died there on the rock.

Beethoven's Life

BETY ABAEE, MINNEAPOLIS

Beethoven has born in Bonn, Germany, in 1770. His father was a singer and the first teacher that familiarized him to piano when he was four. Beethoven's father taught the majority of music rules to him. He quickly became prominent as a skillful pianist and capable composer. When he was 12, he had been chosen as a member of Cologne Orchestra.

In his youth, he went to Vienna and met well-known Austrian composer Mozart. He learned several music lessons from him. After the death of Mozart, he studied music from Hayden, the largest Vienna composer and musician. In this way he found the Aristocrat's Court.

Most of the time, Beethoven spent his life lonely and miserable. Beethoven had special characteristics and he remained as a secret to friends. One of the reasons for his misery that caused him to feel pessimism was his deafness. When he was 28, he gradually couldn't hear, and he was going deaf. For composers there's nothing worse than not being able to hear how music works and how it shows emotion and sensations.

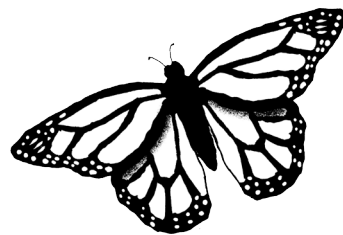
Beethoven created several sonatas, and one of these was named "Moonlight Sonata" that he dedicated to a girl who he was in love with. He also dedicated Symphony 3 "Eroica" to Napoleon Bonaparte, but later, when war began between French and Prussia, he took it back from Napoleon.

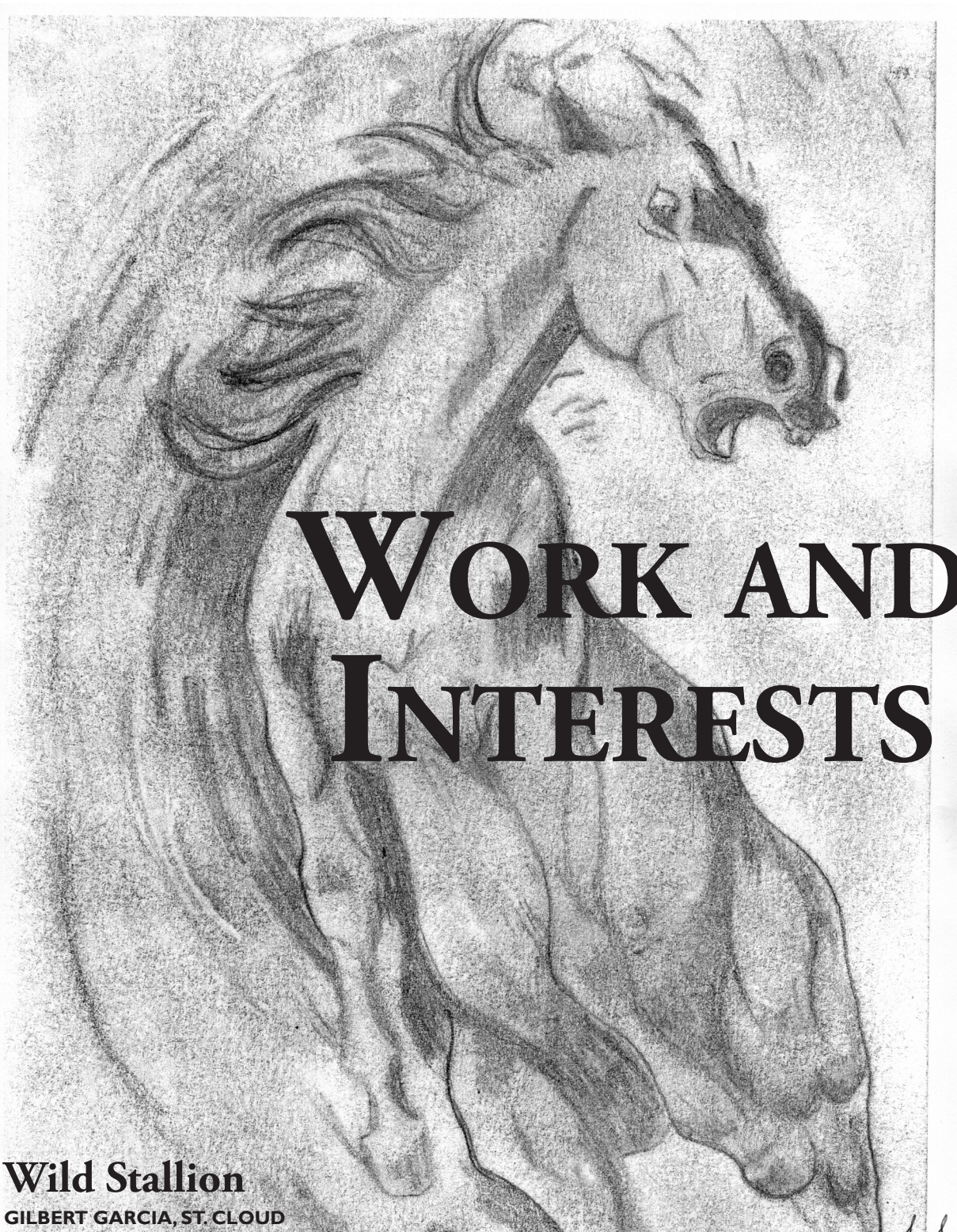
He became completely deaf when he was 46, but his deafness didn't cause serious obstacles for him and his last compositions are especially amazing.

In 1823, when he was 53, he created Symphony 9 "Choral." This symphony is an immortal effect and remained an honor for him. Symphony 9 is the last symphony and differed with other symphonies that musicians until then composed, because he used the human voice as a tool. He applied the poem of Schiller, a German poet, by choir band.

Beethoven spent most of life in Vienna. He died in 1827 when he was 57 years old.

Effects of Beethoven are various, pleasant, and audible. He is considered as the greatest classic musical composer of all time.





WORK AND INTERESTS

Wild Stallion

GILBERT GARCIA, ST. CLOUD

Garcia
87

Featured Author



FREDERICO CARNEIRO

is a software engineer originally from Belo Horizonte, Brazil. He was born in 1982 and is married to his wife Camila. His birthplace is known for its great mountains and waterfalls, which allowed him to put together his love for sports and nature by practicing hiking in trails all over the state. Although he enjoys the simple countryside style of life, his passion for technology and entrepreneurship moves him.

He owns a company that develops software to help companies dump construction waste in the right place, helping the environment. In 2015 Frederico and his wife decided to try life overseas. Their chosen destiny was Maple Grove, Minnesota. They attend the ESL classes at Sandburg Learning Center in Golden Valley and try everyday to learn more about American culture. At school, they meet other students from all over the world and have a wonderful teacher who loves teaching and guiding them in their journey in the U.S. Between English books and computer work, Frederico always finds time to spend with his new friends and also to travel around.

A Winter Visit to Duluth

FREDERICO CARNEIRO, MAPLE GROVE

When I had been living in Minnesota for almost three months, my wife and I realized we had never traveled around to see the state's points of interest. After talking to some friends, our chosen destination was definitely Duluth, a city up north.

It was December, wintertime. We fueled up the car and headed more than 150 miles north until we saw the big and beautiful Aerial Bridge of Duluth. This bridge connects a little portion of land to the mainland. Duluth is on the shores of the great Lake Superior, and believe me when I say, it is really great and superior. Did you know it is the second largest lake in the world? Wow! If you are a person who likes walking, there is a big trail on the edge of the lake, The Lake Walk. It gives a great opportunity to see the beauty around the lake.

Lake Superior is so wide and deep that it is used for navigation of huge boats. If you get lucky, you can see them crossing under the Aerial Bridge when it is lifted. If you want to see how big Lake Superior is, you certainly should visit Enger Tower. It's an 80 foot tall stone building on the top of Duluth. Once there, you have a landscape view of the whole city and lake, an amazing view.

Another great view of the lake is from Leif Park and Rose Garden. In this beautiful place, you will be able to appreciate a garden with more than 3,000 flowers and other floral delights. There is also a fountain and a charming marble gazebo. The view of the Lake from there is so amazing.

Being in Duluth on Christmas Eve is a joyful and exciting experience. During December the city is graced with America's biggest free walk-through lighting display. This attraction invites everybody to enjoy a light show with four million lights all Christmas season. There is no such place like this in the U.S. to visit this time of year. Even in winter season, you have many outdoor activities to do for adventure. Miles and miles of trails, stunning waterfalls and historical parks are available in the area. You just need to pick one.

So, as you can see, Duluth has attractions for any kind of traveler. So would you pay them a visit?

What I Like to Read

BETITA SANTANA, COON RAPIDS

I really enjoy reading the Bible. It's a book that has everything; a lot of real life good examples about people. It knows how everything works. Every time I read it I understand this book is magical. You can read and read and this book is never the same. It helps people who have problems. It teaches you how to smile when you can't see anything good. If you are afraid it will give you peace inside. You need to be smart to understand this book because each sentence has a lot of meaning. It is the book of the books. The rules are the same to the whole

humanity. This book can help you discover the power that you have inside. It is the book that can explain any cause of problems. But you need to focus. If you don't understand this book, you need to be a better person.

My Job

BLANCA MAYORGA, WORTHINGTON

My name is Blanca Mayorga, and I came to the United States on April 24, 1994 from Mexico. I started to work in Chandler, MN on September 27, 2000.

I work in one company called Monogram Meat Snacks and my job is to package and caddie the product. I like my job very much. The problem is the long distance from Worthington to Chandler which is about 45 miles.

Blanca Mayorga is originally from Mexico.

Why I Got Fired From Work

MOHAMED HUSSEN, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Somalia, I moved to Ethiopia. I came to the United States in New Mexico in 2014. I lived there two months, we moved to Minneapolis. I found a job in a company. They sent me to a cake company. I worked for them three months and 15 days. They put me with a team that didn't know English. They fired me for this reason, if you don't know English you can't work with us. I realized there was some discrimination. After that I tried to find a new one but everyone asked if I knew any English. I answered no, I have a handicap

for English. I went this Friday to apply for a new job. When they gave me the application to fill out I said I needed help from my son. They refused to help me. They said we will give this job to someone who can fill it out by himself.

Mohamed Hussien is originally from Somalia.

Job Experience

JORGE MARIN, MINNEAPOLIS

Hi, my name is Jorge. I am from Mexico State. I was 13 years old when I had my first paid job. It was at a farm, harvesting corn for hours from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. In the mornings, the grass was very wet so I got wet every day, carrying a heavy sack of corn on my back. When the sun warmed the grass, it started to dry and the job was a little better until it got very hot and made it harder to work. My body was itchy. I was thirsty and hungry.

When it was my lunch break, I had to run and cut wood from the trees to heat my food because I hated to eat cold food. I lost most of my time heating my food then it was time to go back to work. I was tired and my lunch was small and not enough to fill me, but the day ended soon. I was excited to go home and eat and rest, but the saddest thing was that when I got home there wasn't anything to eat either. The job was only on weekends. I could earn a few pesos to pay for my school books.

When I finished sixth grade, I went to Mexico City to work in construction. The workload was heavier and dangerous but had better pay. I was an assistant in the renovation of school and housing construction. It is difficult to work in Mexico.

Some jobs are very dangerous and far from home. Sometimes you have to go alone and you don't have a place to stay. You have to sleep in the same place where you work.

Thanks for reading my story.

Who I Am

MOHAMUD DHINBIL, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1977. When I was seven, my family left Africa and moved to California to seek out a better life. When I moved to the United States, I became a coach assistant on a soccer and basketball team. I moved to Minnesota in 1994.

I am a FedEx Ground package handler. Packages are unloaded from the truck and need to be scanned before it will be delivered. I scan all the boxes that match the person's name and the item with the order number. If the items don't match with the order number, the person will get a refund before you get rid of the item and cancel the order.

We have a team of deaf basketball players. We travel to different states and play against five to eight deaf teams in the tournament. We meet new faces of people. Also I play deaf flag football in Minnesota. I have touched 40 states. It was fun. I enjoy traveling and seeing different trees, birds, and animals. The other 10 states I haven't touched, I will visit in the next few years. I was a running back, wide receiver, and defensive end. I went to Adult Basic Education school to learn more math and English in class with other people.

I Am Thankful

AHMED SHEIKH, ST. PAUL

I am thankful because I eat breakfast.

I am thankful for my health because I feel better.

I am thankful because I am happy.

Ahmed Sheikh is 71 and originally from Somalia.

Humberto

HUMBERTO PACHECO, MINNEAPOLIS

H I like my House tall and big

U And classroom I don't Understand nothing

M My Mom cooked jalapenos

B I like my Boot color red

E My job starts Early at 7:00 p.m.

R Red is my sweater

T The bedroom is peeling

O On Saturday I like going to dance.

Humberto Pacheco is originally from Mexico.

Hector

HECTOR GONZALEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

H Horse is tall the color black

E Every day I work

C City of Minneapolis is big

T Tired at night

O On Saturday is happy

R Reading in morning.

Hector Gonzalez is originally from Mexico.

Maria

MARIA CORREA JIMENEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

M My Mother likes to talk a lot

A I like the Apple

R The Rose is beautiful

I I like the summer

A My Apartment is old.

Maria Correa Jimenez is originally from Ecuador.

Luz Maria

LUZ MARIA MEJIA, MINNEAPOLIS

L I Look at the yellow flower

U I have yellow Umbrella

Z I go to Zoo

M I like to look at the Moon every day

A Are you very happy today

R I like to smell the Roses

I I have too many Ideas

A I eat a lot of Apples.

Luz Maria Mejia is originally from Ecuador.

Blanca

BLANCA PALAGUACHI, MINNEAPOLIS

B Big dreams

L Laugh with your friends

A Afraid sometimes

N Nurse is my goal

C Children very smart

A Athletic

Blanca Palaguachi is originally from Ecuador.

Sonia

SONIA CAMPOVERDE CONTRERAS, MINNEAPOLIS

S Shoes salad small

O Over three feet

N Never no cat

I Important I am married two years

A Apple apartment.

Sonia Campoverde Contreras is originally from Ecuador.

English.

I am thankful for my father because he gave me money before.

I am thankful for my mother because she take care of me before.

I am thankful for my work because I have some money.

I am thankful for my house because I sleep there.

Jaime Lopez Hernandez is 19 and originally from Guatemala.

Feliciano

FELICIANO PINGUIL, MINNEAPOLIS

F I am Funny every day

E I like in the class the English

L I Like apples

I I like Islands

C I don't like the Cold

I I like more Internet

A very nice Apples

N my car is Nice

O my father is funny

I Am Thankful

JAIME LOPEZ HERNANDEZ, ST. PAUL

I am thankful for my health because I'm not sick.

I am thankful for TV because I can watch movies.

I am thankful for my family because they make me happy.

I am thankful for school because I can read

Life as Heavy

GREGORY BARRERA, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember my first day in the online world, which was four years ago. I was ready for fun, without items or friends. I decided to play Team Fortress 2. I browsed the characters. The oval shaped belly of this man caught my attention. His life bar was the highest and his primary weapon was a mini gun. I chose him. His name was Heavy.

My character's color was based on our team. The team was made of strangers from all over the internet. The mini gun man also had a shotgun. He wore darkly shaded boots with a bullet strap running down his upper body, then past his back and over his shoulder.

When ready for battle, I clicked him then was transported to my team lobby room. There were plenty of shots fired outside the lobby door. My character walked out of the room and saw trillions of bullets soaring everywhere. His mini gun was spinning and ready for action. As my character waddled

towards the noise, he fired randomly and yelled in joy. The fire fight cooled down and I saw a blue suitcase on the ground. It was just laying there. My character walked up to it even though he didn't know what it was for. When he grabbed it, there was a lady's voice that said, "You have the enemies intelligence." Then Heavy walked around his base, wondering where the blue suitcase went. He continued his walk until another player told him where to put it. He walked next to my character. My character put the suitcase with the others. There was a voice again. Once again, it was the lady's voice, "Success!"

I chose this character because his weapons were my favorite. I love the silliness of this game. There are many things that can be done in it. There are many wacky fights like fighting a wizard, robots, and more. Some items can be turned into magical rare items, even a robot sandwich. I have even learned from this game. My imagination has grown from Team Fortress 2.

Gregory Barrera is 19.

The Job That I Loved

ANONYMOUS, ANOKA

Three years ago after two years as a day worker with the minimum salary, I had the opportunity to apply to a different job in a manufacturing production company. I worked work 12 hours, 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., packing cereals, pasta, sugar and cookies.

We have to wear a white shirt, with head net, safety glasses, ear plugs and of course, comfortable clothes.

One day I saw a big sign saying they were hiring line leads for team "B," the company has four teams, A and B for day shift, and C and D for night shift, different days every week. However, I really liked to work on team B, they were nice people there, some of them were really difficult to talk with, but the idea to work there was great for me.

I decided to apply one time during the break time. I was nervous, because they could probably say I'm not enough for the position. I was a line worker, my job was just packing and lifting boxes, sometimes cleaning the machines etc. Being a line lead or machine operator means running equipment machine, checking codes, coaching line workers, entering data about pallets, and different information about the product, but the most important thing was be ready 15 minutes before starting the shift to talk to the night shift line lead about the issues during their shift.

I believed I had strong communication skills and computer skills. I felt like I would be able to do the job. I wasn't sure if they would hire me but they did.

My biggest concern was to get there because it took me 45 or 50 minutes of driving but I was happy, after two weeks of training I got knowledge and experience so I started running line on my own. I had my issues, it was stressful sometimes, but I always try to focus when I have to do something. My supervisors were awesome, they helped a lot.

After three years, I decided to quit to look for something better. I'm very glad to have worked with them and share ideas plus I got experience about manufacturing production.

I Like

BURHAN ESSE, MINNEAPOLIS

I like to go to the Mill City Museum. I like history and enjoy trips. I like the Journeys American Sign Language interpreter. I like self-advocacy for the deaf. I like the trip to Metro Deaf School. I like to go to the Guthrie to the presentation. My sisters drive to Como Zoo, Mall of America, and trips. I like sightseeing. I enjoy watching TV, like basketball, news, football, and soccer. I like to socialize with deaf friends and have fun. My friends enjoy chatting. I like laptops. I like iPhone text, email, Internet, and Facetime. I like to walk around. I like the cold and rain. I like to walk to restaurants. I like Kohl's to buy a new jacket. I like shirts, shorts, pants, and jackets and I want to buy new shoes. My sisters went to Walmart to buy things like a small TV, games, food, soap, shampoo, plates, bottles, and other things. I like to go to Target for food bottles. I like Kmart to buy new glasses. I like HomeGoods to buy new glasses and tea. I like LA Fitness for running, biking, strider, and playing basketball in the gym.

I Am Filmmaker

ABREHAM TOLA, MINNEAPOLIS

I am a filmmaker. My last film is Lalombe about the Hamar ethnic group (southern Ethiopian people). I shot the film at most Ethiopian historical places and with Hamar people. It was screened for the Black African Film Festival 2014 in Los Angeles, California, and in Oregon for the

Archaeology Film Festival 2012.

When I finished my high school study, I was interested in learning cinema, but there was no cinema college in Ethiopia. However, I learned filmmaking in Art and Vocational Training center. Indeed, I got my diploma in a year by filmmaking. But I was not satisfied because the school was only a one-year training center. To go abroad to learn cinema is so expensive and unaffordable for me. I was going here and there to learn more. I went to journalism and law colleges but I didn't finish. I went to Addis Ababa University, but I couldn't continue more than four months. I always regret that. To be honest, the main problem for me to continue my study was there was no cinema school in my country.

When I was in grades six, seven, and eight, I wrote TV and radio drama scripts. When I went to high school, I established a well-known drama club. We produced stage, radio, and TV dramas. Drama script writing, directing, and dialogue study were a lot of work for me. Also I was the leader of the drama club. We traveled to regional states to show our dramas. I had a stage theatre and nine films written, directed, and produced by me. Under those circumstances, it was very hard to go to school properly while doing all these things.

Finally, I find myself here at the high school level again. It is a long time since I received my high school diploma in Ethiopia. I need to refresh and prepare myself to go back to college. Subsequently,

I came to an adult high school to start my journey from a high school diploma to college degrees. I strongly believe that I missed something in my life.

Abreham Tola is originally from Ethiopia.

I Liked the Snow

MARIA VERONICA RAMOS MARTIN, WORTHINGTON

My first day in the United States, I liked the snow. I liked the stores. I liked the restaurants. I liked the language. I liked the schools. Now, I like roast beef and fried chicken. I like watermelon and apples. I like to drink watermelon juice. My favorite desserts are cheesecake and flan. We cook a lot of food for family at Christmas, then dine, hand out gifts, and go to church. In my country we cooked for family, dined, and went to church.

Maria Veronica Ramos Martin is 27 and originally from Guatemala.

Mango

LUL MOHAMUD, MINNEAPOLIS

My children like mangoes. They taste sweet. Some people eat mangoes with chili peppers. Mangoes grow in trees. The mango is a fruit because it has a pit.

Lul Mohamud is originally from Kenya.

Bananas

SOFIYA ABAFOGI, MINNEAPOLIS

I love bananas. They are sweet, and they are easy to digest. The banana tree is beautiful. It is healthy. If you eat one

banana before sleep, it is good for the body. I liked bananas when I stayed in my country. I still love bananas now. Bananas have a beautiful shape and a beautiful color. A lot of people like bananas. My kids like bananas, too.

Sofiya Abafogi is originally from Ethiopia.

Bananas

SOFIA ADEN, MINNEAPOLIS

My children like bananas. My children eat bananas and pasta. Bananas are very healthy. They need water and sunlight. There are many banana farms in my country. There are many people selling bananas.

Sofia Aden is originally from Somalia.

The Chili Pepper

HALIMA ABUKAR, MINNEAPOLIS

Chili peppers are good because they make food tasty. I always use this food a lot. It helps me. I eat a lot of food because I like spicy food. I grow green or red chili peppers. Some people sell chili peppers from their farms at the market in my country. Sometimes my friend cooks rice with chili peppers. There are many chili pepper farms in my country. I can't eat enough food without chili peppers.

Halima Abukar is 32 and originally from Somalia.

I Like Mangoes

HAWO MOHAMED, MINNEAPOLIS

I like mangoes. My favorite fruit is mango. Mangoes are round, and mango trees are

very tall and strong. Mangoes are green and yellow. Mangoes are very healthy. The people eat this fruit and make juice. Mangoes are good for body and skin.

Hawo Mohamed is 33 and originally from Somalia.

About Bananas

FARDOWSO DINI, MINNEAPOLIS

Bananas are long and soft. We use them in pasta and rice and for snacks. Some people use them for juice and salad, too.

Bananas grow on trees. Somali people like bananas very much. Bananas are yellow. They are in sections, so it is easy to eat them. Usually bananas have a thick skin. The banana tree is beautiful.

Bananas do not have any seeds. They are sweet and juicy, but Somali bananas are a little sour. I started to love them when I was young. I think everybody loves bananas.

I see them in America. I buy them a lot when I go to shop. I do not know if they are healthy or not. Maybe they are healthy.

Fardowso Dini is 20 and originally from Somalia.

Tomatoes

ASHA ABDULLAHI, MINNEAPOLIS

I like tomatoes because they are very good and healthy for your heart. I sometimes cook tomatoes with rice and meat. Some people use tomatoes to make juice. They have vitamin C.

Asha Abdullahi is originally from Somalia.

Watermelon

MOHAMED HASSAN, MINNEAPOLIS

Watermelon is a fruit. It has always wide stems and wide leaves. I had a small farm in my yard in my country. When the plant is little, it needs water. Sometimes when I woke up, I put a water hose in the garden. Then the plant drinks water. People wait three months. When it grows, it becomes a big fruit. When that stage finishes, you can pick it. Then you eat it.

Mohamed Hassan is 30 and originally from Somalia.

Shiny Apples

BASHIR ELMI, MINNEAPOLIS

I like apples because they are sweet. Apple juice is a delicious drink. The apple is a fruit. Apples are good for pie. The pie is good for breakfast. Everybody loves apples because they are good for eating.

Bashir Elmi is 46 and originally from Somalia.

I Like Papayas

HAMDIAH ALYOUSEFI, MINNEAPOLIS

A papaya is big, green, and yellow with black seeds. Papayas grow on top of trees. It has so many vitamins. Papayas are very healthy and I like to eat them every day for a snack. I think papayas are good for the stomach. Papayas need water and sunlight to grow. Sometimes we can make juice with papayas. I had many papaya trees when I was in my country, and I took care of them. That is all I know about papayas.

Hamdiah AlYousefi is originally from Somalia.

My Story

MIRIAM SALDIVAR ALVILLAR, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Miriam Saldivar. I am from Mexico. I've been living in Minneapolis for 16 years. I am married. I have three beautiful children, Jonathan, Raciél, and Evelyn. They were born in Minneapolis. I've been working at Cub Foods for 14 years. I've been working on my work. I like it because it is very easy.

Miriam Saldivar Alvillar is 29 and originally from Mexico.

I Was Born to Read

OMAR BERMUDEZ, ST. PAUL

I do not remember exactly when I started reading because my parents taught me how to do it at an early age. They always encouraged me to read, and for that, they bought me books instead of toys. For example, at Christmas I never got the usual toys, but books about mythology and encyclopedias for children were waiting for me under the Christmas tree. It was the beginning of the best adventure of my life: reading.

By the time I started school, I had already been in a kindergarten where my teacher made me love reading further. There were books everywhere and when we were not playing, we were reading! During school, I started reading the books we had at home. I think I read my first novel when I was in fourth grade; it was a translation of the *The Long Walk* by Stephen King. I continued reading almost every day so far. At the beginning I preferred to read fiction, until after a couple years of reading I found one short story

named "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," written by Gabriel García Márquez. I totally loved his writing style and I became passionate about Hispanic literature. But when I thought that I had found my preferred kind of books, poetry came to me to show me another beautiful way to use the words. Nowadays, I like to read almost any kind of literature translated in Spanish, and recently, I started to read books in English. It is an entire new world! I cannot imagine myself sitting doing nothing instead of reading a good book. In conclusion, I need to read all the time, everywhere!

Now that I am getting older, I can look back and realize how lucky I was for having my parents in my life. They could have just taught me how to read, but instead of that they made me love reading and need it like the air to breathe. Recently, a beautiful phrase came to me; it says, "You are the books you read," therefore I can truly say that I owe my parents everything I am. Reading is going to be part of me forever and it is because of them. I have found a new and wonderful world in every book I have read. I just want everyone to have this same experience.

Omar Bermudez is 34 and originally from Venezuela.

My Story

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Mohamed. My nationality is Somali. When I came to the USA in 2014, I started to learn English, math, and writing. I was a writer in Somalia. When I was young I liked to write. My teacher's lessons taught me about some writers in the world. When my school was done,

I started writing a nonfiction book called *Facts on the Market!*. When I am done, I printed my book. All my friends and my family are excited. They said, "You did a good job." Now I want to write another book. Thanks.

Transportation: Roads, Sky, and Ocean

HANI SHEIKH, MINNEAPOLIS

Transportation is very important for human beings. Transportation routes are many different. Bus, car, motorbike, and bike. Sky only fly and ocean they have ship, boat, and canoe. For transportation you need to get a ticket. You need to know the time to go and time to come. The location, airports, and ports.

American transportation they have laws to follow. Special highways help to drive and they have many airports, also ports. My country doesn't have highways and doesn't have signs to help drive. Then airports also don't have special security like the United States. All transportation in the ocean is the same.

I live in Minneapolis. When I came to school I take the bus and train. I hope my country changes all transportation. I want more signs, lights, highways and security.

Hani Sheikh is 36 and originally from Burma

To Be a Priest in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church

GEBREKIDAN SIYUM, ST. PAUL

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has different types of services. One of those is the priestly service. It is special service just for clergy.

Ethiopian Orthodox priests don't marry and live alone. In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, if a man wants to become a priest, he should go out of the city to a monastery. Monasteries are in isolated areas with no electricity and no power machines or vehicles, like cars. My monastery was surrounded by jungle. A student priest shouldn't take anything from home, such as money, extra clothes, or other things. All his needs are met. When he arrives at the monastery, the priests will say welcome. They will wash his legs to relax him and will give him food, drink, and bed for one week.

After one week, the abbot will ask him why he came to their monastery. The abbot should know who he is and why he wants to join them before the abbot tells the other priests. After the inquest, the head of priests gathers all priests and explains to them about the new arrival's intent. All the priests will ask the new stranger again why he came and if he is married or unmarried. The new stranger should persuade them that his story is true. After they listen, they discuss without him what they will do. If they estimate his story is true, he can join them. He will be a priest. These are the true steps to become a priest. I know because I am a priest. I passed through all of them 10 years ago.

Gebrekidan Siyum is 37 and originally from Ethiopia.

Colors

YURIDIA GUTIERREZ MOLINA, WORTHINGTON

My favorite colors are green and pink. I don't have a color that I hate. The red color makes me feel in love or romantic. Green is my favorite color and green makes me feel like I'm wild or free like nature. Blue makes me feel clean like the breeze. Purple makes me feel so-so, not good, not bad. Black makes me feel two things,

elegant, and respectful to the person who is wearing that color, like at a funeral. White makes me feel pure and clean, like heaven or paradise. Yellow makes me feel tenderness. Brown makes me feel dirty. Grey makes me feel sadness. Orange makes me feel energetic.

Yuridia Gutierrez Molina is 29 and originally from Mexico.

Mystery Dream

PHUENG AU, PLYMOUTH

I am Phueng. I like to write stories about my character, Soulsilver the wolf spirit, in my free time. My stories are about some mythological and mysterious dreams I have had since I was a child. They were, and are still, very weird and strange. I love it as my dreams and nightmares. I want to make a story for a Teen and Children's book. I am coming to ABE and I need to learn Advanced English for Writing and Reading. I know what simple vocabulary is, but I want to learn to write with Advanced Vocabulary and Grammar. My teachers teach me to use Time Order to organize the sentences.

Now I have three unfinished stories and ask my teachers to help me to change a little in each for grammar. I can learn to write more. I want to be a writer someday, and maybe an artist if I learn to draw.

My Life

JADE XANDERSON, MINNEAPOLIS

I am Jade. My home country is China. I was born on September 10. My hobbies include sports and yoga. Both are good for my health and losing weight. I also like embroidery. It is a patient hobby, but when the cloth and ribbons and all different colors come together,

the finished designs are lovely to look at. I also like art: Sculpture, paintings, and objects are all interesting for me. Minneapolis is a lovely place to live. Quite quiet, wonderful scenery, unique homes, the castle church, and lots of fresh air make it very pleasant. Finally, I like snow. It is bright, cold, and for me, new and different, and I like the fun and excitement of watching ice skating.

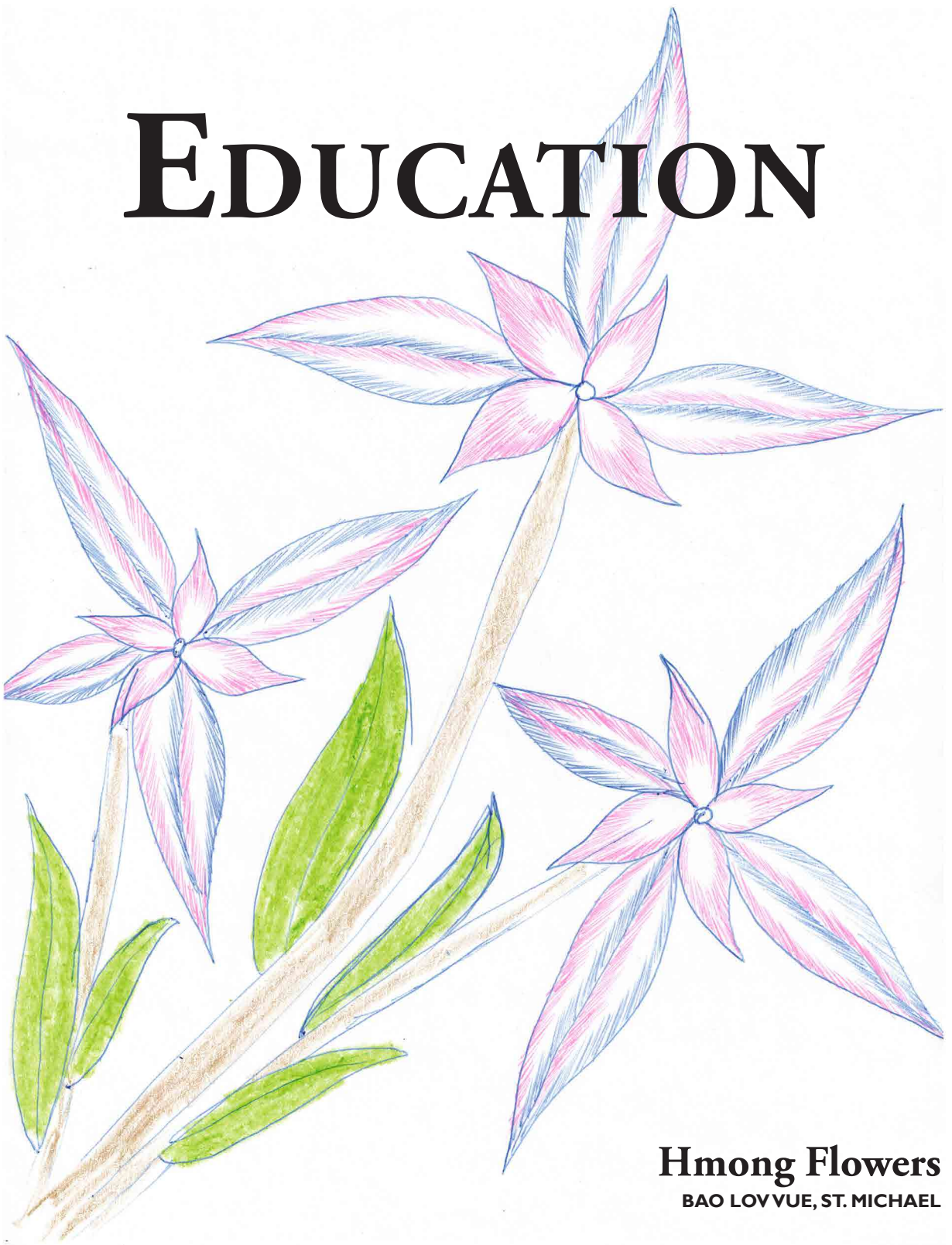
My Story

ANNA NIKOLAEVA, APPLE VALLEY

Gymnastics is all important in my life. I started gymnastics in Russia when I was seven years old. It was very interesting but very hard. I liked to go to the competitions in the different cities and the different countries. Then I wanted to become a coach. I graduated college and started to work with children. I worked hard, and my gymnasts have had success. In 2008, the Slovak Gymnastic Federation invited me to work in Slovakia. I worked with the national team, and I lived there for seven years. In 2015, my friend from America invited me to work in her club in Minnesota to teach children from age six to fourteen. I was never in America, and I thought, "Why not!" So I was in America in February 2015. I like my work. It's very creative and responsible work. I don't just teach gymnasts to move nicely and to control the body, but I teach them to overcome the difficulties in life. For example, when a student is working hard to achieve a gymnastic skill, and it is very difficult, I teach them to overcome their fear and challenge. This helps them when they have future life challenges. I teach my gymnasts to be kind and helpful. I'm very happy when I see the confidence and joy in my students' eyes.

Anna Nikolaeva is originally from Russia.

EDUCATION



Hmong Flowers
BAO LOV VUE, ST. MICHAEL

Featured Author



MARIANELA MOLINA

was born in Ecuador and arrived in Minnesota in 2005. She has two kids, Alan and Jason, 10 and 6 years old. They are her driving force, strength, and inspiration. Losing her mother at only a year old left a huge void in her life and perhaps is the main reason why from very early she looked to be in touch with nature, poetry, photography, theater, and broadcasting, anything that allowed her to express emotion in a genuine way that developed her senses

to appreciate in every detail a little bit of the essence of her mother. She is not giving up, just like every immigrant who struggles to get ahead. She is looking to realize her goals. Now she is studying English in order to prepare for a college career. She wrote her first book, “Brush Strokes in Time,” (Pinceladas En El Tiempo) in June 2008. Marianela yearns to find resources to write more books that will inspire. At the moment one of her hobbies is her internet radio station, where she keeps her dreams of broadcasting alive, a career that began in 1995. She hopes to be heard by a producer who will value her talents and give her an opportunity to be a voice for the voiceless – those who are fearful or stereotyped.

Tears and Smiles of an Immigrant

MARIANELA MOLINA, MINNEAPOLIS

Sitting next to me,
Her eyes were flooded,
And tears slipped down her cheeks.
The sway of her gaze, a sadness hid.
I stared, suddenly feeling reflected.
These are the tears of an immigrant.
The tears that represent
Loneliness, sadness,
The distance that separates us
From a whisper, an embrace,

Or the sweet words of encouragement.
There she was.
There I was,
Sitting in the same classroom.
She does not speak my language,
But we are in the same place,
The place we immigrated to.
Now focused on learning a new language.
A starting point in a new country where
we are offered new opportunities.
Here we are, sheltered by a glimmer of
hope.
We meet here.
Coming from different latitudes,

For different reasons,
From different countries,
Yet in the same classroom,
Exchanging tears.
Sometimes exchanging smiles,
The universal language.
Soul medicine.
For immigrants, even without fully
understanding the new language,
The smile is a sign of welcome.
Thanks for giving that smile, thanks for
making us feel at home.
Please receive our smiles as a sign of
gratitude.

Marianela Molina is originally from Ecuador

Finding My Voice

CAMILA SILVEIRA, MAPLE GROVE

It was only when I arrived in the USA that I really realized how important communication is. I'm from Brazil, and in my country, I always liked to study, read books and magazines, make new friends, and improve my knowledge. As a result, I never have had problems expressing my opinions and ideas. However, I never needed to speak in English, and I didn't take classes or practice in a different language before I came to the USA.

We enrolled in an ESL class in our second week and started to study English. I didn't have a problem understanding the teacher or to read or write English. All my problems started when I needed to talk.

In my first weeks here, I was terrified that people would talk to me, and I wouldn't be able to answer. I felt afraid, shy about my accent, and forgot all the words that I knew before. I listened to people talking about subjects that I like, and I couldn't give my opinion. I needed my husband's help to do everything, even small things like ordering in a restaurant or answering the phone. I cried several times because I felt stupid and alone. I missed so much talking to other people and being understood.

I have incredible support from the school. Our teacher Barbara is amazing. She always encourages us and teaches with so much passion and patience that we enjoy all the classes. We have conversation time, and I can practice with people from all over the world. They are learning just like me, with no hurry, shame, or judgment.

Day after day I feel a little more confident and less concerned. I start to talk more, even when I'm not so sure about the grammar or what word I need to use. After 3 months, I still make a lot of mistakes, but I'm closer to my goals and happier because I finally have my voice again.

Camila Silveira is 31 and originally from Brazil.

English is My Second Language

ANONYMOUS, CRYSTAL

Learning other languages is not so easy for everyone including me, but I need to study English because I live in a different country. We came to the United States because we wanted a better life and freedom.

Besides your own language, learning a second language is very good for you. For example, in the future (helping people to translate), better communication in your social life, and most importantly, how to study correctly in English. These are reasons we need to come to school for learning. In the past when I just came to the United States, everything looked to me very new, interesting, and exciting.

I have a short story and would like to share it with everyone. One day my aunt brought all of us (parent and three sisters) to the Government Service Center to do some important paperwork that needed to be done in order for us to be able to live in the United States. At that time I did not know English very well, and I was standing in front of a gentleman (the government service man) who asked me, "How do you do?" I just looked at him for a moment and said not a word because I did not understand what he was asking me. By the time we got home, my aunt told me that the gentleman had asked how am I doing and that was it. I thought "Oh, I see," and felt so embarrassed.

After this, I thought that if I do not know any words of English, it will be hard to move on. We had a family meeting and made the decision that we all needed to go to the ESL class that was near our house. At last we found a school that could help us with our English problem. My sisters and I went to the high school for two years of ESL, with the exception of my youngest sister, who was only 12 years old at that time and of course had long school hours. As soon as we finished at the high school, we went to college for another two years and then

started looking for jobs. We have worked up to this day.

Now, when we all sit down and think of what happened in the past, we cannot hold out the laughter, tears, and many other things. We can't believe that time went by so fast and keeps on moving, never stopping even until today. I still go to school for ESL class when I have the chance. I feel that learning another language is never-ending and lasts for life.

My History

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

The education in some countries, for some people, is a challenge. In some places it is way too expensive. That our children have education is almost a luxury. It is important that children have a good education and parents have a good job. The biggest challenges that stop students from learning are rules that prohibit students' attendance and the backward thinking of families. Some people think certain subjects will be more masculine or feminine.

Teaching Others, Teaching Myself

ANONYMOUS, PLYMOUTH

I started teaching 60 years ago in a village in the southwest part of Iran. I was the only teacher, and it was the only school. I taught grades one through six all in one room. Class started when the sun came up and ended at sunset. We did not have a fixed time. I would start class with one group.

After I gave them something to do, I would start with the second group, and so on. If students had time between subjects, they could rest or go home and come back, but when I was hungry, I went to a corner of the class that was my living room. I could only take a moment to eat and then resume teaching. At night I would study by myself for my own high school.

Happy

KHADRA YUSUF, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is Khadra Yusuf. Minneapolis is beautiful. My children go to school. Khadra goes to school. Husband goes to school. My family learns English. My family is happy, children are happy, momma is happy, husband is happy.

Khadra Yusuf is originally from Ethiopia.

School

PEDRO SALAZAR, MINNEAPOLIS

What is your goal? My goal is learn to write big paragraphs. I want to go to school. I am going to school to learn English.

Why do you want to learn English? I want to learn English to help my kids. I want learn English to write well, read, and speak English.

Pedro Salazar is 53 and is originally from Mexico.

Family Literacy Program

MICHELLE LAMARDO, BROOKLYN PARK

This is my last year in the family literacy program with my daughter. It's amazing everything I have learned over the past two

years. If you think that I am talking only about English, you are wrong. English is only a part of that. In the program I have learned about different cultures and how friendly and kind the people are with whom I share most of my mornings. But the most incredible thing is to see the enthusiasm and dedication of our teachers. They work together, as a family, finding the best way to teach us. Each day is a different experience, a different challenge, and a different goal to achieve. I like to feel that we aren't a number or a name in a list. I really appreciate how our teacher helps us to attain our goals and celebrates our accomplishments with us. I hope they know how important their support is for us, and if they do not know it, this is my way to recognize their effort and dedication. I am so happy and proud to have found this family and to have been part of it for these two years. Just thank you.

Back to School

YANG XU, NEW HOPE

My name is Yang Xu, and I'm from China. I had never thought I would go to America before I met my husband. Even when I came to America, I still thought I didn't need to worry about anything because he is an American. We have three children. We are not rich, but we have a happy life and have fun with our lively children.

From the time our oldest son went to middle school until high school, we often enjoyed his school award meetings and we are so proud of him. Before I came back to Sandburg Learning Center to improve my English, my son invited us to go to

the University of Minnesota to enjoy an academic scholarship meeting with him. We were so glad that we didn't have to pay for his education. When I sat at the table and listened to the person who was lecturing on the stage, I thought, "What happened in my ears?" As I tried to understand, my eyebrows were getting tighter and tighter and I asked my son, "What did he say?" There was more and more I didn't understand, and I got totally lost. Tears were in my eyes. My son gave me a long, big hug with no words. I felt so bad because I was not understanding the person giving the lecture.

I missed my Chinese parents and my friends, my midwife job, and all my co-workers who are also my good friends. I felt very isolated. More and more memories came back, and I made a very serious decision to go back to school to study English.

Finally, I went back to school, and now I feel better and better the more English I learn.

Yang Xu is originally from China

My Journey Through School Halls

EBONY KNIGHT, ROSEMOUNT

In slow motion

It feels like I am walking down the halls

While everything else is on fast-forward

I see white walls, white floors, white paper, white people

Walking down the halls, I have no friends

No one to laugh with, to joke with

Walking down the halls, I have my

headphones in

Tuning out the rest of the world

Walking down the halls, I begin to realize I no longer

Belong

I am walking in the halls

In slow motion.

Ebony Knight is 17 and is originally from the United States.

Exchanging Lives

SHINY SAW, ST. PAUL

Once, I was a schoolteacher in Myanmar. I taught my students English. Now, where has my English gone? I must start again to learn English. I was born in Myanmar on May 22, 1972. My wife's name is Mu Naw Poe. She was born in Myanmar on January 1, 1983. We lived in Myanmar then. But now, we have a big problem in Myanmar. The problem is civil war. In 1982, my family moved from Myanmar to the Thailand border. Then the civil war came to the border area, and we moved again to a refugee camp in Thailand. In the refugee camp, I was a schoolteacher with my community. Finally, we had a good opportunity to move to another country. Now, we are living in the United States of America. Now, I am an Open Door Learning Center student.

Why am I learning English? I have studied English for one or two years. I want to learn English for many reasons. First, I want to learn English to help my children finish their homework. I want to learn English to talk with my daughter's and son's school office and teachers. If I know English, I can talk to

my daughter's and son's teachers. Sometimes, I want to ask them questions. Also, I can volunteer in the classroom. English is very important for my job. I want to talk with my supervisor or manager and other workers. Sometimes, I need to ask my supervisor a question like, "Where is my paycheck?" or, "When is my holiday?" Also, if I know English, I can apply for other jobs. Sometimes, I need English at my school. Sometimes, I need to ask questions. Sometimes, I want to tell the teacher what I need. If my English is good, I can go to training classes. Sometimes, I need to teach Bible study at church and teach Sunday school.

Now I am a Sunday school teacher in the church in downtown St. Paul, Minnesota. All the time, I ask God in prayer for my English to be better. In conclusion, I want to learn English so I can use it at my daughter's and son's school, my job, my school, my church, and to change my family's life. I will study very hard so I can learn fast.

Shiny Saw is 43 and is originally from Burma.

Grandma Goes to School

GHISLAINE GILLARD, HASTINGS

I decided four years ago to come and join my son who lives here. When I arrived, I did not speak or understand English. I decided that it was important for me to communicate and learn the language of the country where I had settled down. With the help of my daughter-in-law, I found a school. I was very stressed at the idea of learning a new language (at 62 years of age) that I had never learned before. My teachers talking, talking normally,

and I understood nothing! With a lot of perseverance and encouragement from my husband, I started to say a few words.

Today, I have not yet properly mastered English, but I can explain some things with very particular English. It is certain that learning is never easy, but with support and courage, it can be achieved!

I do not regret the hard moments I have lived. It was worth it. I'm lucky because now I have many friends from different countries and cultures. Persia, Egypt, China, Poland, El Salvador and many others, they cross my travels. Nothing in the world is more beautiful than friendship and they give a lot! I'm sad when one of them goes but he or she will never leave my memory and my heart.

Ghislaine Gillard is 66 is originally from France.

My First Days in America

ASIYA TALYANLE, BURNSVILLE

I am from Somalia. I have been here since March 2006. I was 23 years old. When I came here I had many challenges. This country has more opportunity for education and work. I went to school because I couldn't speak English. After five months I worked and stopped school because I didn't have enough time. After five years I opened a small business. My business grew. Now I'm coming back to school. I will finish a GED. I'm so happy I came back to school.

Asiya Talyanle is originally from Somalia.

Why Have I Had More Life Opportunity Than My Mom?

LAISE MOREIRA, MINNEAPOLIS

Although my mom and I grew up in the same place, a small farm in Brazil, we have had different life experiences. We moved from there to live in the city because there wasn't high school for my sister and me. After that, my life has become extremely different than my mom's. What could be a problem actually helped me to improve my life. The environment where I lived, studying in a school in the city, gave me a good education that I couldn't have if I was living on a farm.

When I started to study, I could see a new perspective of the world and my life. In that moment, I started to study high school (in the morning) and an agriculture technical course (in the afternoon). During that period, I met people who helped me decide what college I could apply to.

One year after I finished my high school, I enrolled in an agriculture college. The problem was this college was away from my home, but my mom always encouraged me to go there and keep my plans. I never will forget the day that my mom left me in Juazeiro, the city where I went to college. She didn't cry in front of me! But later, she confessed to me on the phone that she cried a lot when she was traveling back our house. I know that moment was so hard for her, but she hid her suffering to make me strong. In this college years later, I completed my master's degree.

My mom hasn't had the same opportunity as me. She couldn't make progress in her career because she needed to work to keep my sister and me enrolled at a school. In addition, one year after we moved to the city, my parents separated, so she needed to work extra hours. Now, she has returned to college and is studying pedagogy. She is running, trying to make up the time that she missed. I am proud of my mom all the time.

As a result of the difference between our lives, the fact that I left my home and went to study away (from my home), has provided me more life opportunity that I have education and that I could develop my career. I hope soon to see my mom finish her college.

Laise Moreira is 29 and is originally from Brazil.

My Reading and Writing History

NURIYA ADAM, NEWPORT

As a kid, I always loved reading short stories because the long ones seemed boring to me. I remember reading my grandpa's poems and other interesting stories he wrote. Although I never actually had the chance to meet my grandpa, I learned that he was a high school teacher and had majored in English. My grandma, on the other hand, was a housewife. Nevertheless, that did not hinder her from learning how to read and write. She liked reading books. I used to look at the book she was reading and say the words out loud after her, pretending like I was reading. I was very good at lipsyncing

too; I am still good at it. Every time my uncle listened to English songs I lipsynced, but then I felt like I needed to know the literal meaning, not just how to move my lips. I wanted to know more about it rather than acting like I know. That is when the urge for knowing English occurred to me.

By the time I was three years old, I was in kindergarten where they mostly taught us ABCs rather than focusing on our own Fidel (Ethiopian script or letter). My grandma did not like this; she thought it was senseless knowing others' culture before your own. So she sent me to a school where they teach how to read and write in my own language. Amharic is not an easy language. We have precisely 267 Fidel (letters). It took me more than a year or two just to use the alphabets to construct a word. So I had to go to two different schools, one for regular class and the other for the Amharic class.

Speaking, reading, and writing (whether I was correct or not) was something I have always done. For me personally, I have always found English to be an easier language than Amharic because English was familiar to me due to the amount of emphasis that the school put on it. Looking back, I realize even the things I watched as a child, such as Sesame Street and Barney & Friends, were all American shows, but at the same time these shows enhanced my English very well.

Nuriya Adam is 19 and is originally from Ethiopia.

My Journey of How I Learned Reading and Writing

MARGRET NABATANZI, MAHTOMEDI

Even though I am the firstborn, my family could not help me to learn reading and writing until they took me to school at the age of six. My stepmom was my escort to a kindergarten which was only half a mile from home. She kept me company for a week until I became familiar with how to get to school. My teacher's name was David. He had a good relationship with the kids and parents. I remember the cookies Teacher David presented before us. Only the winner could have some of them. I succeeded about five times, and I lost many, which made me often sad.

All the children and I began with pictures, then small black boards using white chalk to draw the pictures. After that, we started writing letters from A, B, C onwards. There was also a lesson of learning numbers like 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, and writing them on the same boards. Furthermore, Teacher David handed us some exercise books and pencils. Every student had to learn his or her name and the names of both parents.

On the other hand, I was so different from other kids because I was left-handed. The teacher always tried to compel me to write with my right hand, but it was impossible. He sometimes used to flog and abuse me. All that didn't help. Still now, I write with my left hand. However, I didn't feel well all the time because of the pressure the teacher was putting on me.

When I entered first grade, I began to learn reading and writing in both languages, English and Luganda, my home language. We studied words one by one until everyone came to make a sentence. We used to mention the words together and often divide into groups of four. Meanwhile, Teacher David monitored each group to see how we performed and later corrected our mistakes. Finally, I moved to second grade, which I remember I repeated for another year. Then I continued with other classes up to the top grades.

I encourage parents, especially in developing countries, to not neglect their children. They should develop their nations by educating their children when they reach school age. And this young generation for sure is going to boost these countries to a better civilization.

Margret Nabatanzi is 63 and is originally from Uganda.

Don't Give Up on Education

NOOR ABDULL HAKIM, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I am originally from Afghanistan and came to the USA three years ago. I wanted to write about the value of education. If we think about it, in today's age everything is circling around education. We can even compare the countries which have a great education system that benefits their economy and the country's development.

I want to say something briefly about myself and how I got a little bit of education in my country. Many of you guys might

have heard or read about Afghanistan's war, and that it's been running for over 40 years and still the security situation is not stable and there are poor living conditions. I remember when I was little we barely had electricity. I wanted to do my homework and we didn't have anything at home to use as a light, so I had to do my homework with moonlight. I have done that many times. The security condition is not stable at all; for instance, due to bad security we weren't able to be at a school five days a week. If we were showing up at school the teachers were missing, and if the teachers showed up the students wouldn't be there because of violence.

On top of all these concerns, people are still seeking further education and they don't want to give up. They put their lives in risk because they still have hope for themselves and their kids' future. Since I came to the USA I have been working and focusing on education, and hopefully one day I will get my GED and continue onto higher education.

Noor Abdull Hakim is originally from Afghanistan.

My Life

ANONYMOUS, APPLE VALLEY

May God bless everybody. Merry Christmas 2015, and Happy New Year 2016.

My sister moved to Burnsville, Minnesota. I visited her house. I was shocked. It is nice in every room. For Christmas we ate rice, peas, oxtail, pepper chicken, curry goat, ham, fried fish, cheese macaroni, vegetables, and sweet potatoes.

I was in Jamaica for school. They had many young deaf adults age 13 or 14 from 1977 to 1984. My mother went with me to a school named Lister Mair Gilby School for the Deaf for the first time. I was calm. I sat and waited patiently in the principal's office. I can see some speech. They showed me the classroom. I can learn the sign language alphabet. I trained at home. I practiced the alphabet, succeeded, and improved. I made friends. The principal explained we volunteer to pray in sign language to God. My teacher helped me get an audiologic earmold. Now I can hear them call me. Thank you, dear teacher.

My group practiced sign language for the parent program. We enjoyed it. It was a good, nice day. I played sports like relay races, jump spoon lime, and baseball. I was encouraged to learn more alphabet sign language, like reading and books and learning JSL, English, math, and other skills. I can talk to deaf and hearing both. Thank you. God bless you and help you learn and teach us all. Amen.

School

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

About school. I go to school because it is very important in my life, and more because I learn English language. Learning English in the United States is important because English is one of the first language that you need to learn. The other reason is that the school can help you to write, listen, talk, and pronounce. Learning English can help you to get a better job, or maybe will help you continue with your studies, like college.

The Long Haul

JENNIFER TESSMER, SOUTH HAVEN

I never thought I would have ended up being a drug-addicted, alcoholic teenager who dropped out of school. At the young age of 13 years old I became addicted to drugs and alcohol. Slowly through the years I started to lose interest in school.

By the time I was 17 years old and in my junior year in high school I had been in so much trouble that the principal pulled me into his office and gave me one last warning. He said, "Jennifer, if you do one more thing to get you in trouble in school, I am going to expell you for your senior year!"

Well, it just so happened he did that on the last day of school of my junior year. I looked at him and said, "I'm going to help you solve this problem. I QUIT!" So, after I dropped out I enrolled myself in school at Area Learning Center West in St. Cloud. I was doing really good there until I found out I was pregnant and not too long after finding out ended up having a miscarriage. I ended up dropping out of Area Learning Center West after the miscarriage. Those were two of my many mistakes in life. I just didn't care about my education or life anymore.

Well, years have passed now. I had many bad years until I decided to turn my life around. My drug use had gotten me into lots of trouble and eventually landed me in prison. While in prison I got put in GED classes. However, I did not get to take any of my GED tests before getting released. So, I took it upon myself to enroll in GED classes to prepare for the tests as soon as I was

released. I called ABE in St. Cloud and went to the orientation. During the orientation I found out about the Minnesota Adult Diploma Program!

At that moment I made the decision to go for my adult diploma instead of the GED. The teachers and staff that work here are very encouraging and supportive. Never did I think that I would be a happy and sober 34 year old woman with an eight year old daughter. I am now back in school getting my high school diploma and thinking about going to college to be a chemical dependency counselor.

Jennifer Tessmer is 34 and is originally from the United States.

English is Like

MANUEL AGUSTIN CASHO, MINNEAPOLIS

English is like for talking

English looks like on TV

English sounds like pronunciation

English is sometimes difficult

English is good.

Manuel Agustin Casho is originally from Ecuador.

School In My Childhood

LESLY TABORA, WAITE PARK

I started my school in a small town in Honduras where I lived. I remember my first teacher in first grade. She was nice but very strict. The school's name was John F. Kennedy to honor President Kennedy because it was built with funds from the USA.

I remember the school was located one block from my house. My time in

the school was not easy because I had to help my mom first and then do my homework. I always complained about that. Furthermore, sometimes in the town we were short of pencils or notebooks. Getting a dictionary was really a challenge because people didn't want to borrow books. I am happy things nowadays are better for kids to get a basic education.

Lesly Tabora is 49. and is originally from Honduras.

The Dilemma of Learning a Different Language

AUGUSTO LOPEZ, WORTHINGTON

This is my short story on how I am now learning English in America. It is hard for everybody, including myself, to have no knowledge of English when they come to the United States (U.S.).

When I was in Guatemala I did not even imagine that I was going to learn another language like English. Unlike the U.S., the society where I came from did not consider education important. The consequence of this is that I did not even go to high school like the majority of my countrymen.

The first day I arrived in America, I felt so strange because everyone around me was speaking in English and I did not understand what people were saying. The first thing I did was to start reading English books and to begin memorizing words. It was really exciting for me to learn English and speak a few words, but it was not easy to do it consistently.

My brother helped me by encouraging me to start taking a few hours of English

classes. My problem was how to get to school because I did not have a car. My aspiration to be successful and my strong desire to learn English led me to find ways so I could attend classes. In the world there are good people. I had a friend who gave me a ride so I can go to school.

Time to Go Back to School

IGNACIO MELENDEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

A few years ago I was in school to learn English, but for some reason or another I didn't have the time to keep going to school. The years passed and one day at my job I had the opportunity to get a better job with a better salary. But because of the lack of a high school diploma I was not able to get that position. At that time I felt very, very sad because I worked very hard for that position.

Time passed and one day I saw one of the former students and friend (Patricia) who was taking English classes at the same time when I took my classes. She told me that she finished her school and she was able to obtain her GED diploma. Patricia asked me why don't you go back and finish school, it will open a lot doors. So I started looking for information on how to go back to school and start again. At the beginning of the school year it not easy for me to be in school and work because my job was overnight so it was not easy. As time has passed I have been learning a lot of new things in school and being in school is helping me to help my kids who are in seventh and twelfth grades.

I need to mention all the teachers are being very supportive, helping me to achieve my

goals. Since I have been in school I see my future with more opportunities because the GED diploma opens the doors for a better future. My goal after I finish school and get my diploma is to go to college because I can see that the better prepared I am, the better a future for my family and me.

Ignacio Melendez is 41 and is originally from Mexico.

I'm Thankful

GALINA KOLTUN, MINNEAPOLIS

I'm very happy to live in the United States in Minneapolis.

I learn English in a school. I'm a pensioner. I came here from Russia. I came to America without knowledge of English.

I have family here: my daughter, her husband, and three grandchildren. They live in Plymouth. They are very busy because they work. Their children study at the University and have jobs. They can't help me to learn English.

It is important for me to study English here. I appreciate the teachers at the school very much.

Before I came to school I was afraid to speak by phone. Now I can go to the pharmacy and also go shopping. Now I'm not afraid to ask something.

My goal is to know English better. I don't want to depend on my daughter's family. I live separate from them.

My family always celebrates Thanksgiving Day because we are very thankful to America.

Galina Koltun is originally from Russia.

Learning English for Success

DEE NAWNZ, ST. PAUL

I live in St. Paul and have been studying at the Hubbs Center since 2013. I started in Level Four and now I am in Level Seven. I am really happy to be studying here. The teachers are so nice. I love the way they teach us. I go to school every day because I want to improve my English skills. If we live in the USA we must understand English. It is very important for us. I am not lazy to study English anymore. My goal is to go to college to get a degree. The major I would like to study is automotive. I have to achieve my goal. When I was in my country I did not have a chance to study because we didn't have schools in my village, in Burma. In 2009 I went to Malaysia. I saw many new things there that made me feel wonderful. I enjoyed life there. When I got here in 2013, I saw snow for the first time. It's funny how I love snow. In the summer I like to fish, play soccer, and jog with my friends. I look forward to learning English well enough to attend college.

Dee Nawnz is 27 and is originally from Burma.

My Middle School

LUZ MARIA NEGRETE, MINNEAPOLIS

I want to talk about my middle school. It is located in Mexico City, and it's named Villa de los niños. It is a free Catholic boarding school. The name of the founder is Father Aloysius Schwartz. He was born in Washington D.C. He created several schools, starting in Korea, and the Philippines, then Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Brazil.

My experience was very nice, although I was away from my family. My peers were from different places, and we got to love each other like sisters.

We had a special day when we celebrated our birthdays with cake, surprises, and presents. Who doesn't like to have that experience?

I had that experience! And I am proud of myself.

Luz María Negrete is originally from the United States.

School

PATRICIA GAMINO, MINNEAPOLIS

I came to school because I want to learn English. I like to learn by myself. I came to school because I need to help my children with homework. I want to get a new job for a better life and more opportunities for me and my family. This is why it is so important to learn English. It is not important how old you are.

Patricia Gamino is 29 and is originally from Mexico.

My Childhood in School

SIKA ALLOU, SAUK RAPIDS

When I was a child in my home country, Togo, 35 years ago, we started school at 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and came back at 2:30 p.m. I started school at seven years old. That school was a Catholic school. We prayed, we played, and we studied languages. At that time I liked candy, so if my classmates gave me candy, I gave my shoes to them. My mother was not happy with me because I gave my shoes away.

Sika Allou is 43 and is originally from Togo.

My Story in the United States

MARGARITA ZARATE, WASECA

My name is Margarita Zarate. I was born in Celaya, Guanajuato. I came to a small town called Waseca, Minnesota, in 2003. My family and I came here to follow our dreams and hopes for a better life. Starting my educational life here was very hard for these reasons: I did not know any English, and I also didn't have any extended family here. When I started sixth grade, it was really hard for me not knowing any English. Teachers could talk to me in English, and I just stared at them. But time went by, and I started learning English. When I learned my first words in English, I was so proud because I was able to understand a little bit of what people said to me. As the years started going by and I had started my first year at the Waseca High School, I was introduced to a lady name Nancy Flattum. She turned out to be one of the most wonderful persons I had ever met. She not only helped me in school but later gave me one of her kidneys.

Margarita Zarate is 22 and is originally from Mexico.

My School

ABDIRAHMAN MADOBE, MINNEAPOLIS

Before I came to the English Learning Center, I was looking for a school near my house. I met a lady who studied at the English Learning Center. I told her that I am looking for a school near my house, and she told me the the English Learning Center is close to my house. At that time, I came to the English Learning Center, and it was 2014. I saw my previous

teacher, Kirstin, from International Institute, and also I saw another very welcoming lady.

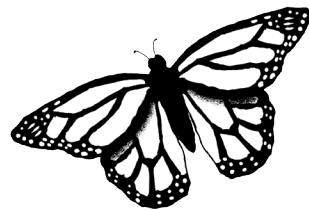
She made me an appointment for two weeks. I took the exam and became level four. When I started class, I got good teachers and good students. The English Learning Center is the place where students study English. It is a good place because there are good teachers who taught me English and students I like very much. I will not forget the teachers and students. They are all good friends.

Abdirahman Madobe is originally from Somalia.

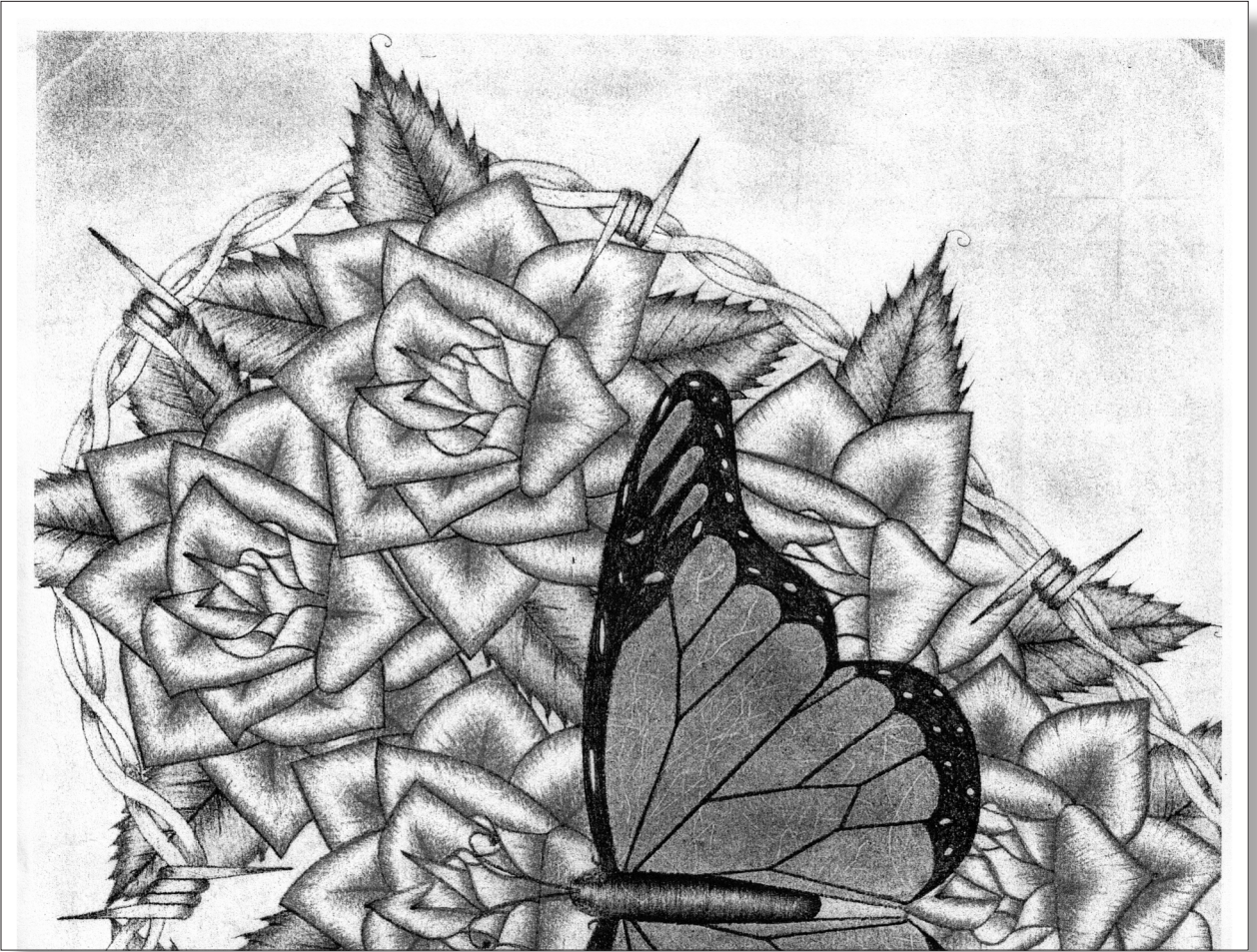
Learning English

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

My home country is Somalia, but now I live in America. This is totally different for me. I have seen many new things and begun learning English, my new language. I remember well my first day of class when I couldn't understand anything. But I had a wonderful teacher named Anne. She was especially patient with me and spent extra time. Within a month, I had learned many, many new words. I could now understand some sentences and phrases, and Anne rewarded my effort with a small gift. My learning still continues. Perhaps one day I can be like Anne and teach English to some new Somali students. That would be exciting!



MEMORIES



Butterfly Among the Roses

ARTURO GARCIA, COLD SPRINGS

Featured Author



ALEXIS ROGERS

was born in Chicago but moved to Minnesota with her family when she was a child. She will soon receive her diploma through the Adult Diploma Program at Volunteers of America Adult High School. After she receives her diploma she wants to find a job and continue her education. After playing Monopoly a year ago, she is interested in studying accounting. Alexis has never thought of herself as an author. She says, "I'm more of a storyteller than a writer."

The Best of Days

ALEXIS ROGERS, ST. LOUIS PARK

Piecing together the best of days is a sleep method used by Dut Majok for the Lost Boys of Sudan. It's thinking of all your favorite things and memories and merging them together to create one amazing day before you go to sleep.

My best of days mostly consists of my little brother Caesar and the embarrassingly funny things I've caught him doing. Two things that come to mind are when I caught him singing in his doorway and when our dad and I caught him sleep eating. Those are by far the best memories I have of my brother. I bring them up to him all the time.

Caesar was around six years old when I caught him in the doorway of his bedroom singing "Chain of Fools" by Aretha Franklin. I didn't laugh at him right away or let him know I was there. Instead I went and got my mom. When she saw him, we both started laughing. It wasn't just that he was singing the song; it was that he was singing the song while dancing in his underwear. When he saw us, he did a little scream and ran into his room.

I was watching TV with my dad when Caesar came into the doorway holding a spoon saying he was ready for dinner. This was strange to us because we had already eaten dinner and dessert and he was just in his room sleeping. We told him that he already ate dinner. He said ok and then walked back in the direction of his room. My dad told me to go and check on him. When I went to check on him, I found him in the dining room sitting in his usual spot. He turned to me and told me that he finished dinner and was ready for dessert. I told him that he already

ate dessert and once again he said ok and walked into his room. I followed him and found him face down on his bed asleep. The next morning my dad and I asked him if he remembered anything from last night. He said he didn't remember doing anything after he went to bed. It was then that my dad and I came to the conclusion that he was sleep eating.

Those two memories alone make up my best of days. Those were the best days of my life.

When I Was a Child

PAW SAY, ST. PAUL

My name is Paw K. Doh Say. I was born in 1976. I grew up in Mae Po Kee forest village in Burma. My village is small. It doesn't have a high school, hospital, or toilet. My grandparents were farmers, and my father was a farmer too. There were many kinds of animals and vegetables. All the vegetables are natural.

When I was ten years old, I went to school. It was hard to learn because there was a lot of fighting. So I couldn't read, write, or speak English. I never went to the city or town. When I was a child my parents didn't live in the village, and I always lived in the forest. I played with my sisters and my brothers. I didn't see my friends every day. My parents always hid in the forest because there was a lot of fighting in my area.

Right now, I live in St. Paul, Minnesota. I study English at Open Door Learning Center. So I want to thank the United States for inviting me.

Paw Say is 39 and is originally from Burma.

When I Was a Child

SHEWAMEBRAT BORSOMA, ST. PAUL

My name is Shewamebrat, and I was born in Ethiopia in 1980. When I was a little girl, I liked flowers. I helped my mom by watering the garden. When I was a teenager, I started to plant flowers by myself. When spring came, the flowers looked beautiful. I picked some flowers and put them in water inside my room. I loved to look at them. I don't forget my flowers and my country.

Shewamebrat Borsoma is 35 and is originally from Ethiopia.

When I Was a Child

PAW KWE HTOO, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Myanmar. I lived in Whan Gode Daw village. My village was near the Pa Ah Town. My village had no mountains or waterfalls. It is farmland. There were many trees and vegetables in my village. There were many kinds of animals. Sometimes, I took care of animals. After, I played and hid behind the trees with my friends. When I was a child, my mother told me stories. After I got older, I went to school together with my brother. My village was near the Salween River.

Paw Kwe Htoo is 31 and is originally from Burma.

When I Was a Child

ROSAURA ALVAREZ ZELADA, NEWPORT

I grew up in El Salvador. I went to school every day. I played with my brothers and sister. I planted flowers in the summer with my grandmother. My mother and I went to church sometimes on Sundays. I traveled to

Guatemala to visit my grandmother every year for one week.

Rosaura Alvarez Zelada is 42 and is originally from El Salvador.

When I Was a Child

AE PAW, WEST ST. PAUL

I grew up in Tha Aye Key village. There were many trees. Sometimes I went to the mountains. Sometimes I fed animals. Sometimes I went to the river and played. Sometimes I went with my parents to plant rice. Sometimes I played with my sister. Every day I took care of my little brother and my little cousins.

Ae Paw is 26 and is originally from Burma.

When I Was a Child

GAUDENCIA VEGA CHRISTOBAL, ST. PAUL

I lived on a hill in Cuauhtemoc in the municipality of Ecatepec in the state of Morelos in Mexico. There were pepper trees, agave, and prickly pear cactus. With my friends, I played soccer and swam in the pool. My brother, my friends, and I explored the hill. We found horses, cows, sheep, dogs, cats, and an occasional snake. I liked to climb pepper trees. We went on a picnic on the hill.

Gaudencia Vega Christobal is 43 and is originally from Mexico.

When I Was a Child

VUE HER, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Wat Tham Krabok in Thailand. My family moved to Wat Tham Krabok in 1990. We lived near the foothills of the mountains and near the Thai farmers. There was no electricity in the town. Sometimes we went to the mountains to cut trees for the fireplace. Sometimes we liked to shoot squirrels. We liked to go up to the top of mountains, and we liked to find many different houses.

My family liked to plant corn, rice, and vegetables, and we took care of animals to sell. During the Hmong New Year, my friend and I liked to go to the mountain cave because there were many Buddha statues in the cave. Many people grew up in Tham Krabok. We love Wat Tham Krabok. Thank you for reading my story.

Vue Her is 42 and is originally from Laos.

When I Was a Child

ANNIE VANG, ST. PAUL

My family lived in Laos, and my house was in the mountains. A long time ago, the people fought in Laos. We moved to Thailand. I lived in Thailand with my mother. My mother and I sewed Hmong clothes and sent them to the USA. People bought them, and my sister got some money, so she sent it to me. Sometimes I didn't sew. I went to the farm, and I took the weeds away from the corn and put them in the bag.

Annie Vang is 33 and is originally from Thailand.

When I Was a Child

NOR LEE SA, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Gelo village in Burma. I lived with my parents. When I was 10 years old, my mother passed away. After she passed away, I lived with my father and sister and brother. When I was 11 years old, I went to school.

Sometimes I went to the playground with my friend and went to the river. On Sundays, I went to church to worship with my family and friends. When I was 20 years old, I got married, and I had 10 children. I am very happy with my family. In 2003, I moved to a Thailand refugee camp. I lived in a Thailand refugee camp for eight years, and then I moved to the United States.

Nor Lee Sa is 56 and is originally from Burma.

The Crossing

LEONARDO DAVID JIMENEZ BERMEO, MINNEAPOLIS

My neighbor in Ecuador asked me if I wanted to come with him to the U.S. I was 14 years old. Everything seemed good. Once I paid \$200 for the trip, it was no turning back. When I said goodbye to my family, my mom was unhappy, but the hardest part was saying goodbye to Ana, my little sister. She was crying, and mom was too. My body was leaving home, but my heart and soul were staying there. Then the crossing began.

The first day on the sea was something I never dreamed of. There were sharks and many other creatures in the water. I felt the boat was only a small leaf in the big tank of water. The boat moved side to side. In the boat, it was complete chaos—80 people were in the small room which kept the fish

that were captured—and this time, it was people instead of fish. The room smelled greasy from the engine and tasted like oil mixed with salty water. It burned your skin. The noise of the engine didn't let us sleep well. The people were getting sick. The place was gloomy and sad. The trip was dangerous, and I wasn't prepared for what was coming.

The clean skies full of stars in the night were changing to turbulent winds, and the wildness of Mother Nature was there. The wind hit the boat hard, and sharks were everywhere in the water. I saw death, and I was feeling sad for what I left behind. In that moment my thoughts were at home drinking hot cocoa with my family, but in reality I felt I was about to die.

I remember a weird kind of fish I call “batfish” for the wings they have. They fly for 10 miles and then go back to the water. One storm went on for three days. The last night we started to pray with the people in the room. I said to God, “Father, please help me, and let me be able to see my family again.” The next day everything was calm, and it was like God was there to protect us. We finally arrived to Guatemala.

Leonardo David Jimenez Bermeo is 26 and is originally from Ecuador.

Chance for Life

MAIDA DUENES, FRIDLEY

I was born in Honduras. For those people who do not know this country, Honduras is one of the five countries that form Central America (Panama is also located in Central America). Central America is an isthmus.

I am here for a chance for life. That is

what I always said, but now I know God had purposes for me. I will talk a little of everything that happened on my trip. When I began my trip, I remember I came with 17 other people from Honduras and many more from different countries. Of those 17 guys, just four people and I were from the same neighborhood; we spent some days together until one day in the Usumacinta River when we separated and never saw each other again.

Many days later, I was continuing my journey alone. I was in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, looking for something to eat. Someone approached me to talk. In the middle of the conversation, he asked me where I came from. When I told him Honduras, he immediately told me, "Yesterday I saw on the news that several people died who came from Honduras. I only heard it because I knew that every day people came from Honduras." It was when I was in Nuevo Laredo Tamaulipas that I realized what happened. I remember it like today. I called my house and talked with my sister, and it was then that she told me that two of the four people who had died came from the same neighborhood I came from, and all were concerned because they did not know anything about me. She told me, "My dad said to me that he spoke with you last Friday, but I did not believe and so I asked again and again if he was sure it was you who had spoken, if it was your voice, and already a little annoyed, told me he's listened to your voice for 38 years, and he knew you were speaking."

I remember also she told me they were sorry for what happened, but they were very

happy that I was fine. After that conversation I felt sad about what happened to my fellow travelers, but I thanked God for taking care of me. God has been good to me. Now my father is no longer with us. He died in 2011, but God continues taking care of me.

My Oldest Memory

RICHARD AYEWONOU, COON RAPIDS

The oldest memory I have is when I was around 10 years old. One Saturday morning, I was swimming with my cousins in the river. When I was swimming, I went to a very deep area, and when I tried to come back, I couldn't because the river was taking me away. So I started shouting, and there was a guard who knew how to swim very well and came to save me. Even though that happened, I didn't give up. I always went to swim there until one day, the same river killed the guard who was swimming in the same area. Then I decided not to swim anymore. Now I'm afraid of any river.

Sweet Memories

OLIVIA MARTINEZ, MAPLE GROVE

When I was a child, I lived in a small town in Colombia. My parents had a farm. On the land we grew many vegetables and fruits. Also, we had cows, horses, and chickens. My brothers and sisters helped my mom in many ways. My mom cooked very delicious dishes and baked bread and cookies.

In the evenings, we would meet with cousins and uncles to tell jokes and stories, sing

songs, play cards, eat cookies, and drink hot chocolate. We had a natural pool by the river that was made with big stones surrounding it. We learned how to swim, and one of my sisters caught fish with her hands. (I'm the youngest in the family.) When I was seven years old, we moved to the big city to get a better education for us.

Olivia Martinez is originally from Colombia.

An Accident

ANONYMOUS, NEW HOPE

I am a 19-year-old from Mexico and this is a story about me. I had an accident nine years ago, when I was 10 years old. One Saturday, my family was eating. Everything was normal. My little brother and I finished first, and we went to our room. My house was under construction, and when I was going up the stairs, I fell from the second floor directly to the concrete floor below. I hit my head really bad and fractured my cranium. My family heard a loud sound, and they came to look at me to see what was wrong, but I was unconscious.

They told me later that I was screaming, but I don't remember anything, even if it hurt or not. My dad put me in the car and drove very quickly to the hospital in Tijuana. They immediately took me into the emergency room, where the doctor told my dad that I needed an operation that was going to be very expensive. My dad asked how much it would cost, and the doctor was afraid to tell him. Finally, my dad said it didn't matter. I was awake seven days later.

Memories

LINDA CHACON, BROOKLYN CENTER

My name is Linda Chacon. I was born in El Salvador, Central America. My parents only have two children, my sister and me. My mother always yearned to have a boy. Years later tragedy struck in my family, the wife of my uncle died when his second son was born. Few years later my uncle died too. That was a very sad moment for the family. After that my family grew because my parents decided to take care and provide a family to the two little and cute children. My parents worked hard to give the best to their children, spending quality time and giving all their love and dedication. For me, my parents are an example of amazing love that only God gives us. My sister, my brothers, and I never can repay their immense love and sacrifice. I miss the warmth of my home. I miss staying together with my parents and enjoying their love. I miss having a good time living together with my family. I love my family.

What Is Life?

GABRIELA ENRIQUEZ, CRYSTAL

Life is every memory you have. Some are good and some are not good. You remember every moment in your life, but you remember the happy and good times more.

Life is made of moments and memories. I think it is most interesting when you have your sons or grandsons. You spend time with them and tell the things you remember or miss the most. The most interesting histories are the ones the grandfathers tell. I can listen for hours and I don't get bored! I don't see

how time is passing, and I only want to listen more and more.

The memory I remember the most is what happened every Christmas. All the family was together, spending the night together. They were sitting around the fire feeling the warmth, smelling the wood that was burning, listening to the different stories and memories. Some stories were funny, some sad and some scary. I listened until I fell asleep. It is the most wonderful memory I have.

Gabriela Enriquez is originally from Mexico.

My Life Story

LIHUI ZHANG, CHAMPLIN

My memory is my childhood. My own parents changed my life. My memory is very clear from the time I was in fifth grade. My grandparents and my uncle and aunt visited my own parents from Taiwan and Wuhan. My uncle told me I was born and at two months my parents switched me with another family. That family's two month old baby boy came to my family.

My own parents have three daughters. My foster parents have three sons. So the youngest were switched. My uncle told me he couldn't do that. I'm not happy with my parents. I was little. The neighbors told me, they aren't your mother and father. They retrieved me from fishing boats. I was very mad at them. I grew up with my two brothers and foster parents. Every summer my own parents brought me to their home.

Sometimes my father came to my school and my home to see me, but I lived with

both parents. I can't feel much love. I feel I am extra and don't belong in the family.

Lihui Zhang is 41 and originally from China.

Old Memory

MAI WENZ, BROOKLYN PARK

When I was a child I lived with my parents and two brothers. I am the oldest child. We were a happy family. My parents worked hard on the farm. My brothers and I went to school. Sometimes I helped my mom cook meals and brought them to my dad out on the farm. We walked for an hour and thirty minutes to get there. After dropping off my dad's meal, I walked for an hour more to get to my grandma and grandpa's place to visit. They had all kinds of fruit trees: bananas, mangoes, papayas, and guavas, just to name a few. I loved to go there. The more I would visit the more I loved it. Sometimes I feel homesick when I sit back and think about the happy moments when I was there. Those thoughts are always with me no matter what I do or where I live. I love and miss my family overseas more than I can say.

The Childhood Memories

THY LE, BROOKLYN PARK

The period of living with my grandma and my mom is the most beautiful memory I would love to never stop thinking of. My mom used to sell food and drinks in front of the house and received support from neighbors and companies. I always stuck

with mom, and people would say “Mom’s tail” to tease me. Even though she had less time for herself, she took good care of us and looked after everything. I would be punished if I was not studious, and whenever such a thing like that would happen, my grandma always appeared to comfort me.

I can see my mom’s support is always for me, even though now we are not in the same spot. The times passed by, and I gradually understood they have been through hard things all their lives. I am grateful to my grandma since she gave birth to my mom and raised her so well; my mom is doing her best with love from the bottom of her heart for me, for us, and for other people. Although it could not happen, I would like to go back to this memory once.

Superstitions

HALINA STASHCHENIUK, ST. PAUL

The student community in Belarus has many superstitions and rituals. As you may have guessed, many of them are related to the final exams. It is not surprising because finals week is usually very dramatic and stressful. No matter how much one studies, there are always subjects that a student knows better than others. The result is uncertainty, despite confident looks. During my college years, we truly believed that rituals were helping us through the tough finals weeks.

The most popular ritual occurs the night before the exam at midnight sharp. All you need to do is to stick your head out the

window and yell, “Let me pass!” So, don’t be surprised if you hear this phrase roar in your neighborhood or apartment building. Perhaps it was the last desperate call to pass an exam.

Once, during my years in college, we had a curious accident. Right before the exam, my friend Anna and I went out to buy some candy bars. We knew that sugar can boost brain activity and awareness. After we bought them, we put them in our purses, and our friend Volodya asked why we weren’t eating them. We replied that we were studying for the exam.

He asked, “Does it help?” We both replied, “Of course! It is proven!” He also bought one and put it in his pocket. We were in different classrooms. My friend and I ate the chocolates right before the exam. After the exam, we met in a café. Our friend Volodya took out the same candy bar he bought earlier and threw it on the table.

“You can have it, girls! I don’t think it worked for me.” We started laughing and explained that you don’t put a candy bar in your pocket as a lucky charm, but eat it to boost your energy.

The next day we got our grades back and everyone passed, so I told Volodya, “You see, your chocolate lucky charm worked! Now, you have a ritual of your own!”

Halina Stashcheniuk is 32 and originally from Belarus.

My Oldest Memory

ANDREA NAVARRETE, ANDOVER

The oldest memory I have was of August 11, 2000. I was about four years old. I remember my mother was pregnant with my little sister, Mara Jose. My parents had to go to the hospital because my mother was about to give birth. My parents weren't going to take me to the hospital because my dad said, "The hospital isn't a place for kids." For me, the worst thing in the world was staying without my parents. For this reason, if my parents left me alone, I felt very bad. They decided to leave me with my mom's sister (my aunt) and her daughter (my cousin). They were going to the hospital very early, and I hadn't woken up yet. When I woke up, I didn't see my parents and I was looking for them all over the house, but the only people I saw were my aunt and my cousin.

Firefly on the River

PEH LEH, ST. PAUL

When I was a child, I stayed with my grandparents in their bamboo house with a roof of leaves. My parents were farmers and worked hard on the farm with my grandpa. During the six-month rainy season, nearly all of us helped plant and cultivate fields of rice, sweet potatoes, eggplant, hot peppers, cucumbers, long beans, and corn. My parents and grandpa stayed in the bamboo hut on the farm. My grandma took care of me at home. She fed the pigs, chickens, and goats. She also worked hard at home.

When I grew up, I went to school. I listened

to the teacher, and I did my homework, too. When I did my homework, I didn't have a candle. My grandma burned the wood in the fireplace, and there I did my homework. Our village had no marketplace. If we needed medicine, cloth, soap, and candles, we had to cross over the mountain and travel to a town. It was a long distance to go there.

During the day, if I didn't have school, I went fishing with my grandma by a small river. I was happy to follow her to go fishing. I usually liked to go at night because I could see fireflies. Some of them were bright. It looked like someone used a flashlight. If I saw a bright firefly, I told my grandma, "Look, someone is coming to fish." My grandma said, "No that was a bright firefly." There I stayed quiet by her.

At 9:00 p.m., we came back to my father's bamboo hut, and we slept there for one day. In the morning, I ate with my grandparents and my parents. After, I returned home with my grandma to the village. I didn't have candles to use at home, but I was very happy that my grandma stayed by me.

Peh Leh is 42 and originally from Burma.

Our Last Christmas

MARIA MELENDEZ, ST. PAUL

There we were (my mother, sister, you, grandpa, aunt, and me) after a walk among the cornfields and peaches that covered a whole hill that squirrels and birds used to nibble. It was the rainy season, so everything was green and flowery. After a long way and a strenuous day preparing hundreds of dumplings and kneading bread, we were

finally sitting on the stones around the clay oven at sunset, listening to the songs of the crickets and the water running in the creek, waiting for the bread to be ready. And you with your flowered apron, your silver hair, and your tired body, were holding a jar of coffee. We always had interesting talks about everything, and we spent many good times listening to each other.

It was getting dark and cold, so we put our hands on the oven to keep warm, and when the bread was ready, we packed everything in baskets. Then we lit a few sticks of ocote (a kind of wood) to see our way back. At home, my mother put the bread in a box of wood that was hanging from the ceiling so that the cats could not reach it. Then you started to prepare dinner, using the blue mushrooms that Grandpa picked in the morning from the forest. You made a spicy sauce with habanero, tomatoes, garlic, and onion that you roasted on the brazier (a clay griddle). When they were ready, you crushed them using a molcajete (a piece of rock that we use as a blender), and you cooked it all together.

While you were cooking, my mother and I were making tortillas and beans, my sister was preparing the table, and my grandpa, he just watched us. When dinner was ready, we ate everything with cheese that you used to make. After, we talked, we had coffee, and we ate the delicious dolls of bread that you made for the grandchildren. That night was one of many pleasant nights and will always be in my memory. Unknowingly, it was our last night.

Maria Melendez is 27 and originally from Mexico.

My Musical “Career”

VALIANTSIN KORZHYK, COON RAPIDS

When I was a child, I lived with my parents. I never wanted to be a musician and do not consider myself a musician. But when I was 12 years old, in our church, one man selected a brass band. I went there and I learned to play the trumpet. Our band played at weddings, funerals, and special church services. When I was 14, I started singing in the church choir. We sang at church services, at concerts, and we even had three trips to Sweden for performances. When one guy from our musical group went into the army, I was invited to the band and I learned to play the bass guitar and even sang. In 1991, our team was joined by famous singer Sergey Briksa and we recorded three CDs and played many concerts. Today, I play the guitar and sing for myself and among my friends only.

My Oldest Memory

ESMERALDA MENCHACA, LINO LAKES

The oldest memory I have is of when I was almost four years old. I remember playing with my brother Daniel. He was about five years old. One day, my brother found a lighter and he told me, “I have an idea. Look at me!” I looked at my brother, and he began to burn his plastic toys. I was very scared. I ran very fast to the kitchen, and I took a glass of water and threw it onto the fire, but that was not enough. Meanwhile, my brother continued to burn his toys, he was having lots of fun. I started yelling for my mom. When my mom saw the smoke and fire she ran very fast. She took the hose and extinguished the fire. My mother punished both of us for almost a month.

Island Paros: A Piece of Paradise in the World

LUSINE PIVAZYAN, MAPLEWOOD

I am very fortunate to have an aunt like my lovely aunt Anahit. Anahit is an about 50 year-old woman with a young, energetic, and positive soul. She gave an excellent present for my birthday and took me to the island Paros in Greece. I was very excited because we had not met already for four years. The summer in Athens is extremely hot and humid. I still clearly remember the white dress on her and the nice little summer flowers that she brought me and her fresh summer perfume smell. The next day our journey to Paros started. Every morning we admired the sea view from our little balcony where we usually had our tasty and totally Greek breakfast. After a little breakfast we went to the nearest little port and took a ship to one of the favorite beaches of Paros. We tasted a variety of super tasty, fresh, and interesting meals like calamari, octopus, paella, shrimps, steaks, and king crabs.

We went on a cruise ship named Captain Benwjich, a little, old, brownish, not-so-big ship. We went to the island Antiparos. Our ship stopped by the big brown rocks of the island and we all, one by one, jumped into the clearest water I have ever seen. The water was so clear that we could see the ocean floor and different multicolor fish. After that we ate grilled octopus and drank the famous Greek anise-flavored liqueur drink, Ouzo, at one of the uninhabited shores of Antiparos.

I really appreciate the unforgettable present that my lovely Anahit gave me. Every day was memorable because we were together. In the island Paros you can find peace, harmony, and energy. My adorable aunt Anahit had done everything for our comfortable vacation. It was more than just a vacation for me as we had lived that joyful month together like in my childhood. Anahit is like my second mother. I miss her very much, and every time I remember that vacation I feel happiness. Paros is really a piece of paradise in the Earth, and not only for me but for millions of tourists that visit every year. The time spent on the island Paros was very positive and left a bright spot in my life. I am truly lucky that I visited incredible Greece, especially the island Paros.

Lusine Pivazyan is 28 and is originally from Armenia.

Childhood Memory

GUILLERMO CASTILLO HERNANDEZ, ST. PAUL

I was born in a beautiful city located in the middle of my country, about thirty minutes from Mexico City. It's a place with a lot of vegetation and with the best climate in the world; that's why it's called the city of the eternal spring. I have the best memories about my warm childhood. I was the third of six brothers and we had a good relationship between us. When Mom said, "A comer," all of us ran to the table eager to taste the delights made by Mom.

Our childhood was very happy living in a peaceful community, where you could walk through the streets for hours and you

would only find friendly and helpful people. The school was like 15 minutes from home and we could come and go by foot every day. When we returned home, my mom was waiting for us with a pitcher of cold fruit water and our hot and delicious food. After eating, I liked to sit to listen to the radio station that played the songs of the Beatles, my favorite band, and I closed my eyes and dreamed I was on a stage playing with them.

My mom always knew that music was my passion. Every afternoon after we did our homework, she took time to teach me something about music. She taught me how to play guitar and some chords for playing better, and we spent a little time singing. I remember her warm voice. . . . I loved this time. It really was the better part of the day.

When my father arrived home, my mom had to attend to him. It was the time to play with my friends in the court of the neighborhood. We organized different kinds of games until the time we had to go home to dinner and take our shower and go to the bed. These were happy days when my only duties were going to school, helping at home, singing with my guitar, and playing with my friends.

Guillermo Castillo Hernandez is 55 and is originally from Mexico.

My Oldest Memory

TATIANA O., COON RAPIDS

The oldest memory I have is of when I was about three years old. I went to a daycare, and I don't have any good memories about it. Every day in the afternoon every child had to go to sleep, but I didn't like to sleep in the afternoon. And when

children went to sleep I did too, but I didn't sleep. Sometimes I slept, but the problem was when I slept, my eyes were a little bit open, and the daycare teacher was nervous. She thought I lied and I didn't sleep, and she awakened me and put me on a very cold floor. Every time when I was really sleeping she did this.

My Oldest Memory

PARISA MONSEFI, COON RAPIDS

The oldest memory I have is of when I was 10 years old. I remember I had a chick. I loved my chick. His name was JoJo. When I was at school, he played in the yard and my mother fed him. I have a sister and two brothers. My sister and brothers cared about him. During school I was thinking about my chick. In my dream he grew and became a rooster and woke up people. One day when I came back from school, I saw my chick died and his innards were out. When I was screaming and crying, my friend came and apologized to me. He said, "I was playing in the yard and didn't see JoJo, and I put my foot on his body." I was so angry, but what could I have done?

My Story

HUGO ALBERTO ROJAS-ISIDRO, BLOOMINGTON

When I was a child, my favorite sport to play was soccer. One day I had a dream. My dream was to be a soccer player. I enrolled in a soccer school. I remembered my first soccer game in the school. That day I had a lot of enthusiasm to play and to kick the ball. In my school, my coach considered me a good player. One day I played soccer in my school, and I had an

injury. My ankle was broken, so I couldn't play soccer for two years. My dad was very angry, and he forbid me to play soccer. I was sad and angry. My dream to be a soccer player was over. I never played soccer again. Today I like to watch soccer on TV. It is my passion and I love the beautiful game.

Hugo Alberto Rojas-Isidro is 33 and originally from Mexico.

Long Path

PACO ESTEVEZ, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Suddenly I woke up and saw myself in the mirror of my soul, older and more tired than what I can imagine, looking as if I was walking through time and without notice, now I have 54 years of walking in this world.

Many paths are marked on my wrinkled face, experiences, and grateful times that will survive only in my memory. Later I know that the time does not wait for anybody. Even though I walk faster I won't make it up, the time is turning into the enemy of my dreams. But hope appears after a fight with myself.

Around me there are lights enlightening the path that I already walked; many angels surround me while I am trying to give up, they are helping me to keep going. I want to see their faces but the fight does not allow me, little by little I see known faces and realize those angels are my wife, my daughters, and the next generation who are going to walk with different thoughts and ideas, but with the same roots like honesty, good morals, and integrity that are inherited from the previous generations.

Paco Estevez is 54 and originally from Ecuador.

When I Was a Child

ALHASSANE BANGOURA, MINNEAPOLIS

My mother and I traveled to her village. It was Tanene. We crossed the Kounkore river. It was at that time of a great many heavy rains. We did maybe ten hours by car. We met my uncle in his rice field. We cultivated green rice in their village. The next day, I went swimming with my cousin, but I didn't know how to swim.

Alhassane Bangoura is 36 and is originally from Guinea.

When I Was a Child

LAH HTOO, ST. PAUL

I was born in 1991 in Burma. I lived in the small village in the jungle.

When I was a child I remember I tried to shoot the bird with a slingshot and

Sometimes I fished in the river.

Sometimes I dug the crickets in the farm and I played soccer with my friends.

Sometimes I swam in the river with my brother. I also planted some vegetables in the garden.

In 2000 I moved to a Thailand refugee camp. I lived in a Thailand refugee camp for 11 years.

Later I came to the United States on June 15, 2011. This is my story when I was a child.

Thank you for reading my story.

Lah Htoo is 24 and is originally from Burma.

I Remember Burma

LAR WAH, ST. PAUL

In June, July, and August, I planted rice. In October, November, and December, I harvested rice. I remember planting. I smelled flowers. My father said the flowers remember when my mother left Burma. I felt sad and cold.

I remember I planted vegetables in Burma. My grandmother said, she remembers it was rainy. I saw it was sunny. I felt cold, hot, happy. I smelled flowers. I harvested rice. I planted grass.

Lar Wah is originally from Burma.

When I Was a Child

SA PI, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Mae Ra Moe camp. There were many trees. Sometimes I played football with my friend. I went to school Monday to Friday. Sometimes I went to the library with my sisters. Sometimes I went shopping with my friend. Sometimes on Saturday I went to the forest with my sister and friend. Sometimes I went to the river and played.

Sa Pi is 25 and originally from Burma.

A Good Experience

CHRISTIAN CARCHI, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

My name is Christian. One Saturday my father, my brother, and I were going to pick up my cousin. She was at the Lawrence Hall University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. When we were on the way my car turned off and we were lucky that no cars were

in the way. My father drove the car to the shoulder and stopped there. It was very cold outside, like minus 20 degrees.

I walked outside the car and tried to check some fuses for possible damage but I could not do anything. I was very cold when someone stopped to help us. I had never seen that guy in my life. His name was Tony. He tried to help us passing energy to the battery, but my car was dead. Then he suggested we go with him. I told him, "Are you sure you want to help us?"

"Of course," he told me, "It is too cold now." My dad was very cold too, and my brother, who was eight years old, did not know what was happening.

So we went with him to pick up my cousin, after that we went to another place to eat something. We stayed there for like an hour and a half, and I called my mom to tell her what was happening with all of us.

Tony said, "I can get a truck to tow your car and then we can go to a warm place to fix your car."

We said, "Yes, sure." We went to get the truck, towed our car, and replaced the alternator and then went to a warm place. It took us like two hours to fix the car because it was hard to take out the alternator and to put it back.

Then to make sure it worked my father started the car and it was very good, everyone started laughing. We tried to give some money to Tony because he helped us so much, but he said, "I do not want money. It is my job to help you."

We were thankful for him and I said "You

were my God today.”

Also he gave me his phone number and told me, “When you are at home please call me.”

That was a good experience for all of us. Everyone needs to try things like this, so what are you waiting for?

Christian Carchi is 19 and originally from Ecuador.

When I Was a Child

HOOO GAY, ST. PAUL

I grew up in a village in Myanmar. I'm from The Karen state.

My parents were farmers because my grandfather

Was a farmer. I have one brother.

In my country, the seasons are summer, rain, And cold.

When I was a child, sometimes I helped My parents at home. I went to school.

Sometimes, I shot a bird with my friend and we went swimming together.

Htoo Gay is 52 and is originally from Burma.

When I Was a Child

GAY NAY HSER, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Do Ta Kay village in Karen State in Burma. My village was small. We made our house of bamboo and wood. My village was on the edge of a stream. The stream was clean and had many fish. Sometimes I went fishing in the stream. Sometimes I tried to shoot the wild animals in the forest.

In my village, we planted some coconuts,

some bananas, some rice, and vegetables. In my village we bred the animals. Some animals were cows, buffaloes, and elephants. We also liked to stay in my village, but my village became a forest.

On April 23, 2014, my family moved to the U.S. The U.S. government had pity for us. I am very happy. I thank God because he made a great thing for us and sent me to this country.

Gay Nay Hser is 55 and is originally from Burma.

She Worked Hard for the Food

ELVIA SOTO-PEREZ, WORTHINGTON

In my country, there are only two seasons, but in Minnesota there are four seasons: summer, fall, winter, and spring. I like to cook posole, and my favorite food is tamales. On Thanksgiving we cooked turkey, and I visited my family. It was a great weekend. I bought clothes. I celebrated Christmas with my family. I made tamales. My favorite holiday is New Year's. My mother made a difference in my life. She worked hard for the food.

Elvia Soto Perez is 30 and originally from Guatemala.

Back Home After 10 Years

MARGARITA MOROCHO, MINNEAPOLIS

My name is a long name and has four Ms and I like it. I moved to the USA when I was 15. I was here in America, where every dream comes true. For years and years I worked in the same restaurant where I had to take two buses to get there. I started going to school to improve my English. I like to living here

because with my work, I can help my parents so they don't have to worry about money anymore.

One afternoon before I went to work I was watching the news and heard about the government approving a law for students that means I could get my social security card and work permit, driver's license, and best of all, maybe I had a chance to go visit my parents in Ecuador. I was in shock with the good news. It took a long time to get all my documents. In August 2014 I asked my lawyer to help obtain a special permit to travel to Ecuador. In December I received the permit, I felt so happy I was crying and smiling at the same time! So the first thing I did was call my Dad to tell him I had permission to go to Ecuador and he was so happy I could feel that in his voice.

On January 5, 2015 I went to Ecuador for the first time in 10 years. I spent only 15 days in my beautiful country but for me that 15 days was time enough to enjoy my family. I had a chance to visit my aunts, cousins, sisters, and my oldest friends too. I also had a chance to eat a lot of traditional food and at every family house where I went, I was a special guest for them. I felt so special. The other thing that I did was take a short vacation with my dad. I took him to Peru, that was his first vacation traveling to a different country. For me it was an honor to take him. In Peru we enjoyed a lot of places, we ate in beautiful restaurants, we shopped, and also rode a horse. All the things we did in only three short days, I don't think we slept enough. All I have to say is thank God for all the blessings, love you.

Margarita Morocho is 25 and originally from Ecuador.

My True Life

ANONYMOUS, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I am from Somalia. I grew up in a small city named Beledweyne. When I was in school, I liked to learn new things. After school I helped my mom, and I took care of my sisters and brothers. It was hard to do my homework. My mom could not help me. She never went to school. When I was 10 years old, my grandmother died. My grandma was my favorite person. I liked her very much. She loved me, too. She bought me gifts. Sometimes I slept with her.

We had a big farm that was my mom's part. Every day we took some fruit and vegetables to my uncle who lived nearby. He always helped my mom. He gave her money. He supported us. I loved my uncle. I remember all he did for us. He was merciful. He gave food and clothes to poor people and the blind and handicapped. His name was Mohamed, and I named my son for him.

When I was 17 years old, civil war broke out in Somalia. The war had an impact on all of us. My uncle who was living in the same city with us was shot in the leg by a gunman. He was neither part of the militia nor the government. His family originated from an Arab tribe, and that was the reason he was shot.

Then my parents decided to move to Yemen because Somalia was so dangerous. I lived in Yemen for six years. I was chosen in the U.S. Visa lottery. I did not want to go to the U.S. but my mom insisted that I go. She knew I could do it. I was 24 years old. I

flew with my neighbor from Yemen to the United States. She had a sister here, and they helped me get settled. I lived with other Somali people in Minneapolis. I took care of children as a job and also cooked and cleaned for the families I lived with. Later I worked in assembly but mostly as a cook at two schools.

After five years I became a U.S. citizen. I brought my family to the USA. Everyone in my family came to this country because of me, and I thank my God for making it possible.

An Unforgettable Childhood

JAMES, BIG LAKE

Unfortunately my childhood life was horrible because I grew up in an undeveloped environment. I was born on February 27, 1983 at Cooper Clinic in Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa. In 1986 my mother and my father were separated. At that moment my mother got an opportunity to go to the United States through a scholarship from the University of Liberia (L.U). My mother went to the States when I was three years old. She left me with my grandparents because the scholarship program didn't allow her to come with me.

In 1988 my grandparents started sending me to school. I was six years old at that time. In 1990, I was eight years old when the war started in Liberia. I was in the second grade. I remember that horrible day, we were in class and the (NPFL) fighters, or rebels, came in to our school. Their strategy was to take new recruits of young boys and kidnap all the girls to be their wives. Our school

principal refused, so they assassinated him right in front of us. It was the first time I really saw a dead body, especially someone that I know well.

From 1990 to 1996 I had to struggle and hustle for survival. I was alone. My grandfather was killed in the war, because he was the plumber chief for the district. I left Liberia in 1996 and went to the Ivory Coast by myself. I was only 14 years old. In Ivory Coast, I went to the (UN) office to talk to my mother and I did. By the grace of God she sent for me through the U.S. Embassy.

I came to the USA in 2001. Now I am in the USA I am trying to forget my past and embrace a better life but things have not been easy. I am still adapting to the system. Right now, I am focused on my education and my living expenses. Finally, consistency, persistence, and determination will help me to accomplish my goals in life.

James is 31.

Heart Burn

ALI SALAH, SOMALIA.

I am Ali. I lived in my home country, Somalia, until 1980. I was in 11th grade when I left. I have many happy memories of my life in Somalia. I enjoyed all the seasons, especially the spring rains. I lived in Mogadishu. It was a beautiful museum to keep our history and culture. One day, I was sitting in a store, and a lady came in. I felt love. After that, she invited me to her house. I didn't visit because I was so afraid, but I loved her so much.

The next time I saw her, she and I met in a beautiful place. We breathed the

perfumed air, and the sky was dark and the stars twinkled. She said, “Nice to meet you.”

And I said, “You too. I missed an appointment with you. Excuse me. I would have liked to come, but I was afraid of your brother. Thank you my heart.”

“That was right,” she said. She informed me that her brother was the worst person. If he knew of our love, he would try to destroy it. She told me that she didn’t have parents to defend her, “But I love you so much,” she said, “When I saw your face, I felt comfortable with you. My heart was happy.”

“Thank you so much, my darling,” I said, “I am so sorry. I want to keep you safe.”

One year later, I graduated high school. Then I went to another state in Somalia called Aregba. I worked for six months teaching at a primary school. Then I went back to Mogadishu. Unfortunately, she had married a man her brother had pressured her into marrying. My heart felt burnt and broken. My goal to marry her could never be.

Ali Salah is originally from Somalia.

When I Was a Child

JOSÉ ORTEGA, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Mexico City. I liked to go climbing in the mountains with my brothers and friends. I played soccer in the street with my friends. I liked to catch fish in the pond with my brothers. Sometimes, I tried to swim. I liked to visit the zoo with my family. I played with my dogs and cats

in the yard.

José Ortega is 48 and originally from Mexico.

A Good Memory

ANH NGUYEN, BROOKLYN PARK

The best memory I have is of when I was in Florida last June to see my great-grandfather. That also was the first vacation for me in the U.S. My great-grandfather turned 90 years old last June. He’s strong and still doing well. He works on his garden and goes to church to sell food. He is a very nice great-grandfather. He loves when we come to see him. And a couple of families down there are very hospitable; we lived in their homes. They bought a lot of food for us and they didn’t let us pay for anything. We had a party almost every day and had much fun time on the beaches. They also gave us money to pay for gas. They want us to come to see them more often, but it’s hard to take vacation together. I hope I can go there every year.

Childhood Memories

OGONA ABELA, ST. CLOUD

My childhood experience in school was bad and good at the same time. When I was four years old my parents came to America. I was left with my grandparents. After some years they decided to let me go to school in Kenya. I started going to school there. I studied English and Kiswahili. When I got to fourth grade, my parents decided that it would be better if I went back to Ethiopia.

When I went back to Ethiopia they let me start from first grade because I didn’t know

the language. I went to class and all I knew was how to read English and speak Kiswahili. I didn't know any of the language and that made me sad. Kids laughed at me. I felt so sad to a point where I wanted to lower my level of reading English so kids wouldn't laugh or make fun of me. Months later I started making friends and learned some of the language. That made my life easier in school. Years later my parents changed their minds again. They wanted me to go back to Kenya so they could start doing the process of coming to America.

When I got back to Kenya everything was easy because I knew their language. I went to boarding school and continued with my education till I came to America in 2010. Life among people who don't speak the same language is very challenging. All I have learned is to be strong and try to fit in if you can. Life is like wind blowing in different directions. You never know where it might take you next.

Ogona Abela is 26.

My Crew

ARISBETH GÓMEZ, ST. PAUL

When I was eight to ten years old I was a member of a crew. I remember there were about ten, seven boys and three girls. We were in the same classroom from third grade until we finished elementary school. During the class we liked to work in teams. On break time we liked to share our lunch and we played football soccer, but many times we were in trouble because we broke windows. Our parents paid to fix the windows, and obviously, they were upset.

After school we liked to do homework

together. When the teacher gave science homework, our favorite place to meet was La Plaza in the downtown of our little village. When we finished the homework, we told ghost stories. We imagined the stories our grandparents told us about how our village was founded. It was settled by Chichimecas and Spanish conquistadors. We played marbles and hide-and-seek, and sometimes we liked to walk to the Dam La Polvora (Powder Dam). This provides water for many villages for crops and grains such as wheat, sorghum, and corn. Of course our parents worried but they knew we were OK. I have very good memories of my childhood even though I am an only child. Today we have communication between us through social networks.

Arisbeth Gómez is originally from Mexico.

How I Learned What School Is

BILAN AHMED, ST. CLOUD

When I was young, I asked my father, "Father, are the children learning how to wrestle in school?" He decided to let me go to school to find out what school was all about.

At school, girls wore short blue skirts and white blouses, but the older girls wore long skirts and they sat away from the younger girls. They acted like they were better than us.

I remember one day a girl who was in the oldest group was fighting with me. She told me, "When class is finished, I will be waiting for you outside, so if you aren't afraid of me, come to me." If I didn't go there, all the students would bully me and maybe every one of them would try to fight me. But if I attended the challenge

and defended myself, nobody would bother me after that.

When I went to the place, she was ready for me and the fighting began. She put her hands on her waist, then tried to kick her leg into my stomach, but I caught her leg and she fell down. I sat on her stomach. I won that fight. After that day, I became the hero of my class.

My First Time at the Beach

ERMILO MARTIN-URZUA, CHASKA

My first time at Miami Beach, the most famous beach in America, was an experience I will never forget. It was a beautiful moment, feeling the ocean water on my body. I had always heard that ocean water is salty, but I had never imagined it was until I tasted it.

Some friends recommended my wife and I try the nightclubs on Ocean Drive. It was very exciting to hear live salsa music and dance in the nightclubs. Another crazy thing we did was go to a nude beach. It was a different experience, and at first I was embarrassed that the people would see me naked, but after about 20 minutes I felt comfortable because nobody was watching other people. The beach had rules against that so people would feel comfortable there.

Now we are planning another vacation to Miami Beach with a cruise to the Bahamas, too.

Ermilo Martin-Urzuza is originally from Mexico.

Stolen Wallet

JESUS HOLGUIN



I Remember Burma

THAY MOO, ST. PAUL

In October and November.

I remember Burma.

In October and November, I harvested rice, soybeans, and corn.

Tobacco, beans, tomato, and chili.

I saw Burma. My family planted corn, chili, rice, tobacco, tomatoes, and vegetables. I felt happy. I miss Burma. I planted. I never forget.

Thay Moo is originally from Burma.

Farming in Burma's Climate

PAW EH CHOE KWAY, ST. PAUL

I remember my family lived in Burma. Sometimes, it was wet and warm. My family felt happy.

In January and February, my family planted vegetables, tomatoes, cabbages, and okra.

In March and April, it was very dry. Sometimes there were fires.

In May, we planted rice and corn. In July and August, it was wet and rainy. I remember when my grandmother told many, many stories.

In October and November, we harvested rice. The neighbors helped my family. My mother said the food smelled so good. In December, it was windy and cold.

In Burma, it's never snowy, never icy. It was very fun. I lived with all my family together. I miss my home town very much. I felt happy. I miss Burma.

Paw Eh Choe Kway is originally from Burma.

When I Was a Child

ALEIDA CONTRERA PEREZ, ST. PAUL

I grew up in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The weather is hot in

Nuevo Laredo. Outside of Nuevo Laredo there is dry grass,

Some prickly pear cactus and mesquite trees. Nuevo Laredo

Is border town with Laredo, Texas across the River Bravo.

In the city there are eucalyptus trees and nut trees.

When I was a child, I played with my cousins on the tree

Swing and I liked the park by the River Bravo and

Barbecue with my family.

Aleida Contrera Perez is originally from Mexico.

Waiting for Sunrise

LAO TAN LE, ST. PAUL

Do you think in the region under control of the enemy there is still someone who loves us? I think so because I met someone when I was in my army.

I had participated in one big operation coordinated between the American and Vietnamese army in the Que Son district. This area is rolling hills and mountains and thinly populated. A few rice fields were planted with sugar cane so the enemy took full advantage of the area to reform their units. We called this area the free firing zone.

After 15 days searching for the enemy we had found many enemy supply bases such as uniforms, rice, and fresh food like a flock of ducks and herds of cows. On this morning we received orders for all units to retreat. Everybody was very happy.

Suddenly, one old man appeared. He walked through our night location camp, and on his shoulder he carried a bundle of wood. When he was close, he said, "I saw many at Lotus Lake."

What do you think? Do you believe with him or doubt? Because the people in this area belonged to the enemy, but in the army we needed to believe him.

Immediately, we prepared to fight. When we arrived at the Lotus Lake, we found burnt fires; we estimated the enemy was at least one battalion. We requested to attack immediately because the enemies hadn't ditched their hold yet and were not ready to fight. But the marine headquarters said, that area belonged to them, so we continued moving home.

At about 3:00 p.m., we got orders to come back to Lotus Lake and attack. This time everybody was very tired and had low spirits too, but we had to carry out the order.

At 5:00 p.m. we began attacking. We found about 50 enemy bodies, but they still opened fire on us. One of our commanders was very happy—he saw the enemy’s dead bodies in the air raid shelter. In one enemy’s hands there was a weapon. The commander jumped to pick up that gun, but under the dead body there was another wounded enemy. He opened fire with a series of shots to the chest. The commander was killed. When I heard, I became nervous.

We didn’t have enough time to research the target thoroughly and the area was thick with shrubs, bamboo, and sugar cane. The dark was coming so we camped overnight on the hill.

The darkness was always friendly with the enemy. They knew where we were, but we didn’t know where they were.

All of us were awake the whole night. The night was long and the time waiting was longer than the time working! Now we remembered all day long we had only breakfast and water; we were hungry and thirsty. But we needed to wait for sunrise.

The next day we captured about thirty crew and weapons. The enemies withdrew. The operation was over. We came back home with victory and regretted the other commander who never came back.

Lao Tan Le is 78 and originally from Vietnam.

My First Swimming Lesson

MAWUGNON SAMATI, MINNEAPOLIS

When I was 12 years old my friend Paul brought me to the Zion River to teach me how to swim. I was very afraid because the river was very large. Its surface was blue.

Paul encouraged me to put my foot in the river, but I refused. I had never tried to put my foot in a river, and it was my first time. When I refused, Paul didn’t hate me. He knew I had never tried before.

The second time he brought me, he got in the water with me. I tried to swim, but I got water in my nose and mouth. Then I decided to leave, but Paul told me to try again. After more training, Paul gave me some techniques to master swimming. Now I can swim any time.

Mawugnon Samati is originally from Togo.

In the Ambulance

MI HYANG BACK, ST. PAUL

It is a son!

The doctor told me with a very excited voice. I felt relieved because I already had two daughters. After the birth, he asked the nurses to finish the last treatment. But I heard their whispering, “I can’t measure her blood pressure, it is so low. And it is going down. Call the doctor!” They called a doctor and he called 9-1-1.

The ambulance came so fast, and they carried me as fast as they could. They made me lie down in the ambulance and drove it to Yon University Hospital. In the middle of the ride, I saw the sky through the window.

The sky was fuzzy and bright at the same time to me, and all my memories were flying and drawing in the sky like old films. I felt some warm liquid between my legs, and I felt shame because I thought I peed on the bed. My husband told me it was okay, and he made me relax. But there was lots of blood. I became unconscious.

They drove me to the emergency room and gave me surgery. My family waited in the hallway for long hours with sweaty hands. My sister had already thought about how to raise my children without their mom and cried breathlessly. It was a too scary moment.

After five hours, I came out with many medical machines. I received 20 packs of blood transfusions and stayed at the hospital for seven days without my baby.

During that time I really wanted to see, hold, and feed my baby breast milk, but I couldn't because I had to take lots of medicine and had a lack of energy. My mom took good care to me and I thanked God and the many people who are 9-1-1 rescuers, doctors, and nurses.

Now I feel I live an extra life because of them. I still give thanks to them when my son gives a smile to me. I often hear an ambulance sound and when I get out of the way, my memory flashes into my mind. I close my eyes and pray for them. God bless them.

Mi Hyang Back is originally from South Korea.

When I Was a Child

BERTHA LOPEZ, ST. PAUL

I grew up Huehuetenango, Guatemala. I have three children. My country has mountains. The mountains have many trees. People plant cinnamon and coffee. My father picked the coffee.

This city is by the river the river has fish and shrimp. My children played in the river and they fished every day and sold fish. My father taught my children and the neighbor how to plant the cinnamons and coffee. This is my little story. My name is Bertha. I am from Guatemala.

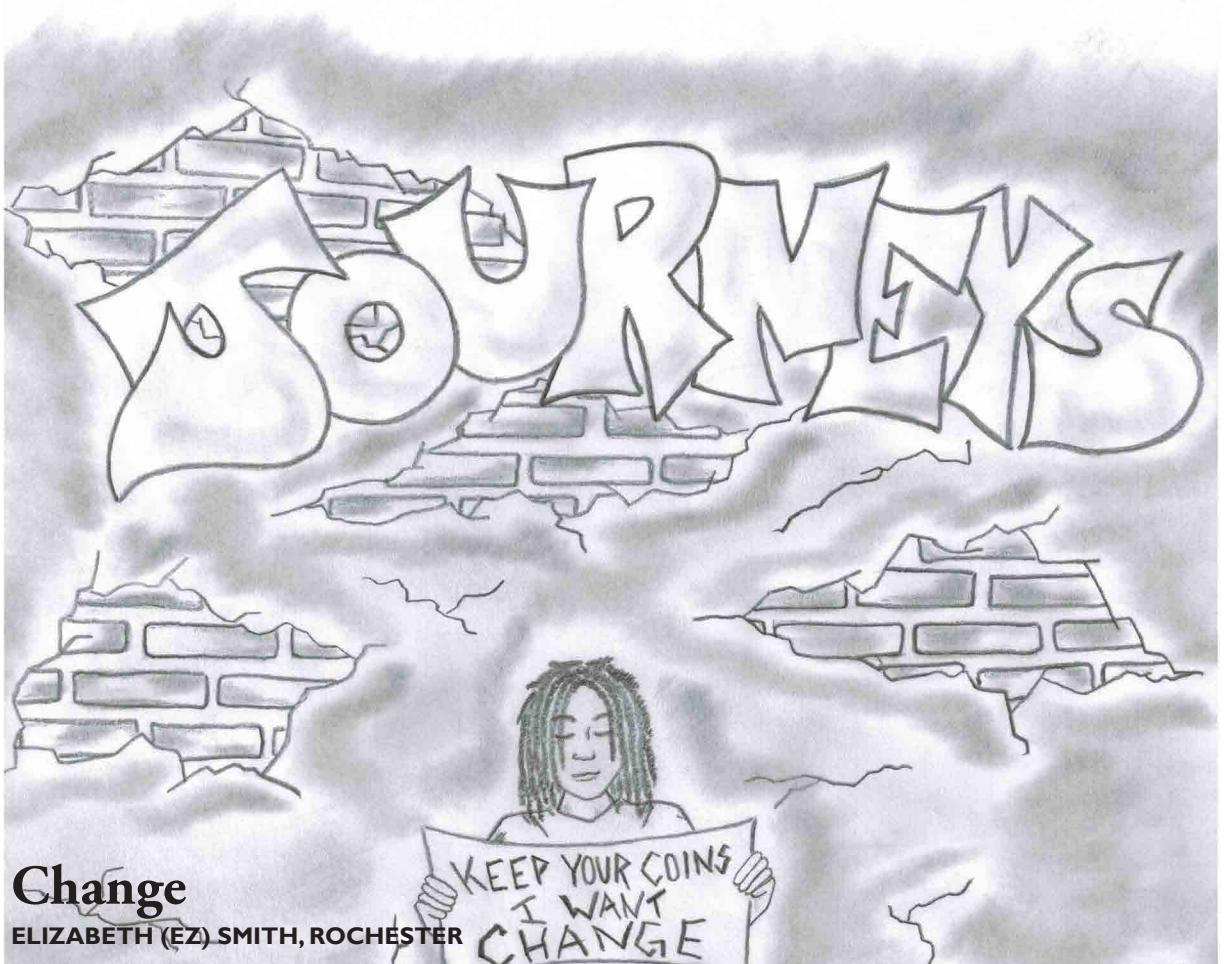
Bertha Lopez is 43 and originally from Guatemala.

My Oldest Memory

MIHAIL DRON, COON RAPIDS

The oldest memory I have is of when I was about five years old. I remember that my uncle had a German shepherd called Palima. One winter day my uncle harnessed the dog to the sled and put me in it, but the dog didn't want to pull me, so my uncle caught a cat and put this cat to run in front of the dog. After that the dog started to pull me very fast, and my uncle ran with us. After 3-5 minutes of running the dog made a right turn and I flew into the snow, but the dog kept following the cat. Every time I recall this story, I remember that dog, because he was very smart and understood a lot. Sometimes he listened to what I ordered him.

IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



Featured Author



MAXWELL OLSON

was raised in a traditionally American environment, so like many other Americans he had unfairly attributed the attacks of September 11th to the Muslim community at large. With the increase of Middle-Eastern emigration, the topic of Islam has been once again brought into contention. Thankfully, because of this, he has been able to see an entirely different angle of the Islamic world. In his piece of writing he describes what he's seen in photos and videos coming out of Europe and what

it must be like to have fought for one's life from tyranny, only to be met with a wave of racism upon your arrival in your new home. He hopes that people who are outspoken on this issue will take the time to consider the people it affects and put themselves in their shoes.

Hijrah (Migration)

MAXWELL OLSON, ROSEMOUNT

Thousands—nameless, shapeless—
Like a mass of lambs herded to the
slaughter.
They shuffle out of train cars,
Scale fences topped with barb.
One by one they seek to make their way
In a world crippled and divided by
indecision—
A world ill equipped.

Forced from their homes, from comfort,
By bullets, bombs, and poison.
Left with one clear choice:
Life in the West or death here at home.

A vitriolic chorus heralds their arrival—
A song of hate and fury underlined by
fear.

They carry the responsibility of others'
actions

And blame undeserved.

Still, they press on forward,

Stuck between two rocks.

And with their homeland at their backs

And a weight on their hearts,

They distance themselves from one evil

Only to adopt in its place another.

Maxwell Olson is 17.

A Nice Experience In Minneapolis

LIGIA CID FIGUEROA, MINNEAPOLIS

One of the experiences I've had living in Minneapolis was when I was invited by students from the University of Minnesota. They were interested in talking and learning about immigration. Certainly it is an issue that is really transcendent in these problematic days we live in.

There are various reasons why people migrate from their countries. But I think the most traumatic reason for this situation is when you have to leave your country and your loved ones because your existence is threatened.

Living in a war zone because your life is threatened by evil dictators, or an abusive government that does not accept the diversity of ideas, killing its opponents, these are the cruelest experiences of an immigrant.

But immigration becomes a massive, painful problem when thousands and thousands of people look for a place to live and for people to host them. So I found it interesting that some students at the University were concerned about researching, studying, and better understanding the diversity offered by immigration. I found it interesting that they took this interest and want to go on to look for solutions.

There are several reasons for immigration, however, I think that the integration of immigrants, with rights and obligations, could be a part of the solution of the problem.

Ligia Cid Figueroa is originally from the United States.

Fearless Father

DEAN M., ROSEMOUNT

What is it that goes through a man's head seconds before he dies?

What causes a person to make a truly heroic action?

What is it that allows someone to put all selfishness aside, focusing on the greater good of humanity?

What allows a man to accept death by tackling a suicide bomber?

Is it the recognition of fate, or is it the love for his daughter?

Those whose lives he saved can be joyful.

Those who loved him will be distraught.

Do we mourn or celebrate the death of such a man?

The tragedies were terrible, but we can be happy.

We can be happy for the selflessness of this man.

Although there also resides the understanding of those who perished,

And the realization that the world is short one person with such benevolence.

Maybe the world is short its only person with that much heroism.

Do we call him fearless or selfless?

Either way, he saved hundreds.

Never forget the fearless father.

Dean M. is 17 and originally from the United States.

Coffee

ARSEMA SEWNET, ST. PAUL

Coffee is a good drink for everyone. If you need to drink coffee, first go shopping, buy coffee, and come back to your house. Ethiopia and the USA are very different. In Ethiopia, coffee is made at home and over a fire. They have a big ceremony and on the side have bread and popcorn. In Ethiopia, we drink coffee with neighbors in a small cup. We talk to each other and have fun.

In USA everyone drinks coffee. Some people make it at home by machine. Some people buy Caribou or Starbucks in a big cup. Everybody is drinking a different kind of coffee, some people drink it with milk, some people drink it without sugar and some people drink it with salt. But for me, I like black coffee.

I like coffee in Ethiopia because we have a big ceremony, and family and neighbors drink together and play. It is so fun.

Arsema Sewnet is 36 and originally from Ethiopia.

Culture

IRMA GARRITY, EAGAN

I was born and raised in Puerto Rico, and my husband is from Wisconsin. The first time I brought my husband back home, it was a culture shock for him. At the beginning it was difficult for him to get used to the weather, food, and people. Puerto Rico has a very hot climate all year round. It was too hot for him. The food was another challenge for him. He said that it was too salty or spicy. The most culture shock was with the people. He noticed that we tend to talk loudly, we are

very affectionate, and we never worry about anything. I remember he said that Puerto Rico people are all on island time.

The funny part of this whole story is that he's been eating salty and spicy food, leaving the heater at almost 80 degrees all winter long, and listening to a loud wife for 10 years. Yes, we been happily married for 10 years.

Women

ANONYMOUS, FRIDLEY

The women are the basis of everything in life. She is mother, sister, and wife. The women can work and drive a car but she does not look like a man, God says "No male is like a female." So, I will write about some of the comparisons and differences of women in the USA & KSA.

In America, women drive but in Saudi Arabia, women do not drive because Islam imposes a chaperone with women. Things in common between the two countries: the women work in companies and hospitals. etc.

Some of the differences between the two countries: handshakes. In KSA, a man does not touch the hands of women unlike in USA, because the religion of Islam does not allow women to mix with any man, just the chaperone. When we speak of religion in Saudi Arabia, we talk about Islam, which forces women to wear the hijab. But in America, there is complete freedom to wear what you want.

Finally, the women are the most beautiful things in life. Also, we all know that every religion has different costumes.

County Blues

QUINCY HARRIS, BUFFALO

The question is often posed, are we being
oppressed or oppressing ourselves?

Or are we just another book on the white
man's shelves?

With human nature ritual, with messed up
metals
and messed up principles.

With three common strikes against us that
label us as unfortunate ones;

being ignorant, a minority, and being young.

This system isn't fit to benefit us and never
will be.

There's more than pimps, killers, and hustlers
in these forsaken streets.

Yet, we, with our unfinished business and
unquenched thirst

Are soon to be riding in the back of a candy-
appled hearse.

With tint and sounds loud enough to be
heard,

Yet if they hear the music, why don't they
understand the words.

See, the road less traveled should have been
traveled more often

'Cause the road most frequently traveled ends in
a cell or a coffin.

Everywhere I go I see death along the way.

They say we are dropping at an alarming
rate.

Homicide, suicide, infanticide, do or die,
genocide.

The facts are there; no lies.

No exaggerations or misinterpreted charts.

It's like as soon as life begins, death starts.

It's essential to the way we live

And even shows in the faces of our kids,

In their actions and the way they think

Somehow we need to find the source and
destroy the link.

If not, the cycle will continue

And they'll have their choice to order from
death's menu.

Delicacies of a variety to choose for their
taste,

Not knowing life is to be preserved, not to waste.

But how is that possible when it's the hot
topic of the news

And even lurking in their schools,

Whispering sweet nothings in their not-so-
innocent ears.

That's why the gangster is glorified amongst
their peers.

Just look at their lack of fear and willingness to
kill.

This isn't an opinion, this is how the mothers
and fathers feel

When they're elegantly dressed in their best
of black

Wishing to reverse the cycle and bring their loved ones back.

It's too late for them, but not for you.

All you have to do is love and get the message through.

Light Up the Darkness

CODY CLEMENTS, BUFFALO

I howl at the moon that can't hear me. It's dark here. How do I light the darkness if I can't have fire? Maybe that's the point; extinguish the flame. I'm almost out of fuel now. I claw at my surroundings to scavenge for more, but it's dark out here. I feel as if my soul is famished but always feeding on phantoms. My stomach screams at me, starving for something real. So I lift another forkful of vapors to my mouth. My diet is made up of illusion and mirage. The more I digest, the emptier I become. The only light I can find is in the small home I've created in a box where the walls keep caving in. Medication has made the vibrations tranquil enough to make it possible to find sleep each night.

Today my Shangri-La is invaded by an unpredictable energy, trying to pawn off its untamed primal instinct. This is the furnace where gladiators are forged. It is dark here. My existence is no longer guaranteed. After life's game of hearts and the cards have been laid we observe whose trump before being ripped from the familiar place I've called home. Escorted by two Goliaths down a seemingly endless corridor to a place I can't call home. The cold restraints of steel piercing deep beneath my skin, holding my heart hostage.

There is no ransom that can buy a way out of this. Only Earth's uncontrollable spinning. It's even darker here. I'm in a HOLE and I can't see a place to start climbing; just time, time, time.

Time is a strange beast that can't be tamed. It devours all things, but it lets you stroke its mane. Forty-four rotations, 1,056 twisted fragments of a clock, 63,360 fleeting thoughts, til I finally hear the keys in the door that jingle the tune of my fate. I'm blinded by the light that follows. I can finally make the pilgrimage back to the place I've called home as of late. It's not so dark here. It's easier to be strong, but I'm still fighting the demons. They whisper a tempting lullaby in my ear, but I must be strong.

The mail brings my lifejackets and I find more light in the love of my family and friends. I am a Moonstone on a dark night grasping at any light; a Beacon of Hope in calm water. Struggling to be a rock for others in a rushing river. I close my eyes and I'm enveloped by miles of love and strength, looking up at the Son and the Joy of the stars and the sky. They guide me home while I sail a one-man sloop through the perfect storm. I will hold these moments for eternity. It's not so dark here.

Is Seeking Power Human Nature?

SERAFIN GODINEZ, MINNEAPOLIS

Humans are all born with certain feelings, such as anger, love, fear, and other emotions that I don't know how to describe in this little essay. Sometimes how these emotions expand depends on where we were born or the environment where we live. Power is a sense of

human fulfillment. Through power, humans generally intensify emotions. Power gives us a feeling of strength and aggressiveness, that we can achieve everything that we want, and even influence others to follow us, one way or another, whatever our will prefers.

Throughout history we realize that power can lead to acts of courage or excessive cruelty. As it were, by some fault of this power, many Native Americans died at the hands of Spanish, English, and, to a lesser amount, the French. In 1492 Christopher Columbus reached the shores of America, and 29 years later the Aztec Empire fell into the hands of the Spaniards under Hernan Cortes, starting one of the largest empires in history that spanned from the southern USA to what we know today as Argentina. In this process the Spaniards ended two of the most flourishing cultures from the American continent, the Aztecs and Incas. In a few years the Spaniards killed almost 60 percent of American natives from these cultures. In addition, the English arrived in America in 1607, and they expanded to the center of the continent, bought Louisiana from France and took half of the new Spanish territories, with the same consequences for the natives of this piece of land: loss of the ancestral life, land and lives at the hands of the named conquerors.

In a brief review of these paragraphs all this is brought about by the power of these two nations, Spaniards for the gold, in what is now Latin America, and English, for the wealth of natural resources that were in the aspired land. We have to reflect about this meaning called power. Why do the people look a lot for this feeling if most of the time it only causes problems?

Serafin Godinez is originally from Mexico.

My Political Awakening

SERKAN KELESOGLU, MINNEAPOLIS

I'm from Turkey, and I was a social studies teacher there. When I was born in 1982, generals had made a military coup in my country. In following years, all of the Turkish people had very bad times because of military management. The people, who were political, had been arrested and tortured by military forces. So my parents raised me up as a non-political person.

I graduated from university in 2004. I started my master's degree and got a new job in a private college. I had been studying with a teacher about instructional design. My working conditions were very good. Our students were members of wealthy families and our campus was out of the city.

In 2012, I had left from my job in college and started to work in university as a research assistant. After beginning my new job, my perspective on life did change. I recognized that when I had worked my former job, I was like a fish in an aquarium. My university and new students made me think more critically.

In 2013, there was a park in Istanbul, called Gezi Park, where the government wanted to build a mall. A great number of people protested this decision, because they wanted a place for fresh air and everywhere else in Istanbul is full of buildings, increasing day by day. Not only people living there protested, but also people living in other cities.

At the beginning, I watched news about protests on TV. However, the news on social

media, like Twitter and Facebook, were very different. So I joined the protest. A lot of people were injured or killed by someone, sometimes even by the police. During the protest I couldn't watch the news on TV. I learned that the mass media lies to us, lies to every citizen.

Our president and some parliamentarians said this event is a conspiracy and the people to kill are terrorists. But I know that one person killed was a 15 year old child. He went to the market to buy bread. Meanwhile, he was hit by a police firework. His dead body was brought to his home, to his mother's arms.

From that day on, I recognized that everything I've seen or watched from mass media is a big lie. I now never rely on the mass media and now feel that I am a political person.

Stranger in the Mirror

BRANDON PETERSEN, ST. CLOUD

When I look in the mirror, I no longer see a kid
I look back at the years, where the hell have I
been

At closer inspection, all I see is a stranger

I look another direction, because I feel he's a
danger

It's sad I find it hard to look into his eyes

Because the truth that he tells me, hurts more
than his lies

He knows where I've been, and where I want
to be

And as I sit in the pen, I'm forced to look and
see

So I open my mind's eye, as my external ones
shut

Memory lane it flies by, and I'm at first happy;
but

Read between all the lines and get sick to my gut
Realizing the wrongs, I just sit back and say
@#&!

I've left so much unfinished, half done, and left
due

It's time I admitted to myself what I must do

I have to stay focused and surrender the boozing
Before my loose ends, they tie together like
nooses

I can no longer give power to the shades of my
past

Shoulda, woulda, coulda, is destruction,
disguised in its masks

Hindsight is my enemy, if I dwell there I'll die

But my heart is a friend of me, it tells me the
limits the sky, so it's all in my mind just have
to live it and fly

And if my resolve is the same, then I have
synchronized right

So I must live in the day, and let the past be gone

And when I make a mistake, I must fix it and
move on

To again love me for me, I know what I must do

That's awake from this dream, and just start anew
So with my focus revised and my mentality
cleared

Hopefully that when I open these eyes, it will
be me in the mirror

Brandon Petersen is originally from the United States.

The Kimono and the Women of Japan

MEGUMI STEFFAN, WASECA

I was born in Kyoto, Japan. It is said that those who are living in Kyoto do not begrudge the expenses of a kimono. My grandfather on my mother's side was a hand painter of kimonos. I was glowing while I admired the beautiful patterns with brilliant colors on the kimono fabric. They were painted by my grandfather and his apprentices. This is why I was brought up to be a woman of the kimono.

I think that the kimono is a part of Japanese culture to be proud of in the world. The kimono has inherited a long Japanese history.

The kimono is a good style for Japanese women and is suitable for the Japanese climate with its four seasons. It is good for Japanese women's shapes and it shows their charming and attractive personalities. I think that movement in accord with the kimono makes a beautiful feminine action like the woman herself. They are both gorgeous and elegant.

The kimono is not for activity like other clothes. We have to learn special manners and conduct when we eat, sit down, walk, and pick up something. For example, when we sit, we must keep both knees together, hold our hands at our tummies, and sit up straight. Most importantly, we must hold the long sleeve when picking up something. We can't show the inside of the sleeve to other people by raising the hand too high.

Rules for wearing the kimono seem to be

very serious when I write it in this way, but these rules are logical and become natural. It is not difficult at all.

I hope those women who read my essay have an opportunity to wear a kimono. When you wear it, you think about the combination of the kimono's material and pattern. You must have an obi, or wide fabric belt, but you can choose from many types of material, threads, paintings, and dyes. Obis have many shapes on the back such as butterflies or flowers. You can accessorize your kimono with zori slippers, a handbag, and hair accessories. Please express your new self individually.

I hope that wearing a kimono may lead you to a course to learn Japanese history and how it is to be a Japanese woman.

Megumi Steffan is 67 and originally from Japan.

America, Helpful Country

MAWOULAWOE FOLI, ST. PAUL

My name is Mawoulawoe Elise A. Foli. I'm from Togo, West Africa. Togo is a small country on a map, between Ghana and Benin. My family is Christian, that's why they gave me this beautiful name, Mawoulawoe, that means God will provide. Is it not a good name? I love it. This name is in my language (Mina). In my country we've many foreign languages from South to North. We speak these languages before we go to school to learn French. If you don't go to school you can't speak French. Does somebody speak French here? *Parlez vous Franciais?* Me! I speak four languages. French, Mina, Ewe, and English. We have English classes in Togo, but I didn't

choose to go to these classes. I didn't speak English before I came to the U.S.

Thank you, America, who cares about us with adult classes to communicate with people who are from another country. We very much thank this country and its government for all the help they gave to us, like English, jobs, insurance, the opportunity to become citizens, and the bringing together of all families to live in peace and in happiness. America, you are a free and helpful country. We can't forget you. We are appreciative and thank you very much. Peace and Blessings from God is yours!

Mawoulawoe Foli is 70 and originally from Togo.

Different Generations

ARAD SUGULE, ST. CLOUD

The present younger generation is always different from the older generation. There are many ways that both generations are different, but these differences do not mean that one is good and one is bad. Both generations have some negative and positive aspects. The present generation is completely based on computers, but the older generation does not depend on computers. Many people of the older generation do not know how to operate the computer. People in the younger generation forget handwriting. They use electronics, email and mobile phones. What I like about the older generation is how they make relationships in the family and neighborhood. Many people in the younger generation do not have that quality. Finally, I would like to say there are differences in both generations, but

it will be good if we learn positive things from both the older generation and the younger generation. This will be good not only for people and families but also for countries.

Arad Sugule is 43 and is originally from the United States.

Throwing a Tantrum

CAIT CASEY, ROSEMOUNT

He's at it again.

He's throwing a tantrum.

One tragedy

After the other.

It's all proof

He knows

He's going to lose.

He will always be the underdog.

Getting his way

The only way

He knows how.

Throwing a tantrum.

Taking lives

In mass quantities

To add more souls

To his list.

These poor people

Damned to

Spend eternity

In his fiery pit.

On a Friday night,

Evil struck again.
This time near the
Heart of Paris.
Evil assailants,
Gunmen and suicide bombers,
Close in on the
Citizens across town
Almost simultaneously.
All densely populated areas
Three of them
Surrounded an event stadium,
All clothed in identical explosive vests,
With terrible intentions.
Elsewhere, near the center of the city
Other destructions
Were unraveling.
Vicious gunmen arrived
In a black vehicle,
Taking aim with their
Semi-automatic rifles,
Almost as if
Pointing lightning.
They then struck the people,
Opening fire amongst them.
The poor civilians
Initially thought the sounds
They were hearing
Were firecrackers.
In attempts to
Avoid the chaos
People dropped to the ground

And hid behind tables.
Over a hundred shots were fired
As more lives fall victim
To this evil,
And many more are injured.
Other targets of the gunmen are hit,
Tallying even more lives.
The deadliest attack of the night
Took place at a concert hall.
Again, arriving in
A black vehicle.
They stormed through the main entrance
To the back of the concert hall,
Opening fire on the crowd.
Taking 89 lives
And leaving yet another 99 in critical
condition.
A total of 129 souls taken
And hundreds wounded.
There he goes again,
Throwing a temper tantrum.

Black Lives Matter

ANDREA PARKER, MINNEAPOLIS

Black lives matter. In today's world, our black men are getting killed every day all over the world by the police. Why is it that it's justifiable to kill black men because you have a badge on? Why, when a person kills someone, do they get arrested the same day but, when the police kill someone, they go home on paid leave? I think that it's

unconstitutional for them to take a life and suffer no consequence.

So, as a black woman raising a young black man, I would love to see something being done to save our black men. More people should come together and hold the police accountable, just like we will be held accountable for raising respectful young men. Stop killing our father, brother, and our son, taking the men that can be helping make better men. Daughters growing up without a father and no one to give them away at their wedding. So let's come together and show them that black lives do matter.

Andrea Parker is 40 and originally from the United States.

Some things that I will keep about my own culture are greetings, clothing, and language. Traditionally, Karen people do not shake hands or bow. In Western culture, people shake hands. Karen people might shake with their right hand but support the forearm with the left because it is more respectful to use both hands. Also, it's important to wear traditional clothes when we celebrate Karen Martyr Day and Karen New Year. I want to be about 50 percent Americanized, but I don't know about my children's generation. How Americanized will they be? I hope they keep our language, holidays, and clothes! I will keep my Karen culture. I am not shy to be Karen in America.

TaKah Wah is 27 and originally from Burma.

Being Karen in America

TAKAH WAH, ST. PAUL

I was born in Burma. I have three brothers and one sister. In Burma, I went to school and helped my family in the garden by watering the vegetables. Sometimes I helped my mom feed the animals. Because of the civil war, my family moved to a Thai refugee camp. In the camp, I went to school and helped my family. In 2007, I moved to the United States with my family. I brought some of my Karen clothes and still wear them for Karen New Year and when I go to church. Sometimes I buy some different styles of Karen clothes. At home I speak my own language, but at school I speak English because I have many classmates from many different countries. I came to school to learn more English. After I finish getting my diploma, I will find a good job that I really like.

The Land of Freedom

CHRISTINA THAW, ALBERT LEA

I was born in Burma (Myanmar) and grew up in a refugee camp in Thailand. Now I live in the land of freedom which is called America. When I came here, I brought Karen traditional clothes, music, books, and the national flag with me.

I'm Karen, so I love my Karen flag, which has meaningful colors, designs, and symbols. I put it on the wall and share some facts about the Karen flag with my kids. On the flag is a frog drum which symbolizes unity in traditional Karen culture. Ancient Karen people used the frog drum during war and venerated it. There is an elephant cage on the frog drum. The white elephant is a treasure. The nine rays of light that stream from it stand for the rising sun and the nine regions from which Karen people traced

their origins. The rising sun gave a bright light to all Karen people in the world. The red streak was used on the fabric for heroism and perseverance. The white streak was for purity and clarity, and the blue is for honesty and peace.

Back home, I wore Karen clothes at home, church, school, work, and special holidays. Here, I wear Karen clothes only on holidays. I don't wear the sarongs at all because they are not comfortable. I feel good when I wear my American clothes.

Every summer break, I teach my kids how to read and write the Karen language. Yet, my kids really like the American culture because that's what they hear, learn, and see at school. However, I would like them to keep their own culture and still explore the new culture of the U.S. People assimilate best when they follow the laws and rules of the new culture but respect their own religion, culture, and traditions.

Christina Thaw is 30 and originally from Burma.

To Trayvon Martin

ANYA HAYSLETT, APPLE VALLEY

Only 17 years young

You didn't deserve this

With only a Brisk, a bag of Skittles in your hand,

And a cell phone to your ear talking to your miss

Walking in the rain

It made you look suspicious

But that man walking behind you

Was a lot more vicious

If you would've just drove

Or walked a different way

Maybe we wouldn't be here mourning you

And dreaming of the man you'd be today

You were somebody's child,

Cousin, and friend

I always will wonder

Why your life had to end

I never even knew you

Until the day you left Earth

But I wish that I had

To know of your worth

As much as I wish

I could rewind time,

All I can do is keep your name

In my mind

I will never forget you

My guardian angel in heaven

Who unreasonably lost his life

2012 in February around seven

Anya Hayslett is 18.

Becoming Americanized

SHENG YANG, ST. PAUL

As the youngest daughter born into a poor family in a small village in Laos, I didn't have much education and didn't get to study like the boys did. In the past, the elders believed that girls didn't need an education because one day they would leave their parents' house and get married. In my family, though, my parents had strict rules for my siblings and me. My mom told me that I should know how to cook, clean, wake up early, and have ethical behavior so someone would want to marry me. I couldn't go out with any boys alone because I would lose face and no one would want to marry me. Even during the Hmong New Year, she would always follow me. I would always feel embarrassed when I was with my friends. I didn't get to do what I wanted because in Laos, we didn't have individual rights. My mom told me that by doing good things I would receive good things. Is that true?

When I married my husband and came to the U.S., everything was totally different. Even married women acted and looked spectacular, like teenagers, so I wanted to be more Americanized: have short hair, wear sexy clothes, and color my hair. Instead, I got a husband who acted like my mom! He didn't want me to be the way I wanted to be. He wanted a traditional wife. Whenever I feel the need to adjust myself to be more Americanized, someone is pulling me down, making me act in the old traditional way. Even if I adjust some part of me, another part will never forget who I am and where I came from. I should be able to change my

appearance and still act like a traditional wife. I also want my children to be Americanized, yet never forget their heritage and where their ancestors came from.

Sheng Yang is 26 and originally from Laos.

Prejudice

MARISSA KHEERESANTIKUL, ST. PAUL

According to Wikipedia, the word prejudice means prejudgment or forming an opinion before becoming aware of relevant facts of a case. Around the world, prejudice often takes place in regards to sex, nationality, class, sexual orientation, race, religion, language, and culture. When I was a child growing up in Thailand, I experienced prejudice related to culture. Hmong is a minority ethnic group with their own language, culture, and customs; we live among a majority population of the Thai ethnic group. As my family migrated from the highlands to the lowland, we experienced being looked down upon by our Thai neighbors. My family was forced to change our last name and wear Thai clothes to avoid further prejudice. We were perceived as filthy, illiterate, and uncivilized. Prior to hiding our cultural identity, we would often be denied the opportunity to enroll in school or go to work.

My experience regarding gender prejudice was even more dramatic. For thousands of years, the Hmong have practiced a tradition in which males are superior in the family structure. It is believed that a boy grows up to carry the

clan name, while a girl marries away to a different clan where she will contribute her time and talent. When I grew up, I was denied the opportunity to go to school until I turned 10. Fortunately for my sisters, my female cousins, and me, an uncle went to fight for us in the family council. He pointed out to the clan leadership that the times had changed and that our family must allow girls the right to an education and other formal personal skills. Even so, my parents still would spend more money on the boys. My sisters and I had to work to pay for most things needed for school such as uniforms, books, and shoes. We were expected to babysit the younger siblings and help with house chores while the brothers played with friends and hung out. This prejudice was unfair and wrong.

Since I got married, I have been able to continue helping my parents with both money and ideas for the well-being of their clan and family. In conclusion, prejudice is not only wrong, but it hurts a lot. In both experiences, I realize that prejudice occurs because of ignorance, but the result is the mistreatment of members of the society.

Marissa Kheereesantikul is originally from Thailand.

Islamophobia

ABDELJIBAR MUNASSAR, BURNSVILLE

It was a nightmare,

Jaber, it's her name.

What you see or hear, it's not the real of her.

Blue, white, red. Yes, it's my country, why?

Because it's mine before it be yours.

You can't call her terrorist because she's not responsible for all that happened, either now or later.

Here or there, she's your friend, sister, wife, or your daughter. She is a Muslim, yes she is, and saying it loud to let you know she's not a terrorist.

Panic, blood, tears, and loss.

She was shocked and grieved, just like everyone, thinking that she could have been in that concert.

This is not a usual thing.

She sells fast food at the small store in the corner.

Islamophobia

She could have been any of those people who died or were injured.

Please break that wall and look closer. Muslims, Christians, et cetera, at the end of the day we are all in this tragedy.

Justice is very lenient

Blue, white, red

No pain, no gain

Yes, it's my country.

And it was a nightmare.

Abdeljibar Munassar is 21 and originally from Somalia.

Assimilation

VELIA DOMINGUEZ, MAPLEWOOD

When I decided to leave the nest, I was so happy because all my dreams were going to come true. On the other hand, I was sad for all the things I was leaving behind. However, my grandma told me, "This is all you ever wished for."

So, I decided to begin my adventure. I brought with me my memories, my traditions, and my backpack full of dreams. Some of my good memories remained with me after all these years because they helped me develop into the person I have become, and those memories also motivated me to do the best I could with my family, friends, and acquaintances.

My traditions are not as easy to keep because there are so many. One of my traditions is to eat with the whole family around the table every day and talk, without distractions, about how our day went. We are living in a society where kids and parents don't spend time together and where material things are more important than family. We have embraced some American traditions, but I don't want that one for my kids.

One of my dreams was to save money for a career as a lawyer or psychologist. I had to postpone that dream because my family in Mexico had economic needs. This year I am finally going to get my high school diploma. I understand that it's not my whole dream, but it is part of it. Maybe I will hang up my backpack. Maybe it's too late for me. Maybe I don't have the brain capacity to study. But it is time for my kids to fulfill their dreams. My traditions and good memories will forever remain with me, and I wish for my children to carry their memories, traditions, and dreams to the next generations to come.

Velia Dominguez is 40 and originally from Mexico.

Being Mexican-American

JULIA RIOS, ROSEVILLE

When I left Mexico for the United States, I brought a few clothes with me but also a lot of memories of my childhood and teenage years. I also kept many dreams to fulfill such as to keep up with my studies and to get a good job to help my father in Mexico. Over time I put aside many of my dreams to live the dreams of my husband. We saved money to buy a car and also sent money to his family in Mexico.

We have been here for 11 years and have one child who is 10 years old. My son has driven me to fight for my dreams, and now I'm studying English and hope to get my high school diploma soon.

We celebrate many traditions here like Thanksgiving and Easter. We enjoy the food and the lakes. Here we have the opportunity to visit museums and see the snow. I still remember my country, my friends, and traditions such as El Dia de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead) when we create altars to remember friends and family who have died. One of my favorites, but one we never celebrate in my house because we don't have money, is El Dia de los Reyes Magos (Three Kings Day) where sweets and presents are given to all.

I hope my son will keep some of our traditions and also learn the Spanish language. I don't know what to leave behind. I just want to keep going, reaching my goals and teaching my son the good of being Mexican-American. There are a lot of cultural opportunities on both sides.

Julia Rios is 32 and originally from Mexico.

Think Time

HEETHAW PAW, WORTHINGTON

What did God make on each of the first six days of creation week?

Does God like to do things that will make people happy?

Why does God give so many warnings in the Bible?

Is it important to know about God's warnings and obey them?

God made you. Does he know what's best for you?

Hee Thaw Paw is 32 and originally from Burma.

Living in a Different Country Has Two Sides

MARJORIE VIVANCO, MINNEAPOLIS

I am from Ecuador, and I have lived in Minnesota for 11 years. This country offers me a lot of things: freedom, a job, a better life, new culture, and new language, but I still miss my country. I miss those beautiful and colored parades, Catholic holidays, family parties, carnival, and walking in the streets without worrying about days passing and winter coming. It is hard for me to live far from my family and adapt to the cold weather. On the other hand, I have my kids and my lovely husband who help me to get through these years. They help me adapt and learn more about American culture. I go to the school, and I learn English every day. My friends are from different countries, and I like it because they share with me their beliefs and customs.

My Assimilation

RATCHADA SANTITHANYAROJ, ST. PAUL

I was born in Thailand, a country in which racism is rampant. My experience might be different from other people who moved to the United States of America. I grew up in poverty and faced immense racial discrimination. To adapt, I learned to speak fluently in Thai to minimize the racism. I believed that it was the best way to blend myself with the mainstream. I considered myself bi-cultural while living in Thailand. It was hard, but somehow I survived.

In America, there are many immigrants who came from many different places around the world, and yet their cultures are encouraged to be kept. Because of this freedom, my perspective about my traditions has gradually changed since I arrived here in 2008. As a matter of fact, it motivated me to learn more about my traditions, especially about speaking Hmong. Because of this, I now can speak sufficient Hmong and teach my five children to speak our language as much as possible. I acknowledge that among the many things which I keep with me from Thailand. The Thai language is the main one, but now it is set aside. I now realize that by keeping my Hmong traditions and language, these will help me be who I am.

Assimilation became more important to my living in America. In addition, I'd like to improve my English, acquire more American culture, participate in civics, and become a part of this country. For my children, I anticipated that they will be completely different from me, becoming more Americanized than a typical Hmong child. They are natural-born citizens here. However, since they are growing up in a tight Hmong-

American community, they will at least keep part of my traditions and hopefully pass these on to the next generations to come.

Ratchada Santithanyaroj is 39 and originally from Thailand.

November 2015 Paris Attacks

GERMAIN GHISLAINE, HASTINGS

The events from November 13, 2015, in France have inspired me to write this reflection.

Me, who doesn't believe in God,
Me, who has neither God nor master,
Me, who believed in humanity,
Me, who had faith in men.

I think that all their gods
Are only a pretext to war.

Me, who believed in Liberty,
Me, who believed in Equality,
Me, who believed in Fraternity.

I tell myself that on this earth
Neither gods nor wars
Will not stop the human folly.

As the singer Levesque has sung,
When men will live for love,
There will be no misery.
Soldiers will be troubadours,
But we will be dead, my brother!

Germain Ghislaine is 66 and originally from France.

The Case for Euthanasia

ANONYMOUS, PLYMOUTH

We have many opportunities in our life, but sometimes we don't know what to do with one. The greatest example of this I received when my father had cancer. Doctors helped him during two years of struggling with this disease. But the last months were really terrible for him. Great pain was in all of his body. He couldn't walk or sit. Father's mind was so bright. However, his body was very weak. Sometimes he asked my mom to help him to die, but we had no legal opportunity to help him. It is really very hard to see your loved one become weaker and weaker.

Cancer is an awful disease. While people understand everything that is happening to them, they are really waiting for death and suffer from pain. In these cases, I think it would be good to give such people the opportunity to make their own decisions on what to do with their lives.

Euthanasia should be legal but not for everybody. It should help only those people who are very ill and want to stay in our memory as strong, bright, and happy people.

Not all of us can make the decision to kill oneself. Many people with cancer are living with great hope about good times when they become healthy again. And this idea helps them to struggle with their disease. Some people have strong religious motives that help to improve their lives. They choose to live with their pain as long as their heart beats. It is their own right to make this decision.

I think every one of us should have an opportunity to leave life as he or she wishes. The government should discuss this problem and create a lawful solution for everybody.

Cultural Differences

SUHYUN NA, MINNEAPOLIS

Many people who come to a new country have an experience of various cultural differences. Sometimes these differences of cultures and customs come to new visitors strangely. I have several experiences about cultural differences between Korea and the U.S.

A few days after I had moved here, I found that one window in my living room was broken, so I asked the office manager to repair it. After a while, a person who came to fix it knocked on my door. As soon as I opened the door, he entered my house with his shoes on, and I was very surprised. I could not understand why he did that. In my country, we never put on our shoes at home. Even in school, we usually change into slippers.

Another experience happened on the first day my son went to the daycare center. When entering the classroom, my son took off his shoes and put them outside. After that all of the teachers and kids gave my son an odd look. Moreover, my son bowed to the teachers, and they all laughed. Other kids just waved their hands to the teachers, and said, "Hello." However, in Korea, we bow to people who are older than us when we meet them. When students see teachers, they always bow to teachers very politely. Waving hands to seniors, including teachers, is considered a very rude behavior in Korea.

At first, some of cultural differences made me surprised, but now I have accepted them gradually.

Keeping Traditions

CELIA BELL, ST. PAUL

I was born in Burma but grew up in a Thai refugee camp because of the civil war. When I came here in 2009, I thought I needed to bring food and clothes from my culture because I thought only American people, food, and clothes were here. Instead I found many different people from many countries were here, too.

Sometimes life in America was very difficult for me because of my poor education and poor English. I was eager to learn English and get an American education. However, my children speak English more fluently than me because they grew up here. I want my children to speak both English and Karen fluently, so I try to teach them my own language. Language to me is very important because if you can't speak your own language, people will think you are a stupid person.

When I came to the U.S., I brought my traditional clothes, equipment to make those clothes, and the Karen flag to show them to the next generation. My children don't like to wear these traditional clothes because it makes them uncomfortable. It is okay with me if they don't want to wear traditional clothes, but I still wear mine to church or on special celebration days. For food, I prefer that my children eat American food because it is easy to prepare, and my children like to eat American food more than Karen food.

There are some things about American culture I don't like, though. I don't like that couples live together without marriage. Also, in my culture, we never call or use an elder person's first name, and we never make

eye contact with elder people and teachers when they admonish us. We can't cross in front of elders without bowing our heads because it would be disrespectful and rude. However, in America, we call older people by their first names and make eye contact with them even though they are older than us. I let my children do this because we live in America, and the meaning is different here.

The one thing I am most concerned about is if my children will change their attitude and behavior as the world changes. I try to teach them the importance of our religious culture and those traditions that help them to know right from wrong. Moreover, I hope they will respect older people, listen to their parents, and get married.

Celia Bell is 30 and originally from Burma.

Come With Me Child

KAYLA DEROSIER, ST. CLOUD

When I pray tonight I'll know what to do
As I'm talking with God I will talk about you.
I will tell of our dreams, our hopes, and our goals
Although he already knows what our future does hold
He will pay attention to all of the details
And he will just sit there and listen
And when I'm done talking he will simply say
Come with me child because there is something you are missing
He will ask Do you know who you are? I mean the person inside?
You know the person that when stuff gets

out of control

Likes to run and hide?

Well the chase is over and there is no place to hide, everything's gone

Including your pride

Terrified, I'll say, reality is suddenly right in my face,

I don't want to be alone and stuck in this place.

Take my hand and trust in your Lord

Paying attention to my word is something you can always afford

You're never alone with me in your heart

The only thing you have been missing is me from the start

You will see that even when you're standing alone

You are so much more

Because nothing can compare to the life for you

I have in store.

Coffee for Ethiopians

HABTEMARIAM FANTE, MINNEAPOLIS

Coffee is thought to have originated from Ethiopia. Shepherds noticed that the sheep and goats were very excited and playful after eating a plant leaf and its seeds. So the shepherd tasted the plant, and he felt happy and strong. Later the shepherd told his family, so they tasted it and felt the same way. The region in Ethiopia where the shepherd lived is called Kaffa, which is where the name coffee comes from.

In Ethiopia, the coffee ceremony is a part of our culture. It is practiced during holidays, social gatherings, at the beginning of work, or at night. Neighbors, families, friends, and guests get together during the coffee ceremony. Coffee seeds are put on a metal plate and roasted. The smell fills the room and is enjoyed by people. The ground coffee powder is boiled in a clay pot called gebena. The coffee is served to the people with a special cup called senni. It is a good socializing event, and it is unforgettable wherever you go.

Keeping Family Traditions

XIOMARA GUTIERREZ, ST. PAUL

When I came to the United States, I only just brought with me a suitcase full of dreams. It was very difficult for me because my whole family is in my home country. I had to forget my traditions for many years because few people from my home country live in the neighborhood where I lived. Right now, I am trying to teach my kids my traditions, especially the language I speak, Spanish. I have lived here for 12 years, and my kids speak more English than Spanish because in their schools they just teach in English. But I am teaching Spanish at home.

I want to keep most of my traditions, and I would like my kids to love my home country and traditions as I do. I love to dance, sing, and talk like my grandparents did, and I keep in my mind all that they taught me. One tradition I don't want to keep is to take my kids to the Curandero. I don't believe in what they do or how they cure because sometimes they don't make good decisions or have the correct medicine. Sometimes I did it in my home country, and my family there still does it. I do want to keep one of my family's traditions,

though. Every Sunday we eat Pupusas! That is one of our traditional foods, and I still do this with my family every Sunday here.

Xiomara Gutierrez is 32 and originally from El Salvador.

Just a Song of a Black Woman

FELICIA KIRK, MINNEAPOLIS

I am black, but comely; I am a daughter
from my mother's womb

As the tent, even as curtains kept inside
my

Father's testicles, look not upon me
because I am black

Because the sun and moon have looked
upon me;

I am one of my mother's children.

They made me the keeper of the vineyards;

But my own vineyard have I kept;

Tell me whom my soul loveth;

Wear it feeds where thou markest

My flock to rest at noonday.

My love is as a cluster of campfire in the
vineyard;

I am also Black with dove's eyes.

So who is this that cometh out of the
wilderness like

Pillars of smoke and smell the perfume it's

A powdered merchant;

Who is she that looketh forth

To the morning fair with the moon

As clear as the sun as
Terrible as an army with banners of
A 50 soldier,
And his cheeks are as a bed of spices
As sweet as flowers as
His lips likes dropping sweet,
Swelling myrrh
This salute is like a palm tree
And my breasts are
As clusters of grapes.

Newcomers

TOUA VANG, ST. PAUL

What did newcomers bring with them to the United States? Many brought clothes, pictures, classical music, and cultural holidays. I am an immigrant from Thailand. I brought my traditional clothes, language, and culture to the United States.

In my culture, people wore their traditional clothes every day. Even farmers and business people wore them. Today, many young people don't wear them anymore. They only wear them at special events such as Hmong New Year. Some young people don't even wear them at special events; young women will wear American-style clothing like short skirts and high-heel shoes.

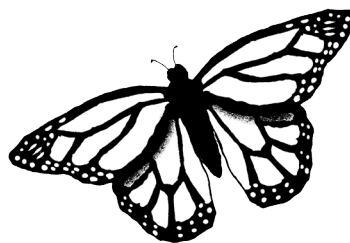
Many newcomers want to keep their own language as a primary language, but the younger generations are more American because English is an official language in the United States. Many immigrant parents

try to speak their own language at home with their children, but the children do not really pay attention to their own valuable language. For example, my children do not speak Hmong when they talk to each other. They speak Hmong mixed with English. I don't want them to lose their own language, so I keep pushing them to speak Hmong at home.

In our culture there is a very strict rule according to our ancestors: We don't want our daughters to marry another group of people because the marriage will not last long. However, many young Hmong women don't follow that rule. They marry white, African-American, and Mexican-American men. Now we have a mixture in our society.

When I came to the United States, I brought my traditional clothes, culture, and language because these are the most important for me. I want to pass these important things to my next generation of family.

Toua Vang is 34 and originally from Laos.



HOPES AND DREAMS



The Freedom

FATIMA ABBAS, COON RAPIDS

Featured Author



VICTORIA KROMAH

is an evening student at the Adult Academic Program in Golden Valley, Minnesota. She is the mother of four beautiful kids. Victoria was born in Maryland in the southeastern part of Liberia and came to the U.S. in 2005. Victoria and her husband Mr. Joe M. Kromah married in 2014. Victoria has six brothers and one sister; she's the second child of her mother and first for her dad. A busy woman, she works full time as a nursing assistant at Catholic

Eldercare residential nursing facilities. She loves school and her job very much and expects to attend college in the future. She hopes to specialize in pediatric nursing.”

A Special Day in My Life

VICTORIA KROMAH, BROOKLYN CENTER

The day I sat for and passed the nursing assistant exams and became a registered nursing assistant was a unique day in my life. I consider this day special because it is the day I realized one of the most important steps that brought me closer to one of my life's ambitions: to someday become a registered nurse.

I lost my mother at the tender age of eight, after she gave birth to her last baby. This was my youngest brother. Although I was too young at the time to know what led to her death, we know now that she died from complications related to childbirth. Growing up without the physical presence of my biological mother is partly one of the reasons I made up my mind to become a registered nurse. I believe that specializing in pediatric nursing will give me the skills and knowledge I need to learn safe child delivery methods. I not only see this as a career, but also as a positive way of keeping my mother's memory alive.

It has been more than three decades since our mother's untimely death. My brothers, my only sister, and I are all adults and some of us have kids of our own now. Many days we can't help but wonder how our lives would have been different if our mother was alive. We really miss our sweet mother's presence! And to keep her memory alive, I have made it a personal goal to work hard and go on to nursing school.

After becoming a nurse, I hope to return and work as a nurse in my mother's hometown in the southeastern Liberian county of Harper, Maryland. Many of the health problems that existed when

my mother was alive are still there today. Yes! I sincerely would like to return to the very place the very place she lost her life, due to complications related to the birth of our brother. I believe that by returning and working there, my mother would be proud as she looks down from her eternal resting place and sees me helping others avoid some of the same health complications that took her to an early grave. The day I became a nursing assistant was the first big step. It put me on the path to achieving a big dream: that of becoming a registered nurse.

Victoria Kromah is 42 and originally from Liberia.

My Dream

ANONYMOUS, MINNEAPOLIS

I remember when I was in my country, Rwanda, I liked to hang out with my friends. We liked to drink some beer and share our different opinions.

I also liked to study, but I didn't get to have university studies. My dream was to be a doctor, but I have not reached my goal yet because of bad circumstances that occurred to me during my work time from 2004 to 2014.

Every hour I pray to God to help me to go back to school because I would like to found an organization that helps indigent people, especially young adults who didn't get a chance to go to school due to the lack of opportunity.

I'm going to ask the help of everyone who has the same dream as me, and I will raise my voice publicly to announce that everyone needs to have pity and a loving heart for human beings, because whoever does will get benediction from God at the end of their time on earth.

My Wish

MARIA PEREZ, WORTHINGTON

My story is that when I was a child I never went to school because there were nine children in my family. We were poor. We didn't have money to pay for school. One day my mom told me, "You have to go to school."

I said, "No!"

My mom told me why it is important to go to school. She said, "You have to speak Spanish and learn how to write letters and numbers." I started to go to school when I was 13 years old.

I came here in 2006, and when I started to work, I didn't speak English. Now I like to come to school.

I wish to build a house because I didn't have one in Guatemala. One day it rained a lot and my house fell down. My goal is to make some money to build another new house.

Maria Perez is 32 and originally from Guatemala.

My Dream Future

ONEYDA CHICAS, WORTHINGTON

My reason to come to America is because I wanted to see my parents again and to be with my sister. I also wanted to accomplish one of my dreams. I would love to become an engineer. When I was nine years old, my parents came here and I had to remain in my country, but three years later my parents brought me here with them. Now I am twenty-four years old. I have not accomplished my dream yet but I am working on it.

My Dream

KOFFI ALISSUTIN, ST. PAUL

I came from Lome, the big city and the capital of Togo. Togo is a small French country in West Africa. I landed in Minnesota in December 2014, and I was so excited to celebrate Christmas and the New Year's Day here. But I was very disappointed.

I spent all the holidays in my room because of the cold. And the way we celebrate Christmas and New Year Day in U.S. is dramatically different from my country. I wanted to go back to my country.

But the day I started working, I realized that the United States is the best place to live if you are ambitious, if you have dreams. I figured out that all people have the same rights, same opportunities to achieve goals.

That's why I have started these English classes to integrate early the American dream. I want to start college next summer no matter how difficult it's going to be. I'm here to do that, to make my dreams come true. I'll go back one day to stay in my country to share with the others what I learned abroad.

Koffi Alissutin is 24 and originally from Togo.

My Goal in the USA

MARGARITA PERTUSINI, APPLE VALLEY

My goal is to learn English to communicate with my daughters and grandchildren and to learn how to write. If I learn to write, I will be very happy. Thanks, America, for this school, this country. It has many jobs and facilities to work at and to buy what you need.

An Ordinary Day

FELICIA PIGEON, BUFFALO

The war at hand is full of rage.
Do I want this change?
My whole life would need to rearrange.

I try to find anything to fill this hole of loneliness,
But I fall deeper into darkness,
Addicted to the hustle,
Yearning for the money,
And jealous of the power;
Needing to be needed, the feeling like no other.

This obsession consumes and carries me away
I don't want this vulnerable feeling to stay.
I need to make my way, so it will go away.

I want to be important on an ordinary day.

Travel Around the World

BASRA HASSAN, ST. CLOUD

If I can afford it, I would like to travel all over the world and see many different places. The first place I would go is back to my home country of Somalia because I want to go back and see how much it has changed. Then I would travel to Sweden to see my father and my brother and sister who live in Stockholm. After that I would just go on vacation to the other parts of the world.

Basra Hassan is 45.

Dream in the Bubble

MADEL VILLA, BLAINE

Hi, everybody! I'm a woman with a lot of dreams. When I came to this country, I was very young. It was in 1989, I was looking for a better life for my son when he was a baby of four months old. One of my dreams was to work to save money and go back to my country to buy a big house with many rooms and to be a doctor, because I was a nurse. But the house was not for me, it should be for kids that don't have a home or were abandoned by their parents. At that time, I was only a 17 year old girl, I didn't speak English, my culture was different. My mind, my soul was in my country. But time never stops and I stayed here in this country. I'm a grown up woman now with roots in this country. I have a lovely husband, children, and grandchildren. Now, my heart is in the middle of two countries. Now I speak English. I never made my dream come true, but when I can, I send clothes and some toys back to Mexico to give a kid a big smile.

Madel Villa is 44 and originally from Mexico.

Dreams Come True

JOSE ROMERO, APPLE VALLEY

One day when I was a child I dreamed to travel to the U.S.

After I dreamed, my life changed. The next day I told my mother about the dream, and she said, "I wish your dreams come true."

I remember when my mother told my father about the dream, and he said, "Fight for your dreams and goals."

After five years, I came to the U.S.

My Hopes and Dreams

BUDDHA GURUNG, ST. PAUL

I was born in Bhutan, but my family moved to Nepal when I was two. I have two brothers and two sisters. I lived in Nepal for 20 years. My second brother came to America first. He arranged for us to come to America, too. We arrived in Minnesota on March 12, 2013. I'm so happy to be here. I study at the Hubbs Center. My goal is to get a GED and then go to college. I have finished a pre-CNA course and am attending a CNA course now. I plan to study for a career in the medical field.

Buddha Gurung is 25 and originally from Nepal.

Never Give Up

SAHRA ADDO, ST. PAUL

Giving up is not an option in my opinion. I am from Somalia, and a mother of five kids and the sixth is on the way. I remember when I had my first child I stopped going to school. When I had my second child, I said to myself, "You don't need to study because you can not do it." Which was wrong. I didn't realize at that time that I was wrong. After a couple of years I applied to be a citizen. I had a driver's license from another state, but I did not want to change it because I was afraid that if I took the reading test I might fail. A lack of self-confidence was holding me back. Before I had kids I was okay. Then, immigration required proof of address, and I did not have enough time to practice for the test. Since I didn't have a choice, I took the test and passed. It was a great feeling and I gained more confidence. Now, I don't want to give up no matter how hard it is. I try to keep an "I can do it" attitude.

Sahra Addo is 30 and originally from Somalia.

Dreams Come True

ANONYMOUS, WORTHINGTON

We came to the United States in 1996. Our kids were very young at that time. We had a seven year-old, a five year-old, and a three year-old. Our dream was to send our kids to college, but we could not help our children that much because my husband and I did not finish college. It was also unfortunate that our immigration status was not legal. We felt sad that we could not afford to give our kids a better future. We are thankful that we had been given the chance to live comfortably and we had the opportunity to work. Currently, we are very happy and we are enjoying our life in this country.

Achievement

FAWAZ AL HOMAIDI, FRIDLEY

I was born in Iraq. Since I was 11 years old I was a shepherd on farms in southern Iraq. Our situation was very difficult because of the blockade. I was uneducated. I didn't even know how to read and write in my own language of Arabic. I learned to read and write at home, by candlelight. In 1998, I got another job. I worked for a tomato farmer until 2001, and in 2003 the international coalition forces entered my country. I felt that my dreams would be realized in the near future. I was very optimistic at that time and I said to myself, I will learn English to get a certificate of work to travel to the U.S. I learned alphabetic letters in a short time to achieve my goals. And I learned some simple words in the English language. I then worked with the U.S. forces cooking in a restaurant. I continued working for them for two years. Finally the opportunity that I was waiting for came: to travel to the U.S. I went to the U.S. military base to take my English test, but I failed three times with easy questions. I went back to

them again and again but they still refused me because of my age and my weird English. I was very sad and felt hopeless that day. I came back to them feeling confident and finally I passed the test.

That was the happiest day in my life because my dreams would come true. I hugged and said goodbye to my family. I went to work in 2007 with U.S. troops in the most dangerous times. Anyone who works with the U.S. military was called a traitor to his country. I just wanted to live safely with my family in a different country. I was threatened by militias. They killed my father.

That year was saddest year of my life. I lost the most precious part of my life. I continued to work until 2012 when our commander Maj. Gen. Keith recommended me to immigrate to the U.S. I submitted all my papers to the International Organization of Migration (IOM) and now I'm in Minnesota with everyone in my family except my father. All my goals have been achieved. This is a message to all the people who did not trust in themselves and their abilities. Our life on this earth is just temporary. We are all here to be tested and to deserve going to paradise. Everything difficult has an end. Nothing is impossible with determination and self-confidence.

Fawaz Al Homaidi is 25 and originally from Iraq.

My Story

NUR GAAMEY, MINNEAPOLIS

I was born in Mogadisho in 1955. I left Somalia in 1992. I lived in Kenya until 1993. Then I moved to America in 2010. I live in Minneapolis. I work at Golden Gate. I have worked there for two and a half years. I drive rental cars and I clean the cars. I started school at Open Door in 2015. I am learning English. I passed the citizenship test in October 2015. I want to get a GED.

Gaamey Nur is originally from Somalia.

Rebirth

SCHUYLHER M. HARRITY, MONTICELLO

Though days may seem long and energies
lethargic

There's a method I have, it's very methodic

To stop the depression and dismiss my
idiosyncrasies.

A resplendent light I can see in the distance
and I think of my fantasies,

My fantasies to be free from a world of
institutions.

My abilities unlimited I receive my absolution
From myself. I am no longer caged, my
surroundings have no bearing

On the life I see in my future, I still rise. I am
standing.

My strength unknown to me has not been
unearthed

I am my salvation. I am my rock. I am my
future. I am my own rebirth.

My Goals

ABDIAZIZ ADEN, ST. PAUL

My name is Abdiaziz M. Aden.

I was born in Somalia in 1990. I came to the
US on June 30, 2015.

I want to be a famous business man.

I would like to prove my dreams or my
goals.

I have short-term and long-term goals.

My short-term goal is to learn the English
language until college. And to take
courses of business administration in

university to reach my goal.

And my long-term goal is to be a famous
business man and to be a general
manager for my company.

Abdiaziz Aden is 26 and originally from Somalia.

Follow Your Dreams

MARQUETTA JOHNSON, MINNEAPOLIS

When you were young and the teacher
asked you, "What do you want to be?", or
"What do you want to do when you get
older?", then you told them. As you get
older you think of all these things you are
going to do to make your dreams come
true or your future bright. You think of
all the things you need to do in order to
make everything happen how you want it
to happen, like going to school everyday,
doing all classroom assignments, pushing
yourself to try your best.

I encourage everybody to follow their dreams
because you never know where your dreams
will lead you. Just have a positive mindset and
keep trying your best and have faith and lots
of support. Everybody has a dream that they
want to see come true. Keep going at it and
keep telling yourself all the things you need
to do for these things to happen and it will
happen for you. There might be bumps along
the way but you have to keep your head up
and believe in yourself.

Marquetta Johnson is 22.

My Biggest Dream

ANONYMOUS, FRIDLEY

Right now in Democratic Republic of Congo,
everyone dreams of going out of the country

because of hard conditions of life and the absence of leadership at the head of the state.

In 2007, I got my first information about D.V. Lottery from my friend who had already moved to the United States. The D.V. Lottery is a Diversity Immigrant Visa program for receiving a United States Permanent Resident Card. It is also known as the Green Card Lottery.

I started to try to apply to the lottery every year. Moving to the U.S. was absolutely my biggest dream. Meanwhile, I decided to continue with my studies in French Language and Literature.

For eight years, I tried my chance to gain a U.S. Green Card. I knew the reputation of some American universities. My dream was also to see my children competing in those universities and being important men and women.

On May 3, 2014, I received an e-mail from the U.S. government that informed me about my selection in the D.V. Lottery! I was very happy. "What a lucky man I am!" I said. Then my dream became reality. Now all my family is living in Minnesota and my two sons are studying in U.S. schools.

Dreams

REYMUNDO LEON, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Hello! My name is Reymundo Leon. I am 36 years old from Hidalgo, Mexico. When I was little boy around eight or ten years old I watched shows on TV and I saw these big buildings and beautiful neighborhoods that I liked. So the TV show always stayed on my mind and I decided that my dream was someday to be there. This is my story and dream. It was around April 1998 when I asked my brother if I could go to the USA with him and he said yes, but I had to wait. So at that time I was 17 years old and

tried to finish high school; 11th grade was my last grade.

The day of truth was in June 1998, the day I left from my town. I left everything behind: my friends, my family, my school, and there were people in particular that it hurt to leave behind, like my grandparents. It was really painful because I didn't know if I was coming back. So it took me little time to pass the border but I did it. My first place in America was Los Angeles, California, just for a year, and I moved to Coon Rapids, Minnesota in 1999. That is when I saw the snow for the first time in my life. So I never thought that my dream was about to start. I started working and trying to learn English and more. Later I got married and had twins, who are eight years old now. I am a single parent. So I have been here for almost 18 years and am trying to be better in my life.

Purpose

ERIK ENGSTROM, ROSEMOUNT

It doesn't make sense

We go to work every day

Partially for purpose, mostly for pay

We save our money for most of our lives

Only to retire and inevitably die.

For the longest time I felt like this

Eventually finding out that something's amiss.

Years of confusion, what could it be?

The truth is, in the end, what really matters is your legacy.

It all makes sense. . . .

Erik Engstrom is 19 and originally from the United States.

My Education and Work Personal Statement

FONGVANG, OAKDALE

I completed 12 levels of education in Laos. After that, I went to college for five years, but I didn't graduate. I stopped my education there because my family and I came to the USA. I study at Arlington Hills Center School. I study English. In the past, I worked at a restaurant in Laos. I enjoyed this work because I like to speak more English, and I had English-speaking customers. Right now, I'm going to adult school in St. Paul, Minnesota because I don't know how to speak English. I need to learn more English and practice more English. If I had never studied English, I wouldn't be able to buy something at the store or drive a car. It would be difficult for me and my family. My goal in the future is to get my GED. I will go to college. I would like to study IT because I would like to learn programming. I would like to have a better job. I plan to buy a house for my family. After that, I want to save money to get married.

Fong Vang is 24 and originally from Laos.

My Lovely Future as a Police Officer

NAREMAN MAHMOUD, FRIDLEY

I would love to work for the government one day. I was so excited to learn about how to become a police officer when I met with a long-time officer at the Columbia Heights Police Department.

I interviewed him to talk about the law and training to become a police officer. He

was so nice and kind and I love to visit him at the department. He talked about his experience and he said it is really difficult and challenging all the time. I hope to be successful and work safely like him.

The career as an officer requires a lot of skills, knowledge, training, education, and examinations. Furthermore, to become a police chief, a person needs a lot of relevant experience, needs to speak English very well, and understand everything about the law and the career as a police officer.

I'm confident I can complete all the training and get the experience I need to become an officer. Maybe one day I will even become a chief!

Nareman Mahmoud is 24 and originally from Iraq.

My New Life

MARIA RIVERA, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

My name is Maria Rivera. I am from Mexico and I have been in Minnesota for 13 years. I am happily married, and I have two girls and one boy. My husband and my children are the most important part of my life because they help to keep me going.

I am very happy because we bought our own house in Columbia Heights, and we have been there for a year. It is a nice and beautiful home.

Right now I am studying to become better at English so I can help my children with their homework and get my GED. I am working at a fast food restaurant and volunteering at my daughter's school. I enjoy helping people. I like to take care of children, and it is my goal to have a daycare. I want to study nursing, too. I hope to achieve all of my dreams one day.

Maria Rivera is originally from Mexico.

Hope for My Family

JOSE RODRIGUEZ CASTRO, WORTHINGTON

My name is Jose Rodriguez. I'm from Mexico. I came to America to help my mother give a better life to my three little brothers. I am the oldest of them (18 years old), and I think I should help them because my father and the father of my other brothers didn't take care of me, my mother, or my brothers. I really had a bad childhood because of that, and I don't want my brothers to go through all the bad things I went through.

So, I came to America to bring my brothers and my mother a better life than in Mexico. Because, in Mexico, life is difficult. There's not much work and no money for living, so when I knew I could come to the USA, I didn't think twice. So I'm here, in Worthington, working at JBS, and I hope everything goes good for my family and me in the future.

Jose Rodriguez Castro is 18 and originally from Mexico.

My Goal in Life

PAHOVA VUE, ST. PAUL

When I was younger, I dreamed that one day I would be a woman and would be married and have a family. I wanted to find a good, patient man to support me and our family. So in 1999, I came to the U.S., and I married my husband. He is a good husband for me and helped me by teaching me how to drive and how to speak English. I got married and I planned to have four children (two boys and two girls) in my life. I am very blessed. Now I have four children. I got what I wanted. My two boys are 12 and 13 years old, and the girls are 15 and 16 years

old now. I have to find a job that pays more money because I have to spend money for my children. Now my two daughters are teenagers, so they need more money, and I have to save money for them to go to college, too. I am so happy now because all my children are bigger. And they are all good children to me and my husband. I love all my children. Now I have to go to school to learn more English and other subjects. I want to try to get my GED in the future. Thank you.

Pahoua Vue is 36 and originally from Laos.

Great News Is Never Great News

AVIMAE CLARA MOLINA, BROOKLYN PARK

My name is Avimael Clara Molina. Today is December 16, 2015. I am going through a lot of things in my life. I have three jobs and I also come to school for English classes. I started to study English last year, and today my teacher came to speak to me about this great opportunity to start to take academic classes so I can be ready for my GED test in the future. I am very excited about this great opportunity, but at the same time I don't want to leave my classmates and my great teacher, Nancy Johnson. I am very thankful for every one of my teachers who have helped me get better in every single one of my classes.

I have a lot of goals but I know that I have to study harder, more than what I am already studying. It is going to be a big challenge for me, but I'm not doing this just for myself. I will do this for my family. I have two beautiful children and a beautiful wife, and I want a better future for them. I also want to be an example to follow for a lot a people. Having three jobs and working 80 hours a week and going to school

is something that not a lot of people do, but everyone could do if they wanted to.

I am very proud of how many things are happening in my life. Don't ever give up. Just give yourself a chance to see how much you can do. When you have great people supporting you with every decision you make in life, you will see how easy it is to not give up. We might make mistakes and make bad choices but we are humans, we aren't perfect. I read a book long ago, and one thing I learned is that life is hard, but it will be harder if you don't know how to live it. Some people think that what I am doing is crazy, but don't judge other people if you don't know their sacrifices.

Avimael Clara Molina is 28 and originally from Mexico.

My Dreams, Hopes, and Goals

ANONYMOUS, APPLE VALLEY

I am from Ecuador, a beautiful country. I have been in the USA since 2005. My goals are to learn English and study to be a nursing assistant. I like to help people. I am so excited to one day reach my goal. My hope is to visit my family in Ecuador and to share time together, strongly embrace, and tell them they are the most beautiful gift that God gave me. My dream is to see my children finish their studies. I pray to God every day to give me wisdom and intelligence to help them become good, respectful, honest men that walk through life with the fear of God in their heart. I work to keep my goals alive.

The American Dream

PETER NGUYEN, BROOKLYN PARK

What do you think about "The American Dream?" It is a big question for immigrants. For me, it is important to pursue the most valuable thing in my life. My American Dream is to have a good career. Having my dream career is important to me because it will make my life easier and help me stay responsible.

Having my dream career will make my life easier because it will set me up for the future. A reason you need to have a good future is it will take some pressure off of you. A good job will make your life better. You won't have to worry about your job every day like some people.

The next reason why the American Dream is a dream career is that it will help me be responsible. As you start to grow up, you start to learn that there are more important things in life than just money. Being responsible is important because you can't always count on somebody else to do something for you.

So this is my American Dream, which is to have my dream career. I chose my American Dream to be my dream career because it will make my life easier and make me responsible. Now, all I need to do is put my American Dream into action.

Peter Nguyen is originally from Vietnam.

Goals

MATIEYEDOU HAMBIKE, BROOKLYN PARK

My name is Marcel Matieyedou Hambike. I have been in the U.S. for five months. My priority goal was to come to the U.S. Now I have reached my dream and have more experience. I am going to talk about what my goals are.

I have many goals. I can mention only a few. They are as follows: understand and master English, and also continue my university studies to acquire my diploma in associate demographic analysis. I will work hard to help my family who did much for me. After this I will move back to my country to teach in the university and help students. I will create a company to help young graduates seeking employment to reduce poverty. I will create an orphanage to help orphans, who don't have parents, or whose parents have died. I will build a house, get married, and have children.

Matieyedou Hambike is 21 and originally from Togo.

Short Story About My Life

JOHN KYAWSWARWIN, ST. PAUL

I am John. I would like to talk about my future plans.

I am from Burma. I have been in the United States for over three years.

I had no chance to go to school because when I first arrived here I had no car. I didn't have a driver's license. Unfortunately, as soon as I arrived here I was very sick. That is why I went to the hospital. I had malaria.

Now, I drive myself and go to ESL class at the library and learn English and American culture. Also, I go to Hubbs Center adult school and study English language.

My future plan is to go to college and to speak English fluently. After college I want to be a teacher and teach English. I will share my knowledge and education as much as I can.

Also, my most important goal is to be peaceful together with people all over the world. Thank you.

John Kyawswarwin is 37 and originally from Burma.

My Goals

ANONYMOUS, BURNSVILLE

I'm from Somalia. I have a beautiful wife and five lovely children. I have been in the USA since 1998. I started ESL classes at an earlier time but I always stopped because I needed to work. For now, I need to continue my school to learn more English. I want to communicate with people and get my GED. After I get my GED, I would like to go to college. I would like to start my own business. I want to work in computers. This country has many opportunities if you have knowledge and are willing to work. I hope my family's life gets better and better because I have an education and work hard.

Having Faith

FATME HAGER, FRIDLEY

Do you want to know why people get depressed? Life is full of surprises, which could be good and bad. Expect the unexpected. Life is beautiful, yes! But it comes with hard work and belief. We people feel stress. It is normal because we are humans. But if this stress starts to increase and you feel overwhelmed, you need to slow down and focus on yourself—think about all the people around you who can help you and who you care about. Have a trustworthy friend or a family member that you can talk to. Have a plan, organize yourself; this can lessen your stress. Knowing yourself is very important to deal with your inside.

What do you want to achieve in your life? Faith is a weapon against depression. Once you have faith you will understand life better, things around you, and what is happening to you will make sense. God is

our Lord; we must know Him and have a good relationship with the Lord. He will help you no matter how small or big the problem is. He knows us more than we know ourselves. Why? Because He is our maker, so just start your day with a big smile, and leave it to Him.

Opportunities

AMINA ABDI, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

I am from Somalia. I immigrated to the United States in 1999 with my husband. The first time I came to the United States, the weather was difficult for me. It was very cold and snowy. When I went to buy milk and sugar, the temperature was below zero. I didn't have a driver's license so I had to walk to the grocery store and back home.

After three months in Minnesota, I started working in a factory to help my family. I didn't know any English, but everyone I worked with was very helpful. Everything started to become normal.

I eventually helped my family in Kenya by sending money and visas for them to come to Minnesota. In 2002, my whole family finally came. I felt very happy.

There are many opportunities here for me and my family, like work and education. Everyone has been SO nice and helpful. I feel successful because all of my family is here, I'm learning English, working, and taking care of my children. My dreams have come true.

Amina Abdi is originally from Somalia.

My Goals

ARMANDO MARQUEZ, EAGAN

My name is Armando. I'm from Mexico. I have been here in the United States for 14 years; I work hard every day, a lot of time. My goals are to have a good job and an apartment and to learn more English. My dreams are to have a good car and save money for my future. I will be visiting different countries: China, Africa, Brazil, and the world. In China, I will visit the big bridge. In Africa, I want to go on safari, and in Brazil I want to go watch the Carnival in the summer. After, when I go back to my country Mexico, I will have different ideas, many experiences, and will be more intelligent and have a wider worldview.

Inspired

ANTHONY MCCOY, FRIDLEY

It's inspirational when we are in class striving to obtain the GED. It really is inspiring knowing that if you get over this hurdle that one day your life will change by progressing to a higher level. Some of us will be pursuing college degrees and some of us job changes. Whatever your dreams may be, having a chance to make changes in the outcome of your life is inspiring.

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JourneysTeam



Ellen Fee

Managing Editor

Ellen will be graduating from the University of Minnesota this year with a degree in English and a theatre minor. She edits and designs at the University's student-run newspaper and writes about education for a college magazine. Ellen loves poetry, children's literature, cooking, camping, and riding her bike.

Anna Heinrich

Lead Copyeditor

Anna is completing a degree in technical writing and communications at the University of Minnesota. Anna has journalism experience as a web writer and editor at the U of M, newspaper staff reporter for Northwestern University, and as editor for her high school newspaper and yearbook. She also volunteers as an ESL teacher for the Open Door Learning Center.



Lecam Trang

Copyeditor

Lecam is a first-generation American and college student. She will be graduating from Hamline University this year with a degree in English and minors in business practice and Chinese. Lecam is a student leader of the Asian Pacific American Coalition on campus and is passionate about providing spaces and voices for the oft unheard. When she isn't planning events or studying, she enjoys making puns, knitting, writing, and exploring the internet.



Rachel Yang

Copyeditor

Rachel is a senior at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, where she's studying literature and education. She interned at the Minnesota Literacy Council during the summer of 2014 and is pleased to have returned to help publish *Journeys* this year. Rachel loves crafting stories of her own and is a budding audio journalist; listen for her on the airwaves.

