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# *Journeys*

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*Jeff Doig, Sandstone*

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*2009*

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## *Mission:*

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

- 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.

## *Acknowledgements:*

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### Contact Information:

The Minnesota Literacy Council  
www.theMLC.org  
651-645-2277  
Hotline: 800-222-1990  
756 Transfer Road  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55114-1404

Submissions accepted year round.

Go online to <http://www.theMLC.org> for Journeys Teaching & Learning Guide.

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# Introduction

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Dear Reader,

I am proud to present the Minnesota Literacy Council's 20<sup>th</sup> annual journal of original writing and artwork by Minnesota adult literacy students. These students, who are enrolled in reading, English as a Second Language, GED, and basic skills classes across the state, have worked hard during the past year, with the help of their teachers and volunteer tutors, to be able to share their experiences with you through the written word.

In the following pages you will find remarkable stories of steadfast hope, devastating loss, and incredible struggle, alongside poignant, candid, and sometimes funny gems of everyday life written by Minnesotans whose voices are rarely heard. Some are immigrants or refugees writing in their second or third language. Others are sharing their writing for the first time after years of frustration and anxiety due to their low literacy skills. All of them have shown amazing courage by making the choice to improve their lives through education and for sharing their thoughts and experiences in this book.

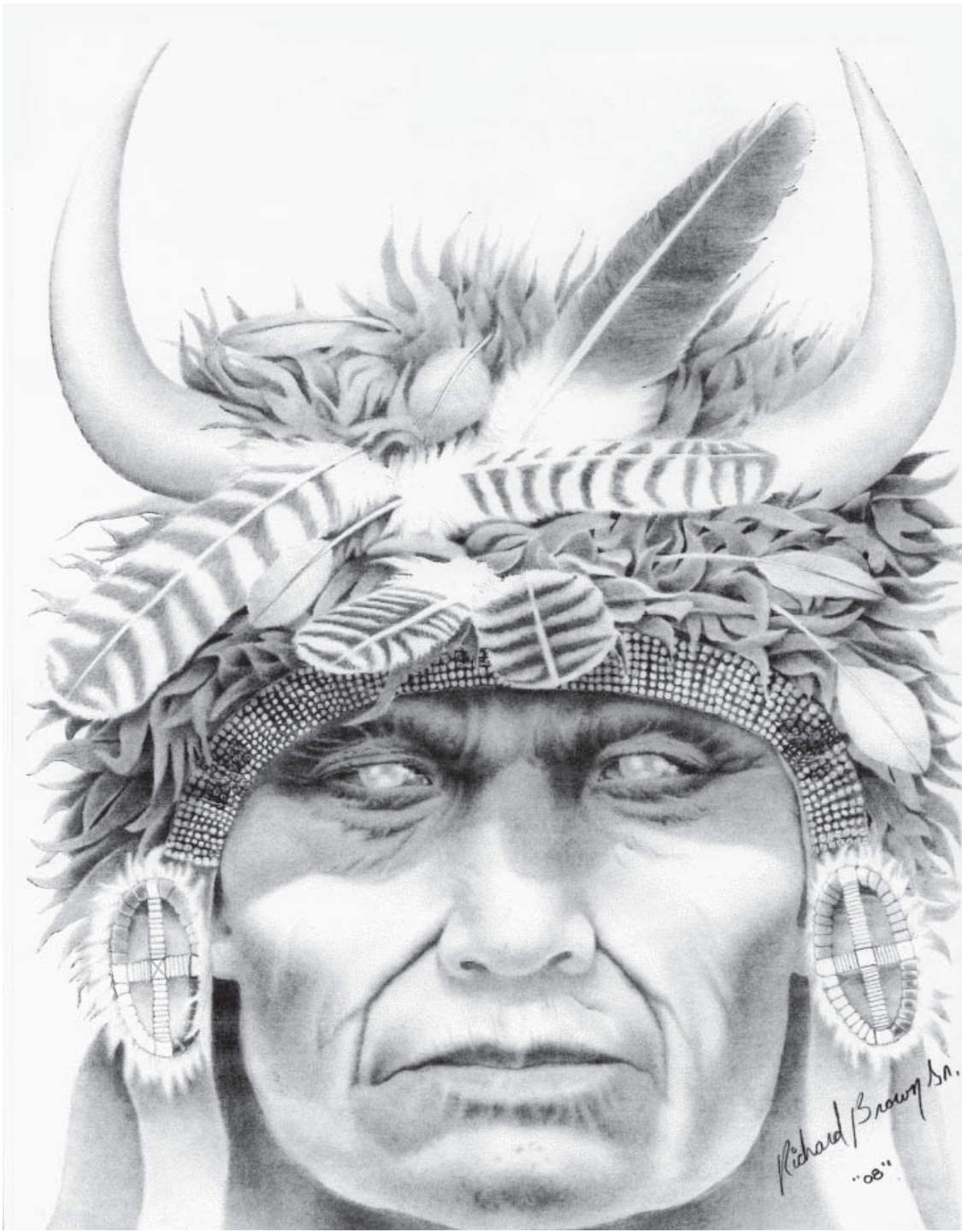
We continue to produce *Journeys* year after year because we believe that it is important to our mission of sharing the power of learning. It provides a forum for the creative expression of Minnesota adult learners, a text of authentic learner stories for teachers to use in the classroom, and an acknowledgement of the tangible value and contributions of adult education to the larger Minnesota community.

During the past two decades, *Journeys* has grown from a thin stack of pages held together with staples to a full-blown literary journal with 350 writing and drawing submissions artfully presented in this bound book. We could not have done it without the hard work of our three tireless interns, Wendy Skinner, Jamie Joslin, and Jamie Thomas, who donated hundreds of hours of their time to make this year's book such a success.

Thank you for supporting this important project by purchasing this book. I hope you enjoy your own journey through its pages.

Sincerely,

Eric Nesheim  
Executive Director



*Richard Brown Sr., Minneapolis*

# *Table of Contents*

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Introduction	iii
Important Experiences	1
My Life	15
Events, Holidays and Seasons	79
People	101
Places, Here and There	143
Memories	161
Problems, Choices and Decisions	183
Fiction	233
Hopes, Dreams and Future	241
Index	265

# Hmong Lived in Lao



In Lao they don't have lot  
money they need to do farmer. For they  
family and they don't have school they  
only do farmer.

Hmoob ua Liaj ua teb noj  
Lub pas dej Lawv ua liaj ua teb lawv haus lub pas dej no.



# Important Experiences

## A Funny Story

*Gustavo, Minneapolis*

I have lived in Minnesota for three years. My first month was difficult. I had never heard English. I didn't understand anything. I went to work with my uncle at a company and my boss asked me, "What is your name?" and I didn't understand anything. I said, "I don't know." He said, "What? You don't know your name?"

## My Best Friend

*Houa Yang, Minneapolis*

I came to the USA in 2004, but I didn't go hunting until October 2007 when I went bow hunting with my cousin's team in Rochester. My brother got his ten point deer, which is huge. I was very excited when I saw it. The next day I got one doe. We got five deer altogether.

In October 2008, I went to Rochester again, but in a different area. Usually when we go hunt, two people go together. My partner couldn't go because he went to another area, so I went alone. After 6:00 p.m., I got down

from the tree and came back to my car. I had to change my clothes before going back to our camp. Before I changed my clothes I used my keys to open my car door. After I changed my clothes, I put my clothes inside the car, and put my keys with my clothes. I had to clean my bow, but I didn't know my car doors were locked. At 10:00 p.m., I waited for our team to come pick me up, but they didn't know where I was. I had a cell phone, but it didn't work in that area. At that time it was very dark and quiet. I just heard insect sounds, and I felt cold. I'll never forget the wolf sound I heard near me. Its sound scared me. I had my hands, my bow and arrows, but it didn't help me. I still felt afraid of that sound.

I prayed that somebody would pass in this area. My dream came true. I saw an American. When I saw him, I thought that God helped me and that was very lucky. He was hunting also. His name was Tom. I asked him to help me. He said, "No problem." So he took me to my camp almost 17 miles away. When I arrived at our camp, my fear disappeared. I thanked Tom, and he said he was happy to help me. Then he gave me his cell phone number. He said he has 80 acres

of land in the North, if I am interested in hunting, he will welcome me. I will visit him next year. I am very proud to have a best friend like Tom because he saved my life. I will never forget him

*Houa Yang is originally from Thailand.*

## Good Things Come in Small Packages

*Mayra Quiterio, Saint Paul*

**H**ello! My name is Mayra Quiterio. I'm from Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo, Mexico. I was born on May 7, 1978.

When I came to the USA for the first time, I thought, "This country is very big and beautiful." Before, I never, never thought I would be in this country. But for me it was very hard to leave my family, my friends, my job, my life and all. I felt very sad especially for my mother and grandmother. They are very strong and one day will survive by themselves.

When I arrived in Texas I saw my brother who I hadn't seen for two years. He's 28 years old and he's married and has one daughter. I lived one week with my brother and his family before coming to Saint Paul. They took me shopping at the mall and various stores.

When I went to the stores I found a problem with the shoes. My feet are very small and I didn't find shoes of my size, so I went to a shoe store for children to buy my shoes. My husband and my brother were funny. They said to me, "Why is your foot so very small?" And I said, "The good things come in small packages."

*Mayra Quiterio is originally from Mexico.*

## The Sad Moment

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

**H**ave you ever felt sad with something that you don't want to do, but it is necessary for you to do it? Let me tell you about the sad moment that I had in my life before.

In my Hmong culture, if you are born a girl, you can't live with your parents when you grow up. When you grow up, you have to marry and go to live with your husband. For me, I knew that one day I would leave my family and would have a new family. Even though I don't want to leave my family, I have to. If you don't marry when you are young, when you get old no one wants to marry you, so you won't have a family.

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When the airplane flew up in the blue sky, it made me feel even more sad. My tears couldn't stop rolling down.

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When I met my husband, we loved each other and were willing to spend our lives together. Then we decided to

get married. At that time, it was an emotional moment for me because I didn't want to leave my family and my friends. Not so long after I got married, it was time that I would come to the United States. My family and my friends sent me to the Vientiane Airport. I embraced each one of them. When I left them, it was hard for me to say, "Good Bye." That time gave me a big feeling of emotion that I've never had before in my life. I couldn't say anything to them, only my tears rolled down a lot on my cheeks. That time I felt like something was stuck in my throat. Then the time was up and I had to go inside the airplane. When the airplane flew up in the blue sky, it made me feel even more sad. My tears couldn't stop rolling down.



Overall, parents are those who you used to live with since you were a child. It could be a tough time for all of us to leave our parents. Anyone who has a story like me, when you read my story, it will remind you of how you felt when you left your family and your friends.

## Winter Break

*Ammar Kadhum, Fridley*

**M**y winter break was happy because I spent time with my kids, I felt relaxed and I went shopping to the different stores. At the beginning of the winter break, my family and I went to the cinema to see a new film. During the winter break, we went to a restaurant to have a lunch and sometimes we played football. During winter break, I went shopping so I bought shoes for my kids, I bought some things, and we needed them in my apartment. I bought a present for my wife. I felt relaxed during winter break because I didn't wake up early every morning, I used the internet, and sometimes I went to the library to study English.

I saw the winter break was very nice, because I spent a beautiful time during the break. I want many days of the year to be breaks.

## A Good Experience

*Victor Reyes, Austin*

**M**y name is Victor. I'm from Honduras. I lived in Honduras for 20 years. I came to Minnesota in 2005. Now I'm 23 years old. Coming to the USA was a really good experience because everything is different—I mean food, weather, culture, language. I like it. Now the bad things are that I miss my family and they miss me too, but I hope

some day to go to visit them. Besides that, I'm happy with everything else because I get to see my mom every day and my brothers and my dad too. And I'm happy now because I'm a proud father of a beautiful baby named Jaden. He is the best thing that ever happened to me. He makes me fight for what I want and give him what he deserves. Now I'm learning English to have a better future for me, my son, and my family.

*Victor Reyes is 23 years old and is originally from Honduras.*

## Chicken Soup

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

**I** am good at cooking. I have been cooking since I was twelve years old. I would like to teach you how to make chicken soup. It's very easy; all we need is a chicken and a few additional ingredients.

The most delicious dish of my menu is chicken soup. First, you need to prepare a chicken. You also need a can of coconut milk, some green curry paste, bamboo shoots, vegetables, salt, sugar, and vegetable oil.

After, you get everything you need to clean them with clean water. Then cut the chicken into small pieces, slice the bamboo shoots into pieces about two inches long, and cut the vegetables and mix with the bamboo shoot.

After that, prepare a pot, put it on the stove, fry the green curry paste with vegetable oil for a while and then pour the coconut milk in. Stir together until mixed well and then put the chicken on. Wait until it boils, and follow with the vegetables, sugar, and salt. Stir together until tender and then cool it down.

Serve it with rice and it will be a very delicious soup. Now you can see it's very easy

# *A Kilometer of Cheese*

I will never forget the time I first entered a Mexican store as an eight-year-old and tried to buy something after I had emigrated from the United States to Mexico, not the other way around. I had trouble with ordinary things like asking to use the bathroom. I had to tell one of my older sisters to do it for me, because they knew more Spanish than I did.

One day my dad sent me to the store to buy leche, in English, "milk." I had a very puzzled expression, so my sister slapped me across the head and said, "It's milk, you retard."

"Well, sorry, miss know-it-all!" I answered her back while rubbing my head.

As it turned out, my sister went for the milk.

A few months later, my grandma needed some stuff from the store. It seemed like she trusted my Spanish because she didn't send my sister.

"Bring me one kilogram of cheese and one liter of milk. Don't forget," she told me with this look on her face that said, "Am I really sending her?"

I started on my way to the store, repeating it in my head over and over again,

"One liter of milk, and one kilo of cheese..."

When I got to the store, though, I asked the lady at the counter, "Can I please have a kilometer of cheese and a liter of milk?"

The lady at the counter turned red, grabbed her stomach, and fell to the ground. I got really scared. I thought I had done or said something wrong, so I left.

When I got home, my mom said, "Where's the stuff that we sent you for?" She sounded upset.

"I asked her for the stuff, and she turned red and fell to the ground. I got scared, so I left."

"What DID you ask for?" she asked me in a curious way.

"For a kilometer of cheese and a liter of milk."

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't you think that's enough cheese, kid? No one could find that much cheese in a store," my uncle said.

Ten years have passed and I am back in the United States. Whenever I call my grandma or uncle, they always ask me, "Are you done with that cheese you asked for?" I just laugh.

Now I know how Hispanics struggle when they come to the United States.

## *Janaly*



*Janaly Farias is a GED and ABE student at the Area Adult Learning Center in Gaylord. She is originally from Conellon Washington, USA. Although born in the USA, she lived in Mexico for a period of time during her middle childhood. She is 18 years old now, and lives in Gaylord with her parents and six siblings. Janaly works at Michael Foods/ MN Pullet in Gaylord (producers of eggs and egg products) and enjoys drawing, listening to all types of music, spending time with friends, and playing soccer, tennis, and volleyball. She wants to get a baccalaureate degree so she can have a professional career.*

to make chicken soup and it's a healthy dish.

## Dumpling

*Chi Zhao, Plymouth*

A dumpling is a traditional Chinese food. The Chinese people used to cook dumplings on the eve of the Chinese traditional New Year. In China, cooking dumplings means enjoying family. The dumpling is made from flour, vegetables and meat. Everyone in the family should have a job when cooking the food. Some make the outside of the dumpling, but most people work on the filling. Then they put the mixed vegetables and meat into the dumpling and close it. Then someone should boil the dumplings. We can imagine the sight—everyone doing the job together. They are working, talking and laughing.

There are many different kinds of dumplings. For vegetables you could use cabbage, tomato, leeks and so on. You could use different meats such as pork, beef or chicken.

I have been in America over one year. This year I couldn't go back to China to make dumplings with my family, but I had the opportunity to cook dumplings with Barbara. Barbara is my English teacher. She was in China 10 years ago. She really likes Chinese dumplings. We also invited an Indian engineer to help us attend to our job. He couldn't enjoy the pork, so we checked the refrigerator and found tomato and eggs. We cooked and talked together. The Indian engineer hadn't cooked dumplings before. We taught him and he learned the technique very quickly. We made very delicious dumplings. We enjoyed the Chinese New Year.

## Important Family

*Srey Soumaly, Woodbury*

I am from Cambodia. I am 24 years old. I have been in the United States for two years. I enjoy living here so much. I'd never realized what I've missed out to do for my family. The last couple months there was a very horrible accident that happened on my family.

Three months ago, after I came back from visiting my family in Cambodia, my elder brother got in a frightening car accident. The car was totally flattened down by a very long commercial vehicle. My brother was pulled out of the car by many villagers because the ambulance in that area wasn't willing to get him to the hospital in the city. My uncle and his wife were in that accident too, but they were okay. My uncle had been on phone with my mum. When my mum heard all the bumm sound, she realized something was happening. A couple minutes later, my uncle called her back, but he couldn't say anything besides screaming and crying on the phone. My mum was really nervous. She had nobody around because my father was on his way to get my brother to the hospital and I was here, thousands of miles away. I couldn't imagine how she felt.

It was a miracle my brother was still alive, but all the left side of his body was totally damaged. His eyes and his body were injured by a thousand broken mirror pieces. His leg, nose, and hand bone were broken. When I first knew, I just kept crying. I really wanted to fly back home right away. I was really mad at myself. Why did I stay so far away?! I really wanted to stay by his side to see how was my brother doing and I wanted to be by my parents' side to make them feel relief. But, I couldn't do anything for them.

What I could do was only hold on the phone, waiting to hear how everything was going. A week later my brother could speak out a few words. The first one he wanted to see was me. He could only say a few words when he gave me a call. He just wanted to hear my voice even if he couldn't respond.

Now I understand the importance of family being together and what I missed to do for them. I can't forget it ever. I hope it will not happen to any one in my family again.

## My Adult Education

*Anonymous, Hopkins*

When I came to this country, it was a while ago. I spoke little English and my pronunciation was very poor. I could understand a little and did not know much on how to communicate with people. After a while, I decided to take ESL classes. After I started taking the classes, I felt that a new door opened for me because the education is free.

You don't have to worry about paying for anything until you are ready to go to college.

Adult Basic Education means a lot to me because it has changed my life to a better life; without this program my life would be hard. In this country not knowing the language is hard. Every day you get mail from an important place. If you don't know where it was from and you can't read or understand English, it is really hard.

Now I can communicate with people and

I am really thankful to whoever organizes this program. It is a helpful program for the people who are second language learners. I also like how my teacher helps me. She always tells me to work hard and one day I will achieve my goal.

## Your Education

*Anita Chatterjee, Woodbury*

I am an Indian and studied in India. I am a graduate from India in Hindi medium, and English was my second language. I like to read Hindi books. When my daughters were grown up, I started teaching small children at my home and I was teaching some people without money also.

Now I am in the US and my two

daughters are in the US so I am staying here for a longer period. But when I came here I faced the problem to speak English with other people and I was feeling bad. I like the US very much. Here you get lots of facilities for education. Libraries are very good with

lots of books to read. I started to read children's storybooks. I got the opportunity to join ESL class and it is free.

Miss Geri Ford was my first teacher. I am thankful to her. She used to talk very slowly, so I could understand her English and I passed her Intermediate class and joined the Advanced class of Miss Janet Sparks. She is very nice and helpful and I am learning a lot and now I am not feeling bad to talk to some other people. I am thankful to her.



*Luan Vu, Waite Park*

I am learning computer and the librarians help us to solve problems. Today is the 20th of January and I sat the whole day in front of the TV to see the inauguration of Barack Obama, President of US. I could understand the English. So people can get lots of facilities for study in the US.

## Communication

*Anonymous, Saint Louis Park*

I've met more people from different countries. If I hadn't come to the US, I couldn't have discovered many things that I didn't know or even think about before through these wonderful people here.

A while after I came to Minnesota, I happened to have a chance to teach my native language to students. That experience gave me different perspectives about learning languages and language itself. They were really eager to learn it and weren't afraid of making mistakes at all. They're willing to make mistakes and get corrected by me. At that time, I was so nervous that I would say something wrong and get people confused. I always felt embarrassed when it happened. As the class went on, their Japanese got better and better. I came to the idea that mistakes were not a shameful thing, but essential. After I found that out, I felt no pressure that I had to talk in perfect English. The more important thing is what you try to communicate with people. Now I enjoy having conversations in English even when people don't understand my English.

I also appreciate the Japanese class for another reason. I realize how interesting and

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I realize how interesting and lovely my native language is through the class.

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lovely my native language is through the class. I hadn't thought about my language as a second language even though I am learning English as a second language. My students often asked "why" for Japanese. The more I found the answer to the "why," the more I liked it and devoted myself to it. Besides, through the languages, I saw the cultural differences inside of people between America and Japan. It seemed that the differences made us choose different words or phrases, or even grammar as well. There are sometimes Japanese words or phrases that don't exist in English. In that case, I had to explain the culture of my country, which was interesting. I wouldn't have discovered this fact if I had stayed in Japan my whole life.

Since I came to the US, I feel a lot of experiences have affected me. I started to study English when I was in junior high school. However, I am learning English with joy, the most ever in my life. The more I can speak English, the more I will know what I don't know. Learning English gives me a new world.

## Haiti Family Reunion

*Roselyne Admettre, Minneapolis*

It was a nice moment in the history of the people of my family, which included uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces. We all went to my grandparents' place in Haiti on vacation. During the first day, our families arrived at different times. Each time was a very exiting welcome to each other because it was also a time to meet some of us. We are a big family of five generations, and living in different countries and cities. After talking about the good and long trip, my grandfather asked everyone to go and get ready for dinner. This was the time something special was going to happen: "Bring everybody in the

yard as a common place.” All of us sat down on the grass, almost age by age with the parents taking care of their little ones. The reason for taking dinner outside was because all of us could have a nice moment when singers performed in a pleasing night and did musical shows. We were praying, reading the Bible, playing and listening to my grandfather carefully with his short, old discourse. That was a great blessing.

Many years later my grandfather died. He was ninety-nine years old. He came from church where he was the deacon and the treasurer. He remembered a friend of his who needed to hear about Jesus Christ. He said, “I have to visit him right now.” He went at that moment and lovingly urged him to invite Christ into his heart. Hours later he walked out under the trees to his garden and he fell. A few hours later he died. From that time until now, we have never had this beautiful and important moment again.

## We Are Blessed

*Wayland Pierson, Plymouth*

I’m thankful that I was not born in a time of slavery or segregation because it was a very hard time for people back then. They knew nothing about equal opportunity. I left school 20 years ago and now I’m back, but people before me did not have this opportunity, they did not have a chance to get an education. I tell my kids all the time that we are blessed for all the opportunities we have today.

I have traveled a lot of places and have seen a lot of things but nothing can compare to my visit to Washington, D.C. There were so many people from different parts of the United States and total strangers were coming together as one family. They came to witness history and to see the first African-

American president of the United States of America. Everyone was showing so much feeling it was indescribable! I’m thankful that I was a part of history.

## My First Winter in Minnesota

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

I came on September 5, 1994. I like Minnesota because the lakes are beautiful. On October 31, 1994, I saw the falling snow for the first time. I did not like the cold, for me it was very hard. I was shopping for different shoes and clothes.

My first winter, I fell down on the ice. I broke my hand, fingers, and my arm. I went to the hospital. I had more pain in my arm. The doctor talked to me, “You need a surgery before we put a splint on.” The third day I had a lot of pain. I took the medicine. I slept. The surgery was three hours. I woke up very fast. The anesthesia was not good for me. My hand and arm were in the pain inside and outside. It was very sad for me.

My family lived far away. My daughter was three years old. She lived with my mother and brother and sister alone in my country. My first year in Minnesota was very hard, no friends. I did not know places or people. No one helped me in school or church. Now I plan to help people who come to Minnesota in different things.

# *The Way It Will Always Be*

*Randy Ringo, Foley*

The grass grows so gently as the clouds race across the sky.  
The wind blows the mountains down one grain of sand at a time.  
The Mother Eagle calls to her chicks; do you hear her cry?  
The ocean laps at the shore, washing away the brine.

A poor Washerwoman holds her child to her breast;  
Loving and coddling the child all the while  
As the Religious man's beliefs are put to the test.  
A King looks down upon his dominion with a smirking smile.

The Rich grow richer as the Poor men try to survive.  
The Evil man looks about the world for victims to defile.  
Countries go to war again; the Soldier wants to stay alive.  
The Angry jump up to fight so quick, the Pacifist is so hard to rile.

The Self-Righteous holler up to heaven, "God look at me!"  
The beating in my chest is like the rain falling from above.  
This is the way it goes, the way it will always be.  
The feeling in my heart and soul, Yes, it's truly love.

## *Ramadan*

*Safiyo Warsame, Minneapolis*

I like to celebrate Ramadan  
Hungry all day  
Eating fried food at night  
Waking up at midnight  
Tomorrow feeling like today  
Ending the month by celebrating on the last day

*Safiyo Warsame is originally from Somalia.*

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# *Coming to the US*

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*Phillip Ruwan, Minneapolis*

*C*oming to the US is quite so cold,  
Shivering from head to toes,  
It's so obvious it shows.

The arrival was fun,  
New things to see,  
Compared it to back home,  
It's more advanced than what I know.  
Planes kept flying, cars kept running  
A minute has passed, I found out I was crying.

Upon arriving to my destination,  
Knowing what I saw, I took a detour,  
To see American Hard Core

To be in a new school,  
I know I had to be cool.

My home boyz from back home were also there.  
We talked; we laughed and forgot to go to class.  
We waited till dark,  
Then ran to the park.  
It was peaceful it was quiet,  
And we were way too tired.

We started drinking and cussing,  
At a cat that was coming.  
After that night I woke up in pain,  
Realizing what I did,  
**MAN THAT WAS LAME...**

*Phillip Ruwan is originally from Yap, Micronesia.*



## When I Came to the USA

*Anonymous, Austin*

When I came to the United States ten years ago, that was the hardest of my life because I didn't know where I was or where I was going. I couldn't ask people what I wanted because I didn't speak English. It was hard to find a job. But then I started going to school to learn English. Now, everything, it changed. I have a job. I can take care of my family.

## Learning English

*Saido Muse, Eagan*

I came to the United States in September 2000. When I arrived, I did not know English. That made life very difficult for me. I did not expect that I would be able to work in order to support my children right after arriving here, but I did. It was especially hard when I started to work as a housekeeper in a hospital. For the first weeks I felt like I was deaf. I could not understand my supervisor at all. I could not read the signs or the instructions at the hospital. I sometimes cried about the way my life had turned out.

Although my English has improved since I came to the US, I still need to work on it. I take ESL classes and I hope that these classes will help me to understand and learn the language even better. My children have grown up and now go to college. They still help me with English but I do most of the talking when I have doctor appointments. Learning a new language is hard but it is good that I don't give up.

*Saido Muse is originally from Somalia.*

## My Trip Home to India

*Reena Alle, Eagan*

My trip home to India started on November 28th, 2008 at 5:00 a.m. from Eagan to the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport by airport taxi. At the airport we did our check in and took boarding passes at around 6:00 a.m. and our flight was at 8:00 a.m. to John F. Kennedy Airport, so we had two hours left. We spent one hour window shopping and took some photos. An on-time departure took place by 8:00 a.m. It was about a three-hour journey with snacks and drinks.

We arrived at John F. Kennedy Airport 12:00 noon. It was a very long journey. The layover was too long. Again we spent seven hours at John F. Kennedy Airport watching a movie and window shopping and then departed at 9:00 p.m. In this journey we had meals two times, snacks and drinks. We enjoyed the journey by sleeping and arrived at Kuwait 5:00 p.m.

Our next flight was at 11:00 p.m. Again, we spent five hours by having evening dinner all arranged by Kuwait airlines. I made a new friend at Kuwait Airport. Her name is Laxmi. She was also traveling through same flight. We spent three to four hours sharing our family matters. In a short span we were already good and close friends. We exchanged our contact details. We also spent some time with our other friends from the same airways. Our departure was one hour late.

We arrived at 6:00 a.m. in Hyderabad, India when we actually should have arrived at 5:00 a.m. At last we arrived at Hyderabad Airport on November 30th and did our immigration check. We were very much excited to see our family members who were waiting to receive us. They were there a long time waiting for us. Even though it was a long

journey, it was quite a memorable journey with my dear husband which I will cherish for a very long time.

## The Great Opportunity

*Ana Lilia Mercado Chávez, Owatonna*

**M**y husband asked me to come to Owatonna, Minnesota for a year to be able to learn to speak English. I'm working hard to learn the language, and to be a better person every day. I have many things to learn in America. It is a great culture. I'm a lucky person, because I have the support of very patient teachers that are helping me to achieve my goal. I know this is a great opportunity for me, so I am taking advantage of my time here.

Ana Lilia Mercado Chávez is 36 years old and is originally from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

## First Come to America

*Youa Thao, Minneapolis*

**H**i, my name is Youa Thao. When I first came to the United States, I first landed in Chicago and I came with my family. There were many families with us. So we were many people who came together but we did not have anyone who knew how to say English. The first time I went to school, I didn't know anything about English and when the people talked, I didn't know anything. And every day I had to bring my lunch for me because I didn't like American's food, but now I like it and I can eat every food. The first winter for me it was cold and I saw the first snow. It was very beautiful for me because I never saw something like that.

## Untitled

*Zahra, Minneapolis*

**I** came to the United States with my kids in July 2007. I packed six bags, two bags for each person. I packed clothes and shoes for us and then I packed traditional gifts for my family like ounsy, traditional clothes and some pictures. I packed with me my jewelry because it is something important to me. I packed my documents like my diploma and my passport. I think I brought the most important things of my life, my kids.

*Zahra is originally from Ethiopia.*

## English Class is Very Helpful

*Jintana Chanthavilay, Coon Rapids*

**E**nglish class is very helpful for anyone because people can understand communication and get a better job. In my country, one has to pay a lot of money for the English program. I always tell my friends about the English language and that they must keep learning it so they can make a lot of money in our country. I decided here to come to school with my dad. My dad said, "I'm old and can't understand what the teacher is talking about." But now my dad and I both moved to the next level. That's wonderful for us. My dad and I would like to say, "Thank you," to the teachers that have given this education to us. In my opinion, the English language is the best way for people who would like to learn and make more money for all of life.

*Jintana Chanthavilay is 38 years old and is originally from Thailand.*

## Important Things in My Life

*Chue Xiong, Minneapolis*

**M**y job and friends are important to me. It is very important to me to learn to speak English and go to school every day. Speaking English is very important because I need a better job and I need more money so I can help my family. In my life my teacher is very important to me because she helps me learn the things I want to know.

## America the Foreign

*Osman Omar, Minneapolis*

**I** came to America in December, 1995. I came to New York. I stayed one day. After that I came to Minneapolis, Minnesota. The weather was a bad day. I saw a lot ice. My first day of life had a cool wind but I was walking on the ice. On the second day I went to the office for a Social Security number and the identification number. After seven days I went on welfare and a church helped for work and for school. Then one year later and now I still work 13 years I go every where and I go by myself now.

## My Living Room

*Astrude Maceno, Minneapolis*

**M**y living room is the most enjoyable place in my house. When I am trying to relax after a long day of work, I'll get a refuge there. After cooking a good meal, this is where I relax for a few minutes. It is also a place for entertainment. Finally, before I go to bed, I make the time to stop in there, with my Lord, read my Bible and pray.

The ideal place in the house for others would be a bedroom, or the family

room. However for me, my living room is the most preferred room in my house, even though I also like my bedroom. I have a lot of good times in my living room. As I said earlier, after a long and exhausting day of work, the first thing I do, is to lie on my couch, kick off my shoes, and turn on my TV before I do anything else. Everyday after cooking, I surely go in my living room either to watch a TV program or to listen to some relaxing music. It is also an entertainment place. Whenever my family or friends come over, we all enjoy the living room. At the end of everything it is also a place before I go to bed taking time to read my Bible and have a pleasant time with my Lord. Most of the time, this happens right there in my living room, because I realize if I get into bed before I do this, I might fall asleep, and I will miss it.

It is evident that the most likeable part in my house is my living room. This is why I spend most of my precious moments there, which are resting after work, listening to music, entertaining and finally reading and praying.

*Astrude Maceno is 47 years old and is originally from Cayes, Haiti.*

LOVE ALWAYS

Just thinking of you, always on my mind  
Entering sleep, trying to find  
Never ending love, deep in my heart  
Never to betray, never to part  
In my dreams, so beautiful and bright  
Forever and ever, holding you tight  
Engaging in loyalty, and felicity til death  
Rejoicing every second, until my last breath



Christopher Hazelton  
St Peter, Minnesota

*Christopher Hazelton, Saint Peter*



# My Life

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## I Am From Zacatecas Mexico

*María Zesati, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is María. I liked my childhood in Mexico. I have four brothers and four sisters. I lived on a ranch with my parents. I miss my family and my ranch. I liked childhood chores on the ranch. I played with baby cows and rode horses. I came to the US in 2000. My first job in Minnesota was in a fruit company. I had nice friends at work. Now I am a student in English class and I am happy too.

## My Life in America

*Joyce Chen, Owatonna*

**M**y name is Joyce. I am from China. I was born in China in Fun Jian City. My village is a beautiful island across from Taiwan. I came to America ten years ago. I met my husband in America. He is a nice man. We were married in New York City in 1999. I have two daughters. The oldest is shy and is seven years old. The youngest one is lively and five years old. They are so cute.

I moved to Owatonna about three years ago because my husband and I work here in a Chinese restaurant. I do not work now because I need to take care of my daughters. I just bring my daughters to school and cook something to eat. In the morning I have time to go to school to English class. I like learning and I'm happy. I love my husband and my daughters, so I have a wonderful life.

## Snow

*Liban, Minneapolis*

**T**he first time I saw snow was November 10, 2001. This was in Minneapolis, because my country has no snow. Every time I see the snow I am scared, and I don't like it. This morning when I woke up, I saw lots of snow outside. Somebody called me and said, "I need a ride to St. Paul." I gave the person a ride. When I came back, I had a headache. The snow hit my head, and I didn't like it. On the other hand, some people live in Minnesota a long time. They like the snow, and some people who have farms like the snow because their farms depend on the snow. If they don't have the snow, they complain all

the time and say, “What is wrong with the snow this year? We don’t have lots of snow this year.”

## Baker

*Anna, Coon Rapids*

The job of a baker is very good. A baker can make sweet things: candy, pies, bread, rolls, crepes, tarts, and cream puffs. This job is very hard, but many people like a job of baker. People study two years in college. At this job you don’t make much money. Teacher and baker make the same money. I like a baker job, I like to make good food and make people happy.

## Cars in Our Lives

*Antonio González, Minneapolis*

There are important things in this world. One thing is a car. Cars make for easy and comfortable living. You can go fast to any place that you want. Also, you can travel to different places no matter how far they are. There are different types of cars—small cars, big cars, and comfortable cars. Prices of the cars can vary. Some of them are very expensive. You can get cheaper ones. It depends on what kind of car you want. However, cars can have negative things. As I already said, cars make for comfortable living. That means that sometimes people do not want to walk anymore. One more thing is that cars are fast, and when you drive fast, you can have accidents. In addition, there are

a lot of cars in the cities. That means a lot of pollution.

*Antonio González is originally from Morelos, Mexico.*

## Mexico and Minnesota

*Abel Martínez, Saint Louis Park*

My name is Abel Martínez. I’m from Veracruz, Mexico. My home town is Coatzacoalcos. It means “place where there are many snakes.” It’s a beautiful place. People are very friendly. You can swim on the



*Luan Vu, Waite Park*

beaches. When I am on the beach with my friends and my family, I like to collect shells. When I go home, I like to watch television and then for one hour before I go to bed, I like to read an interesting book. I like to get along with people.

When I speak English, I would like to help the people who don’t speak English. I have a brother. His name is Victor, and I have two sisters. Their names are María and Yolanda. My parents are alive. My father worked in a big company for 32 years. My mother always worked at home.

When I arrived in the United States for the first time, I liked so much the cities. I have been living here for seven years. I enjoy when I am downtown and I look at the high buildings. I like to drive on the highway because I enjoy it. Minnesota is a nice state, but is too cold in winter. Minnesota has many lakes where you can spend a good time with your friends and family.

## Myself

*S. Barnes, Minneapolis*

I am from Muncie, Indiana. I was born October 31, 1978. I have two children: one girl and one boy. I have been in Minnesota for a while. I study at Northside ABE, where I am taking up my GED. So far I'm doing fine. I like my school a whole lot. My goal is to get my GED diploma. I would like to say I like Minnesota but I'm ready to move back to where I was born and that's real.

## My Dreams Will Come True

*Hsa Moo, Saint Paul*

My name is Hsa Moo. I'm from the Karen nation. I grew up in a small village in East Burma. I have two sisters and four brothers. My father was a pastor, and my grandfather was a farmer. My grandfather is the person who influenced me the most when I was young. He was always so calm and gave me good advice.

I left my country home in 1975. I moved to the Thai-Burma border in November, 1979. I studied in Bible School for four years. After that, I was a Bible School teacher for ten years. I got married on March 10, 1993. I have two children. My family and I moved to Chiang Mai, Thailand in April, 1998. I was a pastor in that city for ten years. Then our family came to the US. I would like to thank the US government, because they invited us and helped us with many things.

My goal is to be a good leader and help our Karen people become a good nation. This is my dream. Thank you for reading my story.

*Hsa Moo is 46 years old and is originally from Burma.*

## My Favorite Things

*RN Wimala, Minneapolis*

I was born in Sri Lanka. I grew up in a village. It was very calm, quiet, peaceful, and so beautiful all around it. When I was little, I liked to visit new places, so I asked my parents to go to the jungle, river, lake, mountains, and to visit caves. My parents asked me, "Why do you want to go there?" I said, "I don't know." But then we went to visit together. One day we went on a trip to visit a national forest. It was my most interesting day.

Otherwise I liked to read books. When I had vacation I read children's stories. I moved from my house when I was nine years old. I studied many languages and cultural things for more than nine years. I like to think about nature. That's why I started to travel in my country. I tried to go everywhere. But I couldn't do it. So I liked to visit ancient ruins because I visited many places that rulers lived.

Otherwise my favorite activity was swimming. Every day in the evening I went to the lake or river. I was there two, three hours with my friends.

I later became a monk. I am doing meditation and other temple work with my other monks. Now I am living in Minnesota. After I came I traveled to many places. I visited lakes, zoos, museums, and rivers. I like to visit ancient places. So I try to go many places. This is my lifestyle.

## Dancing

*Irene Ramirez, Saint Cloud*

My entire body moves to a beat that sometimes I cannot even hear. My heart hears the music and rushes me to another world—a world where I seem to be free. My

eyes close and I feel the sweat running down my chest. There is a current of fire that flows thru my veins—I have become entranced. I feel as though my body no longer moves to the music, but simply a slow beat of a drum. The world is not around me, people have disappeared. It is only me here on the dance floor, dancing forever and dancing however. My legs rush with weakness; I feel they may give out. Somehow though, they manage to continue with a perfect connection to the floor.

My body moves in sync with my heartbeat, it does not skip but once. The thought that I am alone comes once, and only once. The endorphins my brain sends through my

body relieve me of my aching. Slowly I come to a halt. I hear the music again, deafening my ears. I must

wait now until the next song begins so that I may return to that world that I find whenever I dance.

How I wish you could see me. See the way my body moves to the beat, how it seems to cling to a song, whose words to me will be immediately forgotten. I sing to my favorite songs, but I dance only to what I hear. I do not need a famous songwriter to get me to move, to force me to dance. The most beautiful song is derisory to me. I care only to move, I care only to dance.

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My body moves in sync with my heartbeat, it does not skip but once. The thought that I am alone comes once, and only once.

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## Safety and Sadness

*Qamar Mudey, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Qamar Mudey. I am from Somalia. I lived in a small city named Jamama. I left my country at the age of 13. I left my family and I came with my aunt. The reason I left my country was because there was a war and I was scared of getting raped. When I left Somalia I went to Kenya. It was very hard for me because I always remembered my family and cried, but then I got used to Kenya and I didn't miss my family.

In Kenya, I got married to my husband at the age of 16. I had my first child when I was 17. I then had two more children in Kenya. Then my husband and I decided to move to the United States. I am now a mother of seven. I moved here in 1997 on September 23. My parents lived with me in the United States for a while and then moved out to their own house. I still miss my country but now I live safe.

## My Name Is Paw Sha

*Paw Sha, Saint Paul*

**I** lived in Thailand. I came to the United States with my family. There are six people in my family. I have three daughters and one son. Two daughters go to childcare. One daughter and my son go to school. I go to school too, every day. I study English. I'm very happy. My husband does not go to school because he is working to pay for our airplane tickets and diapers for children. I'm happy.

[Editor's note: When refugees resettle in the United States, their plane tickets are paid for by a loan from the government. After four months in the US, families start paying back their loans (World Relief MN).]



## I Had To Leave My Country

*Chit Htoo, Saint Paul*

I am Chit. I lived in Burma for a long time. My nationality is Karen. I have three brothers and two sisters. My parents are farmers. I left my country because of a civil war. Seventeen of my relatives have died in the war, including my grandfather and grandmother.

*Chit Htoo is 28 years old and originally from Burma.*

## Winter and Dreams

*Amal Mohamed, Minneapolis*

I was born in Somalia. I was 14 years old when I came to America with my family on July 20, 2002. It was summer time. Everything was so beautiful, so green and so colorful. I heard my neighbors talking about summer and winter. I asked one of my cousins the meaning of summer and winter. She told me that summer time is like the weather in Africa, but in winter time everything will become white and snowy. She said I would need to wear more clothes, like a coat, a scarf, and gloves, and the roads would be icy. It would be hard to drive a car. Many people would make snowmen in front of their houses in their yards. The kids love to throw snowballs and slide down hills.

After two months I started high school. At the time I was in ninth grade. After that I got married. I have four children now. The older one is named Hamda, and the others are Hamsa, Hudayfi, and Fahad. They are six, five, four, and two years old. I'm a fulltime mom and a student at Volunteers of America (VOA) High School. I will graduate from VOA and then I will go to college to become a dentist. It will be difficult for me, but I will not stop until I achieve my goal.

## Nigerian Cooking

*Anonymous, Brooklyn Park*

We have different types of recipes. One of them is fufu and soup. We have yam fufu, plantain fufu, and so on. Fufu is West African dried yam. You can buy it in African stores here in Minnesota.

How we prepare yam fufu with soup is that we put the hot water on the stove. After a while we stir it until it goes to its taste. After some minutes the fufu is done. Then you prepare any type of soup you like. Names of some soups we cook are: egwusi soup (which is made from melon), onugbu soup (which is made from bitter leaf), ogbono soup (which is a draw soup), okro soup (you guys know okra), vegetable soup (which is made with different types of vegetables), and so on.

The soup I like to prepare is my favorite soup, egwusi. You can use any type of this soup to eat fufu. For example, if you are preparing onugbo soup, you will put some water in a pot and add some stuff you want to put in it, like maggi cube. Not the liquid maggi you use to put in your food when you eat. Maggi cube is a special sauce we use to cook soup that will give it taste. Add also chicken, beef, stockfish, dried fish, palm oil, pepper, onions, and cocoyam, which will thicken the soup. After adding all these ingredients, put it on the stove. You will be watching it in order to prevent it from burning. You will allow it at least five or ten minutes until all of the stuff is well cooked. Then you bring the soup out ready to eat. You will put it in a bowl in order to serve. Eat this soup with fufu.

It is interesting to eat these foods because it is healthy for your body. I hope one day you will come and enjoy these foods with me. These recipes are Nigerian food. Remain blessed. More grease to your elbow!

## Life in the US

*Shun Xing Yu, Minneapolis*

I go to school every day. I went to school yesterday. I am going to school now. I come home at 11:45 a.m. I eat lunch at 12:30 p.m. I cook dinner. I don't have a job. I go to school from Monday to Friday morning.

In the afternoon at 3:00 p.m., I need to look for the school bus and look for my granddaughter to come home. I am a homemaker at home. At 5:00 p.m. I want to cook Chinese food. My family and I eat dinner together. At 7:00 p.m. I do my homework and look at newspapers until 8:00 p.m. I sleep at 11:00 p.m.

Now, I also have a job in a Chinese restaurant. It is part-time from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. I come home at 10:30 p.m. I like my job but I am very tired.

## Special Gifts

*Kinga Janosz, Blaine*

Some gifts I remember are special shoes and a special ring. These gifts I will remember every time.

When I was young my parents bought me shoes. The shoes were special because they were for dancing. These shoes were brown leather and were very light. I really liked dancing with my special gift, but I danced every day and my shoes got damaged. My parents wanted to buy me the same shoes but they didn't find any.

My second special gift is a ring. This ring is very special for me because my husband gave it to me in Poland two years ago. We were engaged and one year later we had our wedding.

I don't have my special shoes but I have a ring. I wear my ring every day and I'm very happy that I can be married.

## Moved To Improve Life from Cameroon to the US

*Blaise Ngandjui, Duluth*

After a visit to the US Embassy, we didn't know if we could move. Friends and relatives helped us to have money. We decided that Charlotte would move first and then I would see if I could move with four kids or alone. But we had to have our visas before September 31, 2008. If not, our possibility to move would be cancelled.

Charlotte and I got our visas in May, 2008 and she moved to Duluth where I have a friend who has lived there for four years. My friend and his wife Lisa accepted my wife to live with them for four months. During this period, she worked hard. We are French-speaking and English was her first difficulty. The cold was the second one. But she didn't worry about that. My friend lent her money for CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) class. She got her certificate and found a job. She didn't stay there for a long time. We always communicated online. After her move, I began to study English on the internet. Many persons helped us and in August, 2008 the children got their visas. One month later we left Cameroon to be together again.

Today we have many difficulties. It is not easy to communicate, weather is very hard (it is our first winter), we don't have jobs which can help us, but it is not too bad. We think those problems are normal for any stranger in a new country.

So we are happy to be together. Our children enjoy being here. They are doing well in school and they have new friends. People in Duluth are friendly and helpful. Charlotte and I have part-time jobs respectively at Nettleton School and Woodland Middle School. Now we also have an ESL class at the Adult Learning Center where we met

wonderful teachers. We just look at the future and it looks bright.

I plan to go to college and get a degree when my English is better. Charlotte wants as soon as possible to be a registered nurse. Our children are too young to know what they want to do. But the oldest, Jessie, said she wants to be a lawyer.

Our families and friends helped us to realize our dream. We know that they are waiting for us and we have to thank them with return help. As it is said in French, "Qui veut peut" (Who need something afford to do it), we see that is true.

## Now and in the Future

*Chanb Thone Yang,  
Minneapolis*

I was born on December 1, 1959 at Hous Phane Province, Laos. I have six sisters and three brothers. My mother's name is Vang. She passed away in 1965 and my father's name is Chue Neng Yang. He passed away in July 2003. They passed in Laos.

My life was very hard. When I was younger I didn't have to go to school. When I turned 12 years old I started going to school. My first class was in 1969 at Long Cheng in Laos. In 1975, I was ready for high school. In 1976, I moved and returned to my old city, Houa Phane. In 1978, I got married to a woman named Pang Thao. We have six children. In 1980, I had to work in the supermarket but in 1990, I quit my job in order to get an education in law.

I went to the law college in Vientiane Province until 1996, when I got a law degree. I passed law school! I got a good job in the

prosecutor's office from 1997 to 2003. After that I moved to this new country, the United States. Now my family lives here. It is very good for my family. Now and in the future.

## My Life in the US

*María N. Díaz, Fairmont*

**M**y name is María Díaz. I come from a large family. I have four sisters and three brothers.

I came to the US in the year of 1994. Everything was so different here, first your language. Even though I could speak a little English, I couldn't understand any single word.

I got married in 1998 and have five children.

So I started going to English classes because I want to help my kids with their homework.

ESL classes have helped me a lot. USA is a country of goals. Now I am trying to get my GED because I want to get a job and so my kids can be proud of me.

I just want to thank all my teachers for helping me all these years of learning and hope they continue having ESL classes.

*María N. Díaz is originally from Mexico.*

## The Dark Side of Forever

*Christopher Podvin, Bayport*

**T**he dark side of life is forever unspoken, held deep, so deep it feels as if there is no hope inside. The depth of darkness is overwhelming, as if you are watching a puzzle going down the twisting water of a drain. It



*Mai Sao Lee, Minneapolis*

is as if you had an out-of-body experience of watching yourself, gasping for air, getting within inches of the top of the water, but then being sucked back under. It is as in a bad dream, feeling like your life is taken for granted by everyone you care for and love.

The deep, dark part of life is thinking you have people that love you, only to find deception from it all. The feeling of deception is too deep and painful to talk about. It's really feeling as if a muzzle is put over your mouth. But you smile; there is no possible way to tell anyone how you feel because you feel as if no one would give a shit anyway.

You question, is there such a thing as a black sheep? There has been a black sheep for as long as we can remember.

The hardened outer shell of our body still hurts. It's as if we were just put here on earth, as if we were just a mistake, turned loose against ourselves.

If we open our hearts up to anyone, we get nothing but pain and deception. We feel as if we have been condemned for the wrongs we have done. The wrong we have done is sticking up for what we believe in, and then we still don't get accepted. It's a deception. People see us as evil, dark souls and don't try to ever contact us, as if we were not even related.

We have done wrong, and we have done the time, mentally and physically, but still no forgiveness. Our people are all hypocrites, lying, never seeing eye to eye. I guess they, for some reason, think they are better than us. It is still painful to know they hate everything about us, and yet, they are the ones that made us. We feel like life is relentless as far as the pain; it is so hard, but yet almost regular. We feel like our moms love us—as do our children—but everything else is forever dark.

## Life Goes On...

*Warunyaporn Standal, Coon Rapids*

I came from Thailand on February 11, 2008. I'm a Thai woman. I'm 32 years old. I graduated from Rajabhat Institute University in Chaing Mai, Thailand. My degree was in Communication Art. When I was young, I lived in the Lampoon province. It's north of Thailand and close to Chaing Mai. Actually, I should say I'm from the country, not a city. I really loved my life at that time. I am from a family of six people—my grandfather, my mom, my aunty, my older brother, my oldest brother, and me. In my family, we always had happy times together. Unfortunately, my

grandfather just passed away last October.

I'm a social person and love to meet people. After I graduated in 1998, I moved

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People are friendly. They always smile even if they never know each other. My country has a slogan—"The Land of Smile."

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to Bangkok. Bangkok is the capital city of Thailand. There are around nine million people there. I did not like Bangkok because it was crowded and busy. I think Bangkok is like New York City in the USA. When I lived in Bangkok, I worked as a sales representative at a travel agency. I loved that job. I was proud and happy every time I got customer, and they signed a contract to be our customers to buy our products and services.

In Thailand the weather is dry and hot. We have three seasons—hot, rainy and winter. Winter is not cold like here. I love my country. People are friendly. They always smile even if they never know each other. My country has a slogan—"The Land of Smile." I'm from a tropical zone. My country never has snow like Minnesota. Before I came here, I knew a lot about the USA because

my friends traveled to Minnesota, and my customers traveled to New York City. They always told me about the USA and the cold weather. Now for almost a year I have lived here. I have realized something about the body adapting. I have gotten used to the weather—just keep my body warm!

## Doing the Impossible

*Luz Adriana Blomster, Plymouth*

**M**y name is Luz Adriana and I'm from Colombia. I have been living in the United States since April, 2003. I have one sister and one cousin who are living in this country too. I'm lucky because I have part of my family close to me. In the time that I have lived here, many things have happened that I never thought possible.

First, I live without my family. All of my life I had lived with my grandma, my sister, my uncles and my aunts. They were always close to me when I needed help. If I was sad, happy, sick or healthy they were always there for me. Of course I miss my family very much. Second, communication has been a challenge. My first language is Spanish. I knew that I needed to learn English. It wasn't easy but it wasn't impossible. My first step was to go to school. My cousin was taking English classes, at the Winnetka Learning Center. He told me how to register for class. I started in level one and now I'm in the last level at my school. I know my English is not perfect but I'm proud of my progress.

Third, when I lived in Colombia, I studied accounting and I was an office manager. After moving to Minnesota I had to work cleaning houses, on assembly lines and babysitting. Babysitting was a wonderful experience because I love kids. Kids are funny, sweet and loving. Now I'm working in customer service speaking

Spanish and English. In my new job I have the opportunity to practice conversation and writing in English all the time.

I had a difficult time trying to figure out all of these things, but now I'm happy with my life and with all of my experiences. After four years I found my other half. I'm married to Mark and I'm still learning about everything.

## Always Connected

*Philip, Anoka*

**I**n my tight-knit South Sudan family, we did everything together. I mean everything. We played games, watched movies and North Sudan Bruins soccer on TV, ate meals together, went to church and the grocery store, and stuck so close that I knew I was loved by my parents more than anything else. If anything ever went wrong, I would be okay because they looked out for me and I looked out for them. I have a sixth sense about them and if they're in any kind of trouble, I can feel it. I just know. I grew up in South Sudan, and there was just my sister and me and our parents. Sometimes I had the feeling that things weren't right and I called Dad immediately. Most of our relatives lived one town over from our town. Every holiday was spent with aunts, uncles, and many cousins. We rotated from house to house.

*Philip is 21 years old and is originally from Sudan.*

# Family

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The word family itself is a magic word, and it's a magic wand. We find everything in this magic wand that allows us to live happily. Being with family is a wonderful experience that God gives us in our life. Our journey begins on the day we are born. Even though we are only one person, the magic is that we carry out different roles in life. Our role partially depends on whether we are a boy or a girl.

I love my life and I'm thankful to God for providing me with a wonderful family. Growing up, I enjoyed every moment of my life with my wonderful family and friends. We spent a lot of time together having fun, but there were sometimes tense moments as well. Spending time with family is priceless and everyone should make it their top priority. Each letter in the word "family" stands for something special:

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"F" is for FRIENDLY

"A" is for AFFECTIONATE

"M" is for MORAL SUPPORT

"I" is for IRRITATING (at times)

"L" is for LOVING

"Y" is for YELLING (at times)

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Even though sometimes we get irritated and yell at each other, the rest of the letters put us back together. Currently I am living in Saint Paul with my wonderful husband, and two beautiful daughters. I know that I am very far away from my country, India, and my family, but the wonderful memories that I have with them are never going to leave me, they are with me and will stay with me. We have only one life to live, but a lot of things to enjoy.

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## Sreedevi



*Sreedevi Mahawadi is a student in the South Washington County ABE/ESL program. Sreedevi came to the United States ten years ago from India and now lives in Saint Paul with her husband, Shridhar, and her two children, Bhavana, age 12, and Asha, age 8. She is pursuing a Master's in Accounting.*

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## Journeys in America

*Amina Jama, Minneapolis*

Since I arrived in the US two years ago, I have had three very awesome journeys. One was a trip to New York to meet my brother's newborn baby boy. Learning to write for our school newsletter has also been an amazing journey too. Then, I got a job in America which means I have new friends who take me on a journey into their culture.

First, it was my first time to travel to New York. It was wonderful. I can't describe how I felt at that time. I went to see my older brother, his family, and their new baby! It was amazing. It was a baby boy, so I felt especially happy. In fact, it was the happiest day of my life. Although I like all kids, I like newborn babies the best.

Second, I got my first job in America. It was really good because I work with people who are not from Somalia. At first, it was hard for me to talk with them. I stopped being scared after one month. Now, I really enjoy my job and talking with American people.

The third journey is a special part of my life in America. I am learning how to write articles for our school newsletter at Volunteers of America High School for Adults. We have a special volunteer, Morgan Mae, who helps us organize and write for the newsletter. After we write it, all students and principals read it. I really feel happy when I see everyone reading our newsletter. I feel proud because I am learning English as my second language. I would like to thank Morgan Mae for coming to our school as a volunteer to help us. We appreciate her kindness, the time she gives us, and her knowledge.

These three journeys in America have been very exciting. Going to New York to meet my new nephew was the best. My job in

America, gives me the experience of learning about people from different cultures. Finally, learning to write articles for our school newsletter is absolutely amazing.

*Amina Jama is originally from Somalia.*

## America the Foreign

*Halimo Abdi M, Minneapolis*

America is different from my country because there are different people in America. They come from around the world and speak different languages. They also believe different religions. America has a different climate from my country. America in the winter is very cold. It is difficult to drive and walk. It is slippery. You must stay inside the house or inside the company you work. You have to wear thick clothes in the winter. Sometimes the cold is below zero. My country is a hot climate. It doesn't have the bad weather in the winter. It is not very cold in the winter. America is good in the summer. It is green everywhere.

## What Gardening Taught Me

*Kathy Taylor, Stacy*

I first started gardening when I was about seven years old and living in Saint Paul. By doing odd jobs for elderly neighbors, I earned money to buy my own seeds. We gardened because I had five brothers and one sister and my mom and dad and it helped the household.

I live in a manufactured home now and have a small 30 x 80 foot lot. My garden takes up about a fourth of the lot. This year I planted cucumbers, muskmelon, pumpkin, peppers, six rows of beans, and 24 tomato plants and I canned lots of it. Usually I use Big Girl or Big Boy and Roma varieties. Out of that I got 60 pints and 18 quarts of beans.

I gave a lot of beans to people in the court and at work too. I also chop and freeze onions to use later in recipes. One of my favorite things to make is spaghetti sauce using the tomatoes, peppers and onions.

Even though my family is grown and gone I still garden because it saves tons of money. When prices go up at the store I don't have to worry about where I am going to get my food. All I have to do is take it out of the cupboard and maybe add a little hamburger to it. This year I took half of my canned goods to my daughter's home in Virginia.

We have sandy soil so I use manure and leaves to make it more fertile. I try to stay away from chemical fertilizer. Planting two rows together is a more efficient use of space. Using old rugs in the paths cuts down on the weeds and is good for the environment. They slowly decay and help to hold the moisture in the ground. The vegetable roots seek out that moisture. If you get dark spots or discolor on your tomatoes it means the soil needs ash or lime.

When I weed I see a lot of wildlife like snakes, owls, eagles flying overhead, and lots of different birds. Gardening not only taught me how to save money, but I also learned that it is fun and relaxing.

## Getting Through Problems

*Ayan Ahmed, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Ayan and I live in Minneapolis. Minneapolis is a great place to live in. When I came to Minneapolis it was during a very cold winter and everything seemed unfamiliar to me. It was hard to find a job, a home, and a good school. After I got through a lot of problems, I was able to find a job, a home, and a school. I believe everything is possible if we work hard and are patient. I have my own family of

three beautiful kids and they were all born in Minneapolis. I love Minneapolis.

## My Story

*Sopheap Kuong, Burnsville*

**M**y name is Sopheap Kuong. I come from Cambodia. I have three children. My family and I lived with the Communists under Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979. I lived in a small village with farmers far away from the city. I lived in Kao I Dang camp in Thailand for one year. We came to the United States on February 8, 1984 as refugees. After that, I went to ESL class for five months. Two years later, I decided to teach Cambodian traditional dance to Cambodian children. We performed on Cambodian New Year's every year. I did that only on weekends. On weekdays, I had a job for twelve hours a day. I worked from 7:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. My job was at ConAgra Foods. But right now it is closed because the company moved to Mexico, so I went back to ESL class again.

## Going Back To Visit My Homeland

*Elsa G., Minneapolis*

**I**grew up on a farm in Ecuador and moving to the United States was a big change in my life. It was not easy for me to adapt to a new life and a new culture. I have been in the United States for almost 11 years now, and I still miss my country. I have two daughters. My oldest daughter is eight years old and my youngest daughter is six years old. Last year, after ten years, I went back to my country with my daughters to visit my family. We stayed there for one month in my mother's house.

My mother lives on a farm. She has farm animals like cows, sheep, pigs, chickens, and guinea pigs. She also has two dogs and



a cat. My children loved being there. My oldest daughter enjoyed going every morning with my



*Ana Rivera, Cottage Grove*

mother to feed the animals. She also started learning how to milk a cow and she loved it. My youngest daughter liked being there too but she was scared of the chickens. That is why she didn't like going outside of the house by herself, but one day she went out with her cousins to the neighbor's house. The neighbor, Gladis, told us that she was so sweet when she greeted them saying, "Buenos días, Miss Gladis." Of course the neighbor didn't understand what "Miss" meant but she was happy saying that my daughter was so sweet.

My kids didn't want to come back to the United States. They wanted to stay there to live on the farm, and now every time when I call my Mom they talk to her and always say that they want to go back to live with her. Going back to visit my homeland was so exciting.

*Elsa G. is 31 years old and is originally from Ecuador.*

## Living in Minnesota

*Rocio Davila Acevedo, Stillwater*

This nice experience started on August 25, 2008. I was really excited to come to the United States. WOW, I couldn't believe my first time here. Two wonderful families were waiting for me at the airport, my new adventure had started.

My first host family was the Laubschers, very nice people. I shared with them many

good moments and great experiences. I learned from them many things, even how to love a cat. It was fun. On December 12, I moved to my second host family, the Stannards, also very nice and fun people. I spent the holidays with them and I'm sure I'll never forget these white, beautiful, and cold days. With them I had some of the best experiences here. I went skiing and I loved it! What an awesome experience—even with the coldest weather I've ever experienced. I will have to move to another family, the Loumas, but I know it will be great also. Now I think every moment, every day or every night is a wonderful experience to discover.

Obviously I miss my family, my boyfriend, my friends and the Columbian food, but you can't imagine how happy I am and how thankful to God I am and how glad and proud I am with everything that happens in my life. I want to tell you more but you'll get bored so I'm going to live happily ever after with whatever happens in my life.

*Rocio Davila Acevedo is originally from Columbia.*

## Same Situation

*Vasyliy Kaploukhyl, Prior Lake*

My name is Vasyliy. I came from Ukraine. It is a country in Eastern Europe. It is an independent country now, but Ukraine used to be a part of the Russian empire and the USSR for centuries. My mother came to live in Ukraine from the other part of the Russian Federation and married there in 1972. Her ancestry is Tatar. She was a bilingual child. She came with many other immigrants from her place and soon they built a small community in our city of about a couple of hundred people. They could speak to each other in their original language, ask about news from home and help each other to live in

a new place. I did not understand my mom's crying sometimes or her worrying about her community when it began to assimilate into Ukraine culture. Now when I am an immigrant in another country, I understand her very well, and would like to say, "I'm sorry, Mom, that I did not understand you. You were right. Family and friends are first. You taught me not to forget them. Thank you, Mom, and I promise I will not forget."

## My Story

*Klara Paley, Plymouth*

In 1990, my family and I emigrated from the USSR to Israel. In 1995, my son, his wife, and son immigrated to the United States into Minneapolis, Minnesota. My son and daughter-in-law went to school and became citizens and then helped me and my husband immigrate as well. In 2004, we immigrated to America and reunited with our family.

We were all very happy to be together again. Our children and grandchildren all greeted us at the airport. Our little granddaughter was born in America. Our children showed us the city. We went to the zoo, the circus, and theatres. Minneapolis is a very beautiful city with many lakes and forests.

In 2005, our kids took us to New York for a vacation. We visited interesting places and went to where the World Trade Centers were. We paid our respects to the victims of the terrorist attacks.

In October, 2006, I started taking English lessons. In the Soviet Union I learned German. Now I had to start all over and learn a new language. This time a wonderful volunteer named Dianne helped me a lot. For the first year she helped me at school. The next year she came to my house and helped me. At school I have a wonderful teacher

named Ruth. She gives a lot of attention to every student and we are very thankful for that. In our class there are people from many different places like Mexico, Russia, and Bangladesh. We all get along very well and help each other out. I am always happy to go to class.

I am very grateful to America and its people for all the help we have received and that we are able to live with our children and grandchildren in a free country.

## Different Life

*Carvajal, Shakopee*

I was born in Reynosa Tamps, Mexico and my husband is from Texas. I was a single girl when I lived in Reynosa with my family. In the mornings, I went to high school and after school I went to work in a factory. In Reynosa my routine was study and work. My goal was to get a degree in veterinary science.

I thought I would get married in my country, but when I met my future husband my life changed forever. We fell in love and got married in 2002 and lived in Houston for a year. I had two sisters living in Shakopee, Minnesota and I wanted to be close to their families, so we moved to Shakopee and my life continued to change from my life in Mexico.

Now, seven years later, I do housework every day—cooking for my family and taking care of my children. It is difficult for me. We have two children, a daughter who is four and a new baby boy, three months old. We are committed to living here forever, but it is difficult for me because I don't speak good English. I want to work to help my family, but I need to improve my reading and speaking. Going to school is important and is helping me get better.

My mother told me that if I got married in

the United States, my life would be different because my husband is an American and we want to always live in the US. Now I am happy here with my family and my life is different, but I am learning every day.

## Dancing

*Rachelika, Hopkins*

Dancing is a very beautiful thing! It's musical, and music is something that everyone likes, loves, and enjoys. It can be a hobby, a profession, or both. In the dance world you have the opportunity to meet and socialize with new

and interesting people. Dancing also can be a very healthy thing in many ways.

It's great exercise because it helps reduce and relieve stress, and many times it helps people who have depression. It's good for the mind and the soul and it makes you feel good, happy, and joyous! Dancing also helps build confidence, and makes you believe that you can achieve something that you never thought you could do. It also helps you be brave and overcome your fear of dancing and performing in front of lots of people.

Dancing can be theatrical and allows you to show different emotions. Many times, during the dance, you express your feelings and passion in dancing. You might express yourself with sadness, happiness, joy, passion, love, hate, or other emotions.

In short, in my opinion, dancing is very important in our lives, because it influences us in a very positive way!

*Rachelika is originally from Israel/Russia.*

## Memory Vietnam

*Ha Mai, Woodbury*

I was born in Vietnam. We lived in Saigon City. My family had six people. I had both parents, three sisters, including me and one brother. My mother had her own business to sell things as fabric, clothes, cosmetics and more.

We had nice neighbors and many relatives; sometimes we shared food together. The city where we lived had good locations for business. It had many opportunities to live there. Near my home there were

schools, churches and temples. There were many stores, for example: groceries, supermarkets, restaurants, and jewelry stores.

There were many conveniences for people to live there who want

to take time to relax. Cinemas offered movies every day and there was a stadium for those who loved football, basketball, volleyball, and tennis.

Many people were in Saigon before 1975. After 1975 the communists won. This was history for the whole country. The Vietnam republican government transformed to a different political party. My father and many people related to the old political party had to go to concentration camp for many years. When he came back home, we moved to the United States through a refugee program. Now I am living here. I have a job. This is a bigger country than my country with many people from different countries who come here.

## Sveta's Story

*Sveta, Edina*

I was born in the Soviet Union in 1973 on the small island of Sakhalin, which is close to Japan. My parents are engineers. They moved to the island after graduating from college and they built cities while they worked in the construction industry. I have an older brother. My family was nice; we liked sports and other outdoor activities.

In 1978 I started to attend a sports school to train in gymnastics. I liked training very much. In 1986 I received the first rank in gymnastics.

During my childhood I went to the continent to camp out every summer, because summer was bad on the island, with very little sun and a lot of rain. I started elementary school in 1980 when I was seven years old. In 1983 I started middle school. In 1990, after completing middle school, I moved to Saint Petersburg, where I started college. Saint Petersburg is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. It is often called "Northern Venice" because it has many rivers, canals, and lakes. In the city there are palaces of the Russian kings, many historic buildings and monuments, nice areas and gardens, museums and churches.

From 1990 to 1995, I studied financial management. In 1995 I received my diploma and graduated from college. That year I got my first job with Ford.

In 1995 my country was renamed Russia. During summers I spent my vacations traveling to Europe or to Sakhalin to see my parents. Vacation is always very good!

In 2007 I fell in love and got married. My husband, Max, is a journalist. We have many mutual interests: sports, travel and reading. Max came here on a long business trip. I came

with him. We rent an apartment in Edina. Now I am studying English at SHAPE, because I would like to communicate more with people.

We take every opportunity to find out more about the United States; we read and take road trips. We have already been to Las Vegas, the Badlands, the Black Hills, and Lake Superior. America is a very big country with many different sides to it! We have many interesting discoveries ahead of us.

*Sveta is 35 years old and is originally from Russia.*

## Coming to the US

*Ángel Romero Piña, Minneapolis*

My story was very hard. I was born in Argentina, but I moved with my family when I was three years old. My father is from Argentina and my mother is from Ecuador. I lived 18 years in Ecuador, so when I was 21 years old I moved to the United States in November of 1995, but my way was very hard.

For two months, I traveled from Quito, Ecuador to Guatemala by airplane. After that I took the bus to Mexico. From Matamoros, Mexico to Houston, Texas and I walked about 21 hours, but from Houston, Texas to Chicago, Illinois I traveled by airplane. Sometimes I didn't eat. I ate one time every three days, so I arrived in Minneapolis, Minnesota by bus about 6:00 p.m. on January 10 of 1996.

My first year in the United States was very confusing, very hard because I didn't speak English. Outside it was frozen—very cold. I saw snow for the first time in my life. My first job was in March, 1996 in the Cattle Company restaurant. I was a dishwasher. I started very nervous, but I liked the food, meat, and seafood because before in my country I was a vegetarian and never ate seafood and meat. Later I was very happy

because I saw the summer come, so I went to play soccer with my friends and my family. And in one year of working I paid \$5,500 for my trip to the United States of America, Now I am happy because I study and work in this country, thanks to God.

## America the Foreign

*Farhia Mohamed, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Farhia Mohamed and I am from Somalia. I came to the United States in March, 2008 where I began a new life in a new

and safer country. I can see many different amazing things which I did not have back home. In America we have 24-hour electricity, new technology, new appliances, and tall buildings. Later, I learned they are called skyscrapers.

There is one other important thing that I did not mention. Here are street rules, traffic rules, the policeman. In America everything is law and order. In my country we did not have a government to impose all those rules, instead of that we served a conflict, a civil war—genocide of women and innocent children and old men—but in America I found the other way around, which I like.

## José Luis and Rebeca Hipatia, a Father and a Mother

*María de las Mercedes Tajbakhs, Hopkins*

**I** belong to a big family. We were seven siblings and my parents were José Luis and Rebeca Hipatia. They did their best for us. They were a good example to follow. Our home was our first school in life because they were

both educators. My father and mother loved each other and had a strong marriage, even though circumstances throughout life were stressful sometimes.

We had a big home and each child had a room. As parents, José Luis and Rebeca Hipatia provided us all we needed and it was hard for them. I won't ever forget all

of us had assignments, the time to get them done, and a schedule to study and to have fun. At dinner time the family gathered to enjoy a good meal and talk about the news of the day.

Everything José Luis and Rebeca Hipatia did to raise us was right. My parents taught us that the love of the family is like a refuge. It is important to keep the love between parents and children and especially between brothers and sisters. I always have in mind what my parents asked of us: to be thankful to God for all the goodness he provides every day, to be honest and respectful with others and ourselves, to have gratitude towards our parents, our teachers, and our elders, who with their experiences in life, give us knowledge, to always say thank you and please, and to be positive and faithful. With his guidance and wisdom, God blesses us everyday.

*María de las Mercedes Tajbakhs is originally from Ecuador.*

# My Hajab

*Naima Ali, Saint Cloud*

Who I am is who you see,  
Woman as free as free can be.  
Who you see is who I am,  
Allah my Lord, my faith Islam.

My veil, my gown like flowing covers,  
Is what I wear to show all others.  
Life and beauty are not skin deep,  
It's in our heart's intentions we keep.

I walk out there yes not showing my hair  
If that offends you then life is not fair.  
I am not a slave at home tied to the kitchen sink!  
I too have a heart and a brain that can think.

And before you ask if I'm depressed,  
Abused, alone, or completely oppressed,  
Just know I'm happy and feel more free  
When men aren't gawking and flirting with me.

I don't need to dress up for strangers  
Or put myself in this world's dangers.  
I feel grand in my palace with plenty to do,  
And I can by the way go outside too.

In case you were wondering if I slept in my gown,  
The answer is no and I don't sleep on the ground.  
I'm just like any other woman you see,  
But covers and protects her modesty.

I eat take-away food on the weekends,  
Share my love with so many friends.  
There's more to me than what your eyes see,  
So don't judge my choices before you know me.

To anyone out there who can't comprehend,  
I'm happy and feel free all the way to the end.  
Not everyone's life consists of hairdos,  
And this is the life I willingly choose.

*Naima Ali is originally from Somalia.*

# Darkness Cinquain

*Dirk Kemper, Saint Peter*

Darkness  
Stars twinkling  
A shooting star  
Oh my mood changes  
Darkness

# Haiku

Greg LaCroix, Cloquet

Dancing with my people  
As the drum beats like the heart  
Time is no concern

## Thanks to Life

José Luis López Méndez, New Hope

I have many things to be thankful for.  
But I have to say that life is the first thing to which I have to say thanks.

I have to say thanks ...

Thanks, to life, for giving me a mouth  
to demand respect for myself and for others  
and also to say "I am sorry," when I am wrong  
but most importantly, to recognize that  
it is better to laugh than to cry.

Thanks, to life, for giving me two eyes  
to appreciate the wonder of the world,  
to differentiate between black and white,  
and also to differentiate in the crowd the woman who I love.

Thanks, to life, for giving me two ears  
to record birds, crickets, thunder, and the ABCs.  
And with them to interpret the words:  
mother, friend, wife, brother,  
and the sound of laughter and tears.

Thanks, to life, for giving me feet  
to go over beaches, deserts, mountains, and cities  
but also, to escape from mud and puddles,  
as well as, to stop to say hello when you cross the street.  
That's why I have to say thanks, to life, for giving me so much.

*José Luis López Méndez is originally from Guatamala.*

# Life

*Priscilla De La Cerda, South Saint Paul*

*L*ife is the moments that define us

The mistakes that we make, the lessons we learn from them  
The kind of love that dies and the kind of love that's constant  
The friendships that fade and the friendships that will be kept forever.

Life is the memories

The photographs that bring smiles to our faces, and tears to our eyes  
The moments we regret and the moments we hold onto  
The endless laughter, endless tears, endless conversations  
The days that were too long  
And the nights that weren't long enough.

Life is the people that make us who we are

The faces that bring light to our darkest days  
The voices that carry us through every storm  
Leaving us with a rainbow  
And teaching us how to be a person we can take pride in.

Life is the journey

The combination of wrong and right paths  
That lead us to where it is we were meant to arrive.



# *I'm Just Me*

*Angela Momanyi, Minneapolis,*

*I'm Just Me.*

I am very open-minded but yet sometimes closed.  
I am very nice and generous and don't treat people cold.  
I am a loving tender person, but I wish I were mean.  
I have seen many objects and many different things.  
I've dealt with all kinds of people and all were messed up.  
In my relationship's travels I've had no luck.

I am very out-going, my personality shines through;  
I've been many times taken for granted,  
But what can I do?  
I've been many places but stuck right here.  
I've been to games but gave no cheer.  
I am a very passive person, will aggression take hold?  
I am very shy and timid, but have been bold.

I may not be a supermodel but my inside beauty is fine.  
I don't wear make-up to hide me away from myself,  
Because I love who I am and you should do the same,  
I cannot be who I am not, in me, I'm not ashamed.

Jean French, Duluth

# Myself

Part of me is angry black,  
cold and lonely,  
lousy and drowsy,  
freaking my friends and hating the spotlight.  
But on the inside there's another part,  
deep red, like a firecracker under a tree,  
angry and shy,  
fearless and cowardly,  
shaking with fright every time the doorbell rings.  
Yet they're both real  
and they're both me.



Mai Yia Yang, Minneapolis

## My First Time Living Out of My Country

*Susana Rodríguez, Saint Paul*

I'm living in Saint Paul because my husband has worked here since June 2008. I think that living here is an opportunity for me and my family because we are learning English and this is good for us to have more chances to develop and more opportunities in the future. I have the opportunity to meet people from other countries and know about them and make friends.

Here in Minnesota, the people are very polite and friendly with all of us. As I said, the winter is so cold. However, sometimes it is fun because I can play winter sports with my family. The snow is beautiful, but it is a little bit complicated when I must drive to school. In addition, I love shopping and here in the Twin Cities we have the biggest mall in the country, the Mall of America, and I'm very proud and happy with that. Another thing is that here I can find all the Mexican food that I want, for this reason I don't miss my country a lot. Living in Saint Paul is a great experience that I will never forget.

*Susana Rodríguez is 32 years old and is originally from Aguascalientes, Mexico.*

## In Cambodia

*Thiem, Woodbury*

Cambodia is my first country. I lived with my family. My father's name is Ol Ang. He's 52 years old. His wife was Yann Sang. I have two older sisters, two younger brothers and two younger sisters. We lived in Cambodia's Battambang province. I was in class there, too. Every day I got up at 6 o'clock in the morning and I went to school at 6:30 a.m. I had twenty classmates. They were

very friendly. We started to study at 7 a.m. and we finished at 3 p.m. We had the class Monday to Friday. My teacher's name was Pun Lop. He is a good teacher and I wanted to study with him. Now I can't study with him because I don't go to his class. I left my first country to go to the USA on October 25, 2008 at 10 a.m.

I arrived in Minnesota on October 27, 2008 at 6 a.m. At that time I saw the snow. It was falling. I lived here about a week and then I went to class here too. I have a class three days a week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. My teacher's name is Eileen. She is a good teacher of English and she is very friendly. I am very happy to live here.

*Thiem is 27 years old and is originally from Cambodia.*

## Driving

*Silvia Vargas, Stillwater*

When I came here to the US I had never driven before. I thought I could ride the bus. But in the town where I live we don't have a bus. If you need a bus you need to call first. They come to pick you up and return back. But now I drive after almost one year. Now I can go every place I want. Also, I can give a ride to my friends. I think driving is very important, especially if you come to live in the US.

*Silvia Vargas is originally from Bolivia.*

## Untitled

*, Minneapolis*

I am a lucky lady. I am with rage writing the history that consumed what happened in Somalia. When I was younger, I was in Somalia, but I grow up in Kenya in the

Dadaab refugee camps. I was there almost 17 years. I was there from 1991 to 2007. When I was in Kenya I wanted a different school like high school computer class. I did my best in class.

About my life in Somalia, it was so hard because of the civil war again. Kenya was so easy because I grew up and I learned something. I worked hard and I tried to make happen my life and my other people and I did well.

About in America, the life is so hard like Somalia because of the wealth. The people and everything are different, good examples are cultural and many there things.

## Moving to America

*Marian Hadi, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Marian H. Hadi. I came from Somalia. I have been in the United States for two years. I have six children. One child lives with me. We both go to school at the Hubbs Center. The other children live in Kenya. I miss them so much.

*Marian Hadi is 56 years old and is originally from Somalia.*

## Then and Now

*Eloisa Bautista Prazk, Saint Paul*

**I** am Mexican. I lived near the beach. I was born on the farm. Eight blocks from my house was the river and a water fall. Many tourists came. It was a beautiful place. Now, I live in Minnesota. It is beautiful place in summer. I like very much but in winter it is very cold. But I am married here. I need to live here for long time.

## My Story About My Family

*Say Hae Baw, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Say Hae Baw. I am 35 years old. I am from Burma. I have five children. I came to the United States two years ago. I have three sons and two daughters. I live in St. Paul, Minnesota. I go to school four hours a day. My children go to school. They like Humboldt school.

In the winter it is very cold everyday. I tell my children that they need to wear a jacket, but they don't like to wear a jacket. They like to ski in the wintertime, and they love to celebrate Christmas. I like snow, but I don't like cold. When I go to school, sometimes I have to walk to school. Sometimes my husband drives me. I like this state.

## This Is Me

*Adriana, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Adriana. I am from Mexico. I came to the US five years ago. I have a job and now I am going to school and my sister comes with me. I work for Chipotle. I like to sleep.

## My Life

*Verónica Rodríguez, Minneapolis*

**I** have a new day. Thank you for a good morning. This morning is excellent. I woke up at 7:00 in the morning. I drank the coffee. After, I watched TV. The program was Spanish. After 9:30 a.m., I came to the English class.

*Verónica Rodríguez is originally from Ecuador.*

## A New Country, A New Language

*Ruqia Ahmed, Apple Valley*

**M**y name is Ruqia Ahmed. I am from Somalia. I'm married. I have four children: three boys and one daughter. My young daughter is eight years old. She's very smart. She helps me with my homework. English is very difficult. Some words, I don't understand. I ask her some words, then she explains them to me. My class is very nice. People there are friendly. My teacher is very nice. I like her. English is important!

*Ruqia Ahmed is originally from Somalia.*

## Untitled

*Fadumo Abdi, Minneapolis*

**I** came to the USA in 2002. I didn't know English. I didn't know the people and the country. Every family had a car. I saw a different life and job. I didn't know snow and cold. I miss my country and my family. But some things are good, in the USA. People have many items and are good here. Now I am happy because I have a job. I learned English. I drive a car and clean my house and I am safe.

*Fadumo Abdi is originally from Somalia.*

## I Like Minnesota

*Htoo Ku, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Htoo Ku. I am from Burma. I am 29 years old. I have two brothers and 1 sister. I came to the US on May 29, 2007, one year and eight months ago. I have four children: three daughters and one son. I live in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I like Minnesota. There are many people and many schools. It is very beautiful. I like to go to school. My

children go to school. They like Hancock school. Minnesota has many foods. When I lived in my country, I didn't go to school.

## My Life

*Doo Kway, Saint Paul*

**I** was born in Burma. I moved to Thailand in 1985. I went to school in a refugee camp. I have three friends. After school, I helped my mother cook for my father. I lived in Thailand for a long time. We were happy in the refugee camp. Karen people don't have a country. Thank you to America for giving Karen refugees a place to live. I have been in the United States of America since, June, 2008. I live with my family of ten people. I like life in the United States because we are not scared of the police here. We have an identification card. In Thailand we didn't have anything. We had no identification. We were scared of the police. Now I am happy, because I feel safe in the United States of America.

*Doo Kway is 28 years old and is originally from Burma and Thailand.*

## My 25 Years of Life

*Alex Pallazbco, Minneapolis*

**H**ello, my name is Alex. I'm from Cuenca, Ecuador. I want to tell you my little history about my life.

When I was a little kid I started to go to school. I was only six years old at that time. I lived with my parents, my brother and my sisters. I tried to go to school every day and work hard. I finished tenth grade.

My parents were very happy because they like me to have an education. I liked all the subjects that I studied in school. All of the teachers helped me. Of course like everyone, I dreamed that, one day, I could go to the USA.

I decided to leave my country. It was a very difficult time for me. It was hard to leave everything behind me, especially my mom and dad, friends and all relatives.

So now I'm here. I love Minnesota. I like my job that I have. I like the people I work with. But I still miss my parents. I hope as soon as possible, to go back to visit them.

*Alex Pallazhco is 25 years old and is originally from Cuenca Ecuador.*

## Untitled

*Ivan Barrera, Saint Louis Park*

**H**i, my name is Ivan. I'm from Ecuador. I came to Minnesota two years ago. Okay, this is my history:

I have nine sisters and three brothers. When my dad was young he loved ladies. He had three wives. That is why I have a lot brothers and sisters. I love my family. I miss them very much.

I came here for a new opportunity and to change my life. I like Minnesota and my new experience. I hope I can go back to Ecuador very promptly.

## An Introduction

*Maoly, Brooklyn Center*

**M**y name is Maoly. I am 32 years old. I am from Thailand. I am a student and study English in Northside Adult Basic Education. I work at home and I clean house and take care of my kids. I have seven children. Thailand is in Asia. I came from Thailand to the United States. I like living in Minnesota right now. I live in Brooklyn Center.

## Life Here and There

*Elvia Narvaez, Minneapolis*

**I** was born in Ecuador. It is in South America. I lived with my family in a small city. When I was a little girl I was very poor. I had two brothers and five sisters. Only my mom worked because my father was always sick.

I remember when I was a little girl, I did not have shoes. I had my bare feet only. Sometimes I slept with hunger. When I was bigger I helped my mother by working. So that's why I came to the US—to find a better life. But when I was in the US, I lost my father in two years and the next year I lost my mother. I felt like I was going to die too.

Then I met a man and when I told him that I was pregnant, he left and I was alone. And when my baby was born he made me happy and I worked hard for him to have a better life.

My life is like the lyrics from a song entitled "Clown." And it's said like this:

I'm laughing of the life  
Trying to hide from the old pain  
The people don't know  
Inside of me my sadness, lost, and pain  
Laughter and more laughter, it's my destiny  
I might do it so as not to cry  
And laugh like a clown  
I'm trying to hide my old pain.

## Story About Myself

*Lei Htoo, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Lei Htoo. I was born in Burma on November 16, 1977. I grew up and I went to school there. I have one son. He is 13 years old. In Burma I lived with my family, but because of the war, we couldn't live in Burma so we moved to Thailand. I

lived in Thailand ten years. We decided to come to the US. I came only with my son and me. My parents were still in Thailand. I miss my parents sometimes.

Minnesota is very fun because I go to school and make new friends. My teachers are very nice. Even when I don't know English they still love me and help me understand more. I'm very happy to be in America.

## Me

*Manuel Popoca, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Manuel Popoca. I am from Mexico City where my father has a farm. He has goats, sheep, and horses. I have nine brothers and sisters. I came to the United States fifteen years ago. I don't like the winters here but I do like summer when it is nice and green. I work downtown.

## My First Experience Coming From Mexico

*Jesús Alcantar, Edina*

**M**y name is Jesús. I was born in Mexico in 1976. I have two sisters and three brothers. My mom and dad are still alive. When I was 22, I came to Minnesota. It was the first time that I did not live at my house with my mom and my dad. I was so sad. Now I got married, I have two children: one girl and one boy. My daughter, Leslie is eight, and my son, Jesús is only two. My plan in the US is to make money and learn skills that I can bring with me back to Mexico.

## My Story

*María Elena Bautista González, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is María. I am 27. I am from Mexico. I live in Saint Paul. I live with

my family. I like my home which is good. Also, I like the living room. I learn English because I am rich and because it is very necessary. We're hoping for good weather.

## My Life History

*Mayra Moreno, Austin*

**H**i, my name is Mayra Moreno. I am from Mexico. I have lived in Austin, Minnesota for two years. I remember my first day. I came to the USA on April 18, 2007. I was 16 years old. It was the first time I saw a lot of snow. It was white everywhere. I said, "Oh my God!" It was very cold for me. I remember my first week in high school, I had one week that was really, really horrific because I didn't understand anything and I didn't have friends. Something horrible.

I miss my grandparents, my uncle, and aunt. However, I won't go back to Mexico. I like living here. My life is better. Here I have another form of life. I have better education and better food. And the most important, I am with my mother and my boyfriend, the two persons most important in my life. I love you.

## My Life

*Faisa Shire, Saint Paul*

**I** was born in Somalia. I came to the United States on December 2, 2004. I have three brothers and four sisters. My mother and my dad, they died. The first year when I came to the United States, I had something happen to me. I broke two ribs when I slipped in the bathroom. I couldn't sneeze and couldn't laugh. I slept in the hospital one month. Right now I feel better. Now, I come to school and I learn English.

## Learning English

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

I came from Vietnam. I have lived in St. Paul for six years ago. I remember the first day I learned ESL. It felt very hard. I thought, "I don't go to school," but with the motivation of my friend and the teacher, I learned English step by step in six years. I'm not a clever student. At the present time, I can speak and listen to a little bit of English. I'm grateful for all teachers. I have a dream to know more English very well.

## Untitled

*Aabia Abdulahi, Saint Paul*

My name is Aabia Abdulahi. I am from Somalia. I have a nice family. I have Eid to celebrate. For Eid I like to cook so many kinds of food. I like Eid. Eid is my favorite holiday. I like to watch the wrestling.

## Remember My Parents

*Bla Vang, Minneapolis*

I was born in Laos. My father died. I didn't know how he died. When I was five months old, my mother carried me to Banvinai, Thailand. I grew up in Banvinai, Thailand. When was ten years old, I asked my mother about my father's picture. My mother told me she didn't have my father's picture, because we lived in the mountains and didn't have photographers. After I got married, my husband and I came to the Pa Nikom and my husband stayed about one year in Pa Nikom because we had to study English six months.

After six months, my husband and I came to the United States. I was very happy to see snow because my country didn't have snow. After that, I went to school about four months. I didn't have money to pay my bills. I went

to work. My husband went to school. Now my husband has finished school. He is going to work. I go to school at Northside ABE on Broadway. Thank you, Chris and Gina. You two always help everybody.

## Untitled

*Rahel Aynalem, Saint Louis Park*

I am Rahel. I came from Ethiopia. I have sister and brother. I am the youngest in my family. I was living with my family in Ethiopia. I was a high school graduate in my country. I came to the USA in 2005. I have lived here almost three and half years. I have a job. I study English too. In my country I did not speak English. Now I speak a little English. I am so happy. My goal is to study and after that I will go to college. This is my goal. I miss my family.

## About Me

*Eduard S., Coon Rapids*

I'm Eduard Solyanko. I came to the US from Russia. I am 38 years old. My hair is light brown and my eyes are blue. I want to go to school to study English every day. When I speak better English I can look for a very good job. I would like to have the same job as I did in my country. There are four people in my family: my wife, Svetlana, my daughter, Karina, and my son, Denis. My best friend is my wife. Sometimes we go to a park to relax. I like to barbeque. It's my favorite food. I like to listen to pop music in my car. My favorite sports are boxing and gymnastics.

## My Story

*Tin Hlaing, Saint Paul*

My name is Tin Hlaing. I was born in Binlin city in Burma. I have six people



in my family. My parents were farmers. In my country there are many foods. In my country there are three seasons: summer, rainy, and winter.

My sisters and brothers and I went to school. We usually went to temple. We moved to Umpiem Mai refugee camp in Thailand in 1998. We lived together in a small house in the camp for 10 years.

I came to Minnesota with my husband, three children, mother, and sister. We get welfare assistance. We have been in the US six months. We are learning English at school every day.

I never saw snow in my country. The snow is very beautiful in Minnesota. All the trees' leaves fall on the ground. The trees are very beautiful in Minnesota. I like snow. I like trees. My family is very happy. I would like to thank Minnesota and teachers in the US for helping us.

## My Life in the US

*Felicitas Muñoz, West Saint Paul*

I am from Mexico. I came to the United States five years ago. I have learned to drive, and I have received my learner's permit to drive. I have two children. One of them is fifteen years old, and the other is seven years old. I have had many jobs. Now I study at the Hubbs Center. I learn English and take a writing class. My goal is to learn more English to have better job opportunities. My husband works as a truck driver for the Pioneer Press.

## My Life

*Tram Tran, Saint Louis Park*

My name is Tram. I am 22 years old. I am from Vietnam. I have lived in Saint Louis Park for one year and two months. I

like summer because I can go to the park to play with my cousins. My father, my mother, my brother and my sister live in Vietnam. I call them three times per week. For me, it is important to learn English because I need to talk and understand when I work or when I talk with some people from here. When my English is better I want to go to college.

## My Store

*Taw Naw Paw, Saint Paul*

My name is Taw Naw Paw. I was born in Burma, but I grew up in Thailand. I don't know about Burma. When I was young, I stayed in the refugee camp in Thailand. I only know about the refugee camp.

I have a large family. There are six people in my family. I have two boys and two girls. My family came to the US on June 4, 2008. Now I am learning more English for my future and all of my family members are studying. I don't have a job.

## Me and Obama

*Dien Nguyen, Red Wing*

My name is Dien Nguyen. I was born in Viet Nam. I have three sisters and four brothers. When I was young, my father stayed home to take care of us. Sometimes he went out to the market to help my mother with her business.

In 1990, my father with a lot of Vietnamese crossed the ocean on small boat. He came to Galang Island in Malaysia and lived there over seven years. Then the US government sponsored him with my mom and my two youngest brothers to come to the US. My siblings remained in Vietnam because all of us were over 21.

In 2005, I got married to an American citizen. I left Vietnam in 2006. Now I'm living

in Red Wing, Minnesota. I have had a good life beside my husband. I have been going to ESL class. My English has improved. I like my teacher, her name is Eliza. She is very nice and is kind to everyone.

I love this country because of freedom and you can do what you want. Because of this freedom, Barack Obama became president of the US. He worked hard to try to become president. Finally his dream came true. I admire him very much because of his endeavors.

## My Job

*Sintayhu Setegne, Farmington*

I like my job. My job is in customer service. I like working with people. Also, I have a good salary and benefits. Finally, I like my work schedule because I can attend class. There are many things I like about my job.

*Sintayhu Setegne is 32 years old and is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Untitled

*Yordanos Asfeha, Saint Paul*

My name is Yordanos. I am 23 years old. I am from Ethiopia. I like food (Engera). I like to play music. I like the holiday of Christmas. I like my favorite color, pink. I like to relax.

## Butterflies

*Thoo Thoo Moo Day, Saint Paul*

In my country there are many animals. There are many butterflies. My family is in my country. My country is very beautiful. Karen people have many foods. I remember that my country is beautiful. I miss my friends. I have many, many friends. I miss

my mother and my father. Sometimes I talk on the telephone to my sister and my brother. Sometimes they call me at night at one o'clock.

My children go to school. My husband goes to work. I go to school every day. I have nice teachers in America. I am happy to be here. I like my school.

## One Half of My Family in the US – One Other Half in Thailand

*Tha Htoo, Saint Paul*

I was born in Burma in 1950. I am 59 years old. I went to school from 1955 to 1967. I got married in 1975. We went to a refugee camp on the Burma/Thai border in 1978. I worked at the ARC Workshop. We have four children. One son is with me in the United States. The other three children are with my wife in Thailand. I hope they can come to the US soon.

## I Miss My Grandmother

*Yuliana López, Saint Paul*

My name is Yuliana López. I'm writing about when I was a little girl. I lived in Mexico in a small town. The name of the town is Acatlan Puebla. This town didn't have big stores. I remember when my grandmother bought stuff at the market every Sunday. It was the special day for buying. In my town they didn't have a lot of cars. Only three persons had cars. These persons used the cars for transporting the people and were friendly. Now it is very different in my town. It has more stores and more transportation. Now my grandmother is old. When I came to the US I could see many differences. The US has a lot of stores and a lot of opportunities for my family and me. But, I miss Mexico because there my grandmother lives and I love her.

## My Hopes for the Future

*Htoo Baw, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Htoo Baw. I was born in Klee Thu village in Burma country. Usually, we worked as farmers. I have two brothers and one sister. We petted the animals. We planted rice and vegetables. My village has mountains and is near forests. School was a one hour walk from my house. We didn't have bikes for riding to school because we were poor. Some people used the boat to go to school. The weather in my village was good and I liked it.

In 1997 the Burmese government came to my village. And then we had to move to Thailand and we were in the refugee camp for 10 years. We didn't have jobs because we couldn't go outside the refugee camp. My cousins lived outside the camp and they took me to work. So after that, I did not go to school.

In 2001 I got married and then I had three children. I came to the United States in 2007. I did not have a job. I like Minnesota. I started school because it helps me understand and speak English. I hope in the future I will know more than now.

My favorite thing is fishing. Sometimes I miss my village and my friends in Thailand. I came to the US because I hope for my children to learn English. Finally I want to thank everybody who helps me to understand and speak English. Thank you so much.

## There and Now

*Amy Vang, Minneapolis*

**I** am from Thailand. I lived in the refugee camp. My life in the camp was difficult. In the morning I woke up at 5:00 a.m. I helped cook rice and then I helped wash clothes. At 7:30 a.m. I went to school until 12:00 p.m. I came home and made paj utaub until 4:00

p.m. or 5:00 p.m. I helped my dad feed the pigs and went and played. My life every day there was pretty much the same.

In 1994, I came to the United States. I married my husband and I have my own life to take care of. I have a job to get money for my children. I am happy that I live in this country because my husband helps me to find money to support the family. I really want to learn English so I can live a better life here.

## Raul Cobos

*Raúl Cobos, Minneapolis*

**I** came to the USA on November 18. I first went to New York. The first day I played soccer. In April, I came to Minneapolis and now continue. Living here I am so happy because I go to school.

*Raúl Cobos is originally from Ecuador.*

## Hello, My Name is Bernardino

*Bernardino Enriquez, Saint Paul*

**I**'m from Oaxaca, Mexico. My country is very beautiful. I like Mexican food very much. I recommend Mexico. In the summer the beaches are very nice. My family lives in Mexico City. In Mexico I was working as a waiter. It was very good tips. I have lived in Saint Paul, Minnesota for five years. I miss my family very much. I'm learning English. The school is near my home. When I'm in the classroom I'm happy and enjoy the moment. The teachers are very friendly.

## My Life

*Zambrano, Bloomington*

**I**n 2001, I came to the United States. The first week, I found a job. Two days later, I had one more job. I was working for a long

time. In 2002 I got my driver's license. In 2003, I met my girlfriend and in 2005, we were married. I had a big party. In 2005, we bought a house.

*Zambrano is 31 years old and is originally from Ecuador.*

## My Life

*Ardo Ali, Burnsville*

I was born in Somalia. I started school when I was six. I liked my teacher. I met my husband at the workplace. I got married in 1982. I had my first baby in 1984.

I was self-employed when I had four children. I had my own business and I took care of my kids, too. After the civil war, my children and I came to Kenya in 1991. I had a small shop in Kenya. I had a lot of problems in Kenya. I left Kenya in 1999.

When I came to the United States I didn't know how to speak English. I did not have enough income to pay rent. I tried to get a job, but I didn't know how to fill out the application. I found a job at a hotel, but didn't understand English well.

## Childhood Dreams

*Hugo Ortiz, Anoka*

When I was growing up I wanted to be a teacher or a doctor, and I wanted to visit the archeological zones in my country.

When I was a child I went to school and I liked to see how the teachers worked. In my house I played with my little sister and we played that I was a teacher and she was a student. We played very happily.

When I watched television, I saw the archeological zones of Mexico. I dreamed that I liked to visit these zones. I thought that to go to visit these zones would be very fantastic.

When I studied at the university, my teacher, my friends, and I went to visit Teotihuacan, Chichen Itza and Tulum. These archeological zones are very beautiful.

My other dream was to be a doctor, because my mother works in the hospital and I liked to go to the hospital with her. In the hospital, I liked to play in the area where my mother works and thought that this work was very nice.

I like to remember my dreams, because I think that is very important to have dreams. I studied tourism and I am very happy to do my dream.

## Story about Moving to the USA

*Anonymous, Otsego*

Hi, my name is Liliya. I moved to the USA in 1997 from Ukraine. I and my husband and my seven-month-old son came to a Washington city called Spokane. One month, we lived with my husband's brother's family. They had three kids.

We started school to learn English because it started a hard time for us. We couldn't speak, we couldn't drive, we couldn't work because we couldn't speak and people didn't understand us. My husband started driving, and after five months, I learned English. It was very hard. I had my driving test and I did very good on the test. I started driving. After six months, my husband went to work without English. It was hard to do a job if you didn't speak English. After one year my husband lost his job.

We moved to Minnesota. I started my job at Cub Foods. I made pizza, sandwiches, and salad. I loved my job because I loved to cook. After this job I went to school to learn English because I couldn't speak and people didn't understand what I said. I didn't understand what people asked me.

Now, I've lived in the USA almost twelve years and I can speak and write. I want to learn more and go to college.

## Untitled

*Starlin Fernández, Golden Valley*

**H**i, my name is Starlin. I am from the Dominican Republic. Most of my family lives in the Dominican Republic, Spain, and Minnesota. I have lived in Minnesota for two and a half years.

I like Minnesota because I have a lot of family here. In my home country I lived with my sister. I love my country. I like the people in Minnesota because they are cool. When my English is better I want to start my GED letter. I want to be a federal agent. I miss my friends and my family.

The thing I like most in Minnesota is the winter. I love snow. In my free time I like to use the computer. My hobby is camping. I love my mom. I have two puppies. They are beautiful. I want to go to my home country. I love the United States of America. God bless the United States of America.

## My Dream is Done

*Lamiae Andaloussi, Richfield*

**I** was born in Morocco in 1981. I am now 27 years old. I was six years old when I started school. I am fifth in my family. I was a shy girl and I didn't have friends.

I loved my school and my teacher. That's why I drew a picture for her. When she saw her picture she didn't believe I made it by myself. She showed it to everybody. I thought she didn't like it and it was a bad idea to do something like this.

She told my parents to help me study in acting school. My mom wanted me to be a runner and my dad wanted me to be an actor

or a doctor. I started to run when I was nine years old and I quit when I was 12 years old because I couldn't study and run at the same time.

I graduated from high school in 1999 and I went to college in 2000. I got married in 2003. In 2004 my son was born. I felt so happy! I have to be a good mom and responsible with him. I have to be a teacher at home, outside... everywhere! I thought being a mom was so easy, but now I understand my mom when she tried to teach me everything.

In 2006 I came to the United States with my son. I got a job in 2007. Now I am here in SHAPE in 2008. My parents' dream for me is done. I hope I finish my school and get a good job.

## I'm Happy to Live in America

*Efrain Tapia Burgos, Saint Paul*

**H**i. My name is Efrain Tapia and my country is Mexico. I have been here in the US for four years. I lived with my family and my wife in my country. I like fishing and soccer. My favorite fruit is the orange, watermelon, and mango. I hope to learn English because I like the language and hope to get a better job. I miss my sister because she is lonely and I miss my brother. So this is my story. I'm happy to live in America.

## Important Thing

*Pasoua Yang, Brooklyn Center*

**T**he most important thing for me is my family, the second thing is education, and the third thing is money.

My family is most important because I need my family to support me. Whatever I want to do they will support me. When I get sick they will take care of me.

The second important thing for me is

education because education will get you a better life. Education, if you have it, will never go away or get lost. The more education you have, the better life you are going to get. I don't have a good education. That's why my life is so complicated and hard.

The third important thing is money because if I have money, I don't worry about getting more education and I don't have to worry about working hard. Whatever I want I just throw money in and get it, that's why I want to have money.

Family, education and money are important. If you don't have one of those, it will make your life harder. I wish I could have all of those.

## I am from Russia

*Anonymous, Woodbury*

**M**y family is from Russia. In 1992, my daughter got married. Soon they moved to the USA. My wife and I did not see our daughter and grandson for over nine years. In May, 2006, we came to the US and now we are living in Woodbury together with our family. We have two grandsons. They are nine and two years old. I am working and going to school. I have to learn English because without English I will not find a decent job. Plus, I can't understand basic English. My wife stays at home and takes care of grandkids. I go to English classes in the morning and then work second shift. My wife and I are happy that we can see our grandkids and kids every day.

## I Went to School

*Houa Yang, Saint Paul*

**I** was born in 1988. When I was seven years old, I went to school. I learned how to write and to talk the Thai language. I had many

students in my school and they were all Thai. I was the only Hmong person. I had a lot of fun in school because we played many games. We also played Bingo.

In 1996, I began to learn about how to sew clothes. My mom taught many things about how to sew and make cotton fabric clothes. After I knew how to sew I liked to help my mom sew clothes for my sisters and my brothers.

In 2002, I finished my sixth grade in school. After two years I didn't go to school because my parents didn't have money to send me to school. I had to stay home two years to find more money. In 2004, I had to go to school again, but it was nearly 2005 and that same year we had to come to the US.

My family and I arrived in the US. In September, I went to Humboldt High School. I studied in high school three years, but didn't get my diploma. After I finished high school, I had to go to the Hubbs Center to earn my high school diploma.

## My Village Life

*Ku Paw, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Ku Paw. I have seven sisters but I don't have brothers. I'm the oldest. When I was a child I lived in my village. My village was beautiful. I love my village. I was a student. Monday to Friday I went to school and Sunday I went to church with my friends. I was very happy.

I had a lot of friends and I played skipping and swimming in the pool together with my friends, and my friends were happy. I love my village weather. My father was a farmer. He had a big garden and fields and he planted rice, beans, potatoes, watermelon, coconut, mango, and banana trees. My father was very poor but he was happy because his village had forests, mountains, and food, but because

of government violence, my family went to Thailand.

Now I'm free because I came to America. The American government is very sympathetic. I like Saint Paul because I see snow. In the summertime I visit the park and go swimming with my cousins and friends. I like the wind in summer. The ground is green.

## My Family

*María Ramos, Cottage Grove*

**H**i. My name is María Ramos. I'm from Durango, Mexico. My family lives here in the USA. I have seven sisters and two brothers. Five sisters live in Las Vegas, Nevada and one lives in Morgan Hill, California. My mom and my brothers and one sister live in Missouri. My older brother has a restaurant in Missouri. Two months ago my mom moved to Missouri. She doesn't like Missouri. She said it is very cool. I think she wants to come back to California. My father lives in Tijuana, Mexico. I'm married. I have three children. I live in Cottage Grove. I love my family.

## My Story

*Ka Khang, Minneapolis*

**I**am the oldest child in my family. My mother and father were farmers in Laos. When I was a child, my father had to go fight in the Vietnam War. When he left, we lost track of him. We didn't know where he was. When I was nine years old, my mother took me and my brother to Thailand. My grandmother and grandfather helped my mother take care of us. In Thailand my mother waited for my father for many years. When he didn't come back to Vietnam, my mother remarried.

I left for the United States with my cousins. My mother, stepfather, grandmother,

and grandfather all went back to Laos. I miss my family very much.

## Untitled

*Faustino, Minneapolis*

**I** came to the United States of America in January, 1999. My brother made money to pay for my travel. After six months my wife came to be with me. A year later, my eight-year-old daughter came to the United States of America. Six months after, my second daughter was born. My second daughter still lives in Mexico. I live with my first daughter who is 17 years old and studies in Haig School.

Faustino is originally from Mexico.

## My Life

*See Xiong, Minneapolis*

**I**n Laos my father was a soldier for General Vang Pao. Four months before I was born, my father died in war. I was born on September 4, 1974. I stayed with my mother until I was two years old. When I was two years old my mother got married. My uncle didn't let me go with my mother. He wanted me to stay with him. I stayed with him. I missed my mother a lot. I cried every day and every night while I slept.

When I was six years old he told me how to take care of babies and cook food. I did what he told me to do. When I was ten years old he took me to the barn to watch the chickens and pigs and I also gardened every day. I did that until I was 15 years old. My uncle's family and I came to Thailand. We stayed in Thailand from 1987 to 1988.

After that my uncle's family and I came to the United States, to Fresno, California, on May 15, 1989. I was 17 years old. When I met my husband on New Year's, my husband liked

me and I liked him. After two months I was married to him on February 10, 1990. After that I had children and a good husband. Now I have three boys and one girl in my life. Now I have reached my dreams of having money, a house and a good family.

## What I Am Thankful For

*Raad A. Ahmad, Columbia Heights*

There are many things in my life that I am thankful for. Let me tell you about three that are very important to me. First of all is family, second, studying in the Metro North School, and third, friends.

The most important thing to me in life is family. I come from a big family. I have my wife, five sons, and one daughter. Whenever one of us is in need we all try to help each other through. We live in one house and we always gather to celebrate.

I am also very thankful for the Metro North School where my wife and I study. We have a hard time studying the English language and learning American culture. Also, I am very thankful for my kids studying in school.

The third thing that I am thankful for are my friends here in Minnesota. They help us when we were new coming in this state.

## The Story of My Life

*Edith Rivera, Minneapolis*

When I came to the United States for the first time, I had a little girl. She was one year old. I had to come to work for three months to get the green card for my children. My husband and I came to work then in Florida. After three months we went to Mexico to Ciudad Juarez for the papers and then everybody could come. My husband and I and our eight children lived one year in Florida.

Then we came here to Minneapolis. I have lived here for 10 years. It is cold, but we are with our children. When I had two years here in Minneapolis, my ninth child was born and now he is nine years old. My father and my sisters are in Mexico. Two of my brothers are in California. Every Saturday I call to them on the telephone and I feel fine.

*Edith Rivera is originally from Mexico.*

## Untitled

*Marco Contreras, Minneapolis*

I have four brothers and three sisters. I'm from Mexico. My state is Oaxaca. I lived in Puerto Escondido. I have experiences in my country playing soccer with my friends in the park. I went fishing at the beach with my father. I like to eat seafood. In my state every time the weather is hot, I go surfing. I have three sons. One is a teacher in Mexico, and two study here in high school. My country is beautiful.

I have lived in Minneapolis for seven years. My job is cleaning in the bakery of General Mills in Chanhassen. I like to study English in the school. I work forty-five hours each week. Because of my job, I have more American friends. My wife is also Mexican and a good person.

## From Ethiopia to America

*Mohamed Burka, Saint Paul*

My name is Mohamed Burka. I am 64 years old. I was born in Ethiopia. When I was in Ethiopia, I was a businessman. I liked my work in the market economy and also with farmers. One day two people from different nations disagreed with each other. Then the government took me to jail for no reason. After I got out of jail, I went to the



refugee camp in Kenya. I lived there for five years. I came to the US on May 21, 2003. I live in Saint Paul. I have had a full-time job for five years.

## Different Lives in Different Country

*Nhialue Khang, Brooklyn Park*

**M**y name is Nhialue. I live in Brooklyn Park. Before my first winter in Minnesota, I came to the United States on August 27, 2002. At night the first day, I got up in the morning, I opened the window, and I saw many cars outside the street next to my son's house. The next month or so in November, I got up and looked outside around the house. I saw so much snow. It was beautiful, but I opened the door to go to grab it and squeeze. It was very cold in my hand. I got back inside the house. My country never had snow but I like it.

I liked grabbing it, and playing with it, but my son was telling me, "You don't go outside too much. You never lived in the winter cold. I think you will get sick."

I answered to him, "Yes, I go back inside immediately." I said to my son, "Thank you for telling me."

He said, "You have to remember every time, because you never lived the winter cold. You don't go outside."

The next month, I went to Green Bay with my son for Hmong New Year. I saw some people wearing clothes different from my country because they came to the United States before me. They had to change their culture. Before, we used the old people's culture. The Hmong culture reference is not reality. It is no good for all people. In the future, the children, mostly everyone, will know the Hmong culture. In the future, I think the children will know the Hmong language, but the children will not like to

speaking the Hmong language every time and all day.

Thank you everyone to have special satisfaction for reading my true story.

*Nhialue Khang is originally from Laos.*

## What I Am Thankful For

*Iryna Malets, Anoka*

**T**here are many things in my life that I am thankful for. Let me tell you about three that are very important to me. First of all, I am thankful for my family, then the way of my life, and last but not least, my health.

The most important thing to me in life is family. I have a fine family: my husband and two daughters. I have parents, one sister, and two nephews. Whenever one of us is in need we all try to help each other.

I am also very thankful for my way of life. I was born in Belarus, but my husband, my children and I live in the USA now. We moved to America. I am thankful for America's freedom.

The third thing that I'm thankful for is my health. I am healthy so I can go to English school, learn the English language, and go to work. I can take care of my family. I love to celebrate Thanksgiving because it teaches us to be thankful people.

## Untitled

*Paz Maceda, Brooklyn Center*

**M**y name is Paz. I was born in Mexico City. I have a big family consisting of seven brothers and two sisters. Five brothers and two sisters live in the US and five sisters and two brothers live in Mexico. Before I came to the US, I studied at the University in Mexico City. I came to the US on August 11, 1999 over the border to California and Nevada. I moved

to Lake Tahoe. It's a big lake and we went to the beach there. I worked in housekeeping in a hotel. Afterward I returned to Mexico. I came to Minnesota four years ago. I moved in with my brother, Domingo. I have one son who goes to elementary school. I'm working in two restaurants, McCormick Schmicks Seafood and Rock Bottom in downtown Minneapolis. I'm a pre-cook in one restaurant and prepare salads, pizza, and in the other, I work the fry station. I like my job!

I live Brooklyn Center in a house that is big. All the other houses in the neighborhood are the same. I like the neighbors who are quiet, but the others neighbors are noisy. I like my neighborhood! There is a park one block away from my house. There are no stores. I have to drive to the Brookdale Mall to shop for food and clothing. My church is far from my house. The library and post office are 10 minutes away and the gas station and school about two blocks from my house.

I listen sometimes to music. Every day my favorite music is romantic. I watch TV for news. On my days off I read books. Now my son is in high school. I have been in Minnesota for nine years.

I work very hard on my days off going to school and study English. I want to learn more because English helps me in my job with better communication. I like my teacher; she is beautiful, funny and happy. I like to study English. I'm proud of all the English I've learned. Finally, I'm looking forward to the future, but I always remember my family.

## Cold Minnesota Winter

*Gonul Yildirim, Hopkins*

I like winter because it is beautiful and my daughter loves it. She likes sledding on the snow. She loves to make snowmen and snow angels. She plays with snowballs. I think

winter is a great adventure for my daughter because she enjoys winter. There are frozen lakes to go ice skating and there is a beautiful view. Minnesota has pretty scenery in winter. My daughter and I love it.

*Gonul Yildirim is 31 years old and is originally from Turkey.*

## I am Karen from Burma

*Christian, Saint Paul*

I am from Paw Eh and Htee Say and so are my brothers and sister, Nober Say, Bwehy Say, and Jansy. We joked, cooked, played, and watered plants. I am from the Karen State in Burma and the Selween River, where I fled from my enemies to the Thailand side and became a refugee.

I like to eat chilis, fish paste and ta ka paw curry. I thought that when I came to US, I wouldn't see them. Minnesota has a lot of different foods from different countries. I still have my favorite curries and I feel like I'm staying in my homeland, close to my family and friends. So, many people like me like to stay in Minnesota.

*Christian is originally from Burma.*

## My Name is Lilia

*Lilia, Saint Louis Park*

I came from Mexico City in 1996. I am 45 years old. When I came to the USA, it was really hard for me. I didn't know English or know anyone. But then slowly, I started to learn English and met people.

When I came here, I came with my two daughters and one son. I had to leave three of my sons in Mexico. It was very hard for me when I came to the USA because I wanted my three kids to have the love of their dad.

My husband was here first, but I left my other kids because it was necessary. Then in 2000, I gave birth to a baby girl. Her name is Brandy.

Now I hope to learn more English for a better job and a better future for my kids, my husband, my two daughters-in-law, my granddaughters, my grandson, and me. I love my family. Now I live with all my family I like to live in Minnesota but I miss my home country, Mexico.

In my free time I like to play soccer with my children. I have seven children: four boys and three girls. I like Minnesota because it has beautiful lakes. I hope to live to here with my parents.

## Dream

*Daniel, Saint Louis Park*

**T**his is what I would like to do in my life. First of all I will to pray to my lord, and second, I would like to take care of my family and myself.

When I was a kid, I had big dreams. My dream was very big though, and I shared everything with my family. My dad and my mom inspired me and encouraged me to be successful in my life. My dad was a very good father and a compassionate, smart man. My mom is strong and a hard worker. That thing that makes me strong is when my family is strong too. One day, I grew up and I changed my attitude, I did many mistakes in my life. So, I learned many things also and that it would be okay.

Now, I have a plan to finish my GED. After that, hopefully, I will be going to finish my college. Then I have a dream to have my own business one day. I have a good feeling and I have motivation. I had a dream that I couldn't get chances, but right now I have the opportunity to do what I can do.

Well, everything is not easy to do, but I

will try my best and I know I will make it. So far, I am learning. I am studying and hopeful my dream will come true and I pray to God, I will make all my family happy. God pleases America and all the world. Thanks, Daniel.

*Daniel is originally from Eritrea.*

## Plans Gone Awry

*Angélica Pedreguera, Shakopee*

**W**hen my family and I first came to the US, we thought to stay only for two years. I am 24 years old now. The years have passed. We've been here for five years now and haven't gone back to our country, Mexico.

I think this country is very nice. I like the schools, hospitals, parks, clean streets, job opportunities and the English language. I like the idea of my children growing up in this country because this is the land of opportunity and I want the best for my children.

I miss my country very much, family, friends, food, and culture. I'd love to go back. That's where I belong. One of my dreams is to become legal in this country so I can go back and stay for awhile and come here whenever I want. That way I won't miss either of the two countries.

I need to be realistic, though. I don't think that's going to happen soon. I'm just asking God to let me be here. He is the only one who knows what's going to happen in my life.

## A Family United Again

*Benjiang Sun, Saint Paul*

**I** was born in a big city of millions of people in North China. I have three brothers and three sisters. When I was six years old my country had problems. All families were the

same, just half a pound of food to eat each day. We were starving. I went to school only four years. We were too poor for me to study. Then our family moved from the city to a farm. I had to work and make some money and I grew crops for my family. There I met my future wife. She was studying in high school. When she graduated we worked together until we got married. We had a daughter. The government only allowed us to have one child. After ten years my family came back to the city.

My wife and I worked very hard. We were very poor, so in 1999 my wife left my country and went to Samoa to work in a factory. It closed after two years and someone sponsored my wife to come to Minnesota. She started working in housekeeping at a hotel right away. Later, our daughter went to Ireland where she could study.

I was able to come to the US in 2005. Then I studied English at MORE Multicultural School. I found a job but I still study. In 2006 my wife and I bought a house. My daughter and her husband came from Ireland to visit last summer. After nine years of separation we finally enjoyed two months together as a family once again. Thanks my God!

## My Life In Veracruz and Minneapolis

*Noe Alejo, Minneapolis*

I grew in small town in Veracruz, Mexico. I used to write in Spanish and now I write in English. My teacher in Mexico was very young. I used to have many friends of different places. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, I have friends in my job and in the school. Nowadays when I came to the school, I drive my car, but in Mexico I used to walk to the school. When I came to US my life changed because here I never take vacation. I need

to get money and learn English, but in my country I used to take a vacation one time a year. I used to travel to Mexico City. I visited my brother. Here in Minneapolis, I go to visit my friends.

## My Name is Paw Dah

*Paw Dah, Maplewood*

In my country there are many animals. My family is in my country. My country is very beautiful. There are nine people in my family. The Burmese came and shot my Karen people and we came to the refugee camp. My family was in Thailand. We lived in the refugee camp ten years and we came to America and we are happy. I like school.

## Someone Important in My Life

*Be O., Saint Paul*

Five or six months after I was born, my father died because the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the military regime in Burma, killed him. So I never saw my father and I never got my father's love. My mother was very poor and it was difficult for her to take care of me, but she tried her best. I lived with my mother and my grandmother.

At that time the white people came to our village. They stayed in a hospital to take care of the patients. They came with their whole family. They heard about my life, and they came to my house and visited my mother. They talked about me, and they wanted to help me.

When I was five years old, they picked me up and took me to their home in Mae Sot, Thailand. They sent me to another different place after four months, to a pastor's house. I was very happy when I lived with the pastor. I saw a lot of pretty nature and good weather. That was a good place in my life. I was happy

with the animals and weather.

For one year the pastor sent me to EVA school. I started to remember my mother and for the first time that I was in EVA school, I missed my grandmother, my uncle and my village very much, and I felt very homesick. I miss my village, but I had to leave it.

*Be O is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

### My Story

*Eloisa Rodríguez, Saint Paul Park*

**M**y name is Eloisa Rodríguez. My country of origin is Mexico. I love Mexico! I have three children—two girls and one boy. I came to Minnesota in 2000 and I like it very much, but I have all my family in Mexico. I have eight sisters and two brothers and I miss them very much. I miss the Mexican food, the countryside, and the people. Here in Minnesota I am studying English. I am very content in the school. I have friends and my teachers are very kind people. I love them a lot.

### My Life

*Mohamed Daud, Minneapolis*

**I** was born in Somalia in 1982 and I fled from Somalia to Kenya when the civil war started. I lived in Kenya for about 19 years. Life there was great and beautiful. Kenya had a lot of farms and green land and I started a small business. My life in Kenya was so happy.

In September, 2008, I was reunited with my family. When I reunited with them I was so excited because it was the first time that I saw my daughter since she was born in the United States in April, 2006. Every time she sees me now she laughs and she even kids around with me.

Now on the other side of my life in the

United States things are difficult because I don't have a job or money to use for my family. Also, I am very proud of myself because I still take care of my family. I don't doubt that God will help me and my family. I will get a job.

I would like to say one proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." I would also like to say thank you for my teacher, Jessica Wanless. She encouraged me to tell my story.

### The Story of My Life

*Khadija Adan, Marshall*

**I** had to say goodbye to my mother and my sisters. I knew we wouldn't see each other for a long, long time. When I came to America, I was helped by my family. Then they were so happy because when I came to America in 1999, I started a job and learned the English language. So I had success in all of them. When I came to the USA, I didn't speak English. I am a zero, but now I help myself. I'm reading, writing, and speaking English. The first day when I came to Marshall I heard you could get a free education. You can imagine how excited I was to hear that information because I never saw free education in Africa. I want to say thank you to my teachers and God bless you, America.

*Eloisa Rodríguez is originally from Mexico.*

### My Life More or Less

*Abezie Gebeyehu, Eagan*

**M**y name is Abezie. I'm from Ethiopia. I came to Minnesota six months ago, June 23, 2008. I left my husband alone in Ethiopia. I was a registered nurse (RN). I

miss my job. I have many relatives including sisters, brothers and friends in Ethiopia. Now I live in Eagan with my daughter, son, grandson and brother-in-law.

In Minnesota, I learn English Monday through Friday at the Woodland and Rahnclyff ABE schools. I don't have a job yet, but I'm always busy in my house. I cook, clean, wash, and so on.

My country is not too hot and not too cold. You can say it is the best weather in the whole world. I even love the rainy season in my country. In Minnesota, the weather is too hot and too cold. I saw the summer. It was too hot. I saw snow for the first time. In Minnesota the outdoors looks like sugar or salt. The weather is not good for me because I'm allergic to cold. Even so, I would like to be adopted by Minnesota.

## The Autobiography of Cha X.

*Cha X, Saint Paul*

When I was a little boy I had two brothers and three sisters. Unfortunately, my mother died when I was nine years old. I didn't know anything about my future. I just played with other kids every day, but I always remembered that my mother had died. I was really sad, but I still had my grandmother to take care of me.

After eight months my father got remarried. A year later my father, my stepmother, and I had to move into the refugee's camp. When we went to the buses that moved us, the security patrol checked everyone's name. My stepmother's name was not on the list. She cried a lot because she had no chance to go with us. "I can't help," I said, because I was just a mere child. We moved to the new place and lived there for one year. Then we moved again into a village called Tham Kra Bok. When we got there

my stepmother had moved to Tham Kra Bok too. We enjoyed our family life together once again. We lived this way for 10 years.

When I was 19 years old I was fortunate to know a cute girl in the village who was 16 years old. We agreed to get married. I paid for the whole wedding. Nine months after we married we moved out of my parent's home. We suffered for a while, but we enjoyed living together and loved each other. We had three daughters and one son. We were really lucky to have all those kids.

Before I came to the United States of America, I imagined that I would have a better job, cars, and a house, but I was uneducated and didn't know English. Everything had changed. I felt frustrated and disappointed. However, I would not be defeated by any difficulties that came to my family. I had promised to study hard, improve my English, and move toward my GED. Some day I want to be a beam of light for my family to show the way and to be a role model for all my relatives. I can't work without a degree because English is the best language to speak in the United States.

Since coming to the United States we had two more kids, one daughter and one son. My small family of earlier is now growing to be a big family.

## This is My Story

*Bao Vang, Minneapolis*

I was born in Thailand. I lived with my parents. When I was 18 years old, I got married to my husband and we lived together in Thailand. On September 14, 2004, we moved to the USA. Right now I have five children. I go to study English at Northside ABE. There are many students from different countries. English is difficult for me. But I

want to learn English. My husband goes to work and studies English. I love my husband very much because he is busy every week and he takes care of my children in the early morning. He doesn't have time to sleep.

*Bao Vang is 35 years old and is originally from Laos.*

## My Life in Minnesota

*Khou, Brooklyn Park*

When I came to the United States it was November 28, 2004. I didn't know any education. I didn't have money and I was very poor. One month later, I bought a car, but I wasn't lucky. Then a robber stole my car. When that happened I didn't know how to call the police. Then I went to a stop sign and waited for a Hmong person to drive by. Then I saw a Hmong drive by and I asked them to help me call the police. When they helped me call, they said that my car was not good anymore, and then I had to pay the city \$130. After that I went to buy a new car for \$6,000, and I was very stressed that I had no more money to pay my house, so I had to go live in Mary's Place for six months.

## Story

*Aurora Pedroza, Minneapolis*

When I was young, I lived in Mexico. My life in Mexico was very nice with my whole family there. When I was there I enjoyed going to the church every Sunday morning with all my brothers. Then we liked to go to the movies or to the park. Every Sunday was special because only on Sunday we could go out with my mother.

But I couldn't enjoy many things with my mother because she died. My mother died when I was little. I was 15 years old. After that I moved to the USA, and everything

was hard for me—first the language and then the people. After work, I was scared about everything here. I was scared about black people because a lot of people thought black people were bad. The first years in the USA were the worst.

## I Am From Guatemala, Central America

*Livia M. Cordon, Saint Paul*

My name is Livia. I liked my childhood. I am from Guatemala. I live in St. Paul, Minnesota. Now I miss my family and Guatemala. I have four brothers and four sisters. Three brothers live in Las Vegas, Nevada. One brother lives in Guatemala. My three sisters live in Guatemala. One sister lives in Minnesota. I am very happy. I came to the US in 2008. My family is in my country. Guatemala has many foods. I miss my father and mother very much. My husband and I in Minnesota have one child.

## My Life

*Wa Thao, Minneapolis*

My name is Wa Thao. I am from Thailand. When I lived in Thailand, I heard people talk about how the American people had to bring Hmong people to live in the United States. I was very, very happy and I waited for when we had to go to an interview and we had the permission to come to the United States. We were very happy when we got to come to the United States. We saw a lot of snow and beautiful country.

But the United States has different the weather and time and the United States has winter, spring, summer, and fall. I don't like winter because the winter has a lot of snow. I'm afraid to drive my car. But my children like to eat snow. In summer my family likes to

go to the park. My husband and my son like to play ball. My daughters and I like to find rocks to throw in the water and we like to run and walk in the park.

## Ubah's Story

*Ubah Abdi, Eden Prairie*

I was born in Kismaaya, Somalia in 1974. I started school in 1980. I didn't finish school because my country had a civil war. My family went to Kenya in 1991 and they're still there. They felt good because they went where there was peace. When they got to peace, they loved Kenya.

When I got my visa in 1993, I dreamed about the USA. I came to America in 1998. I love America because I had many opportunities from the beginning. I got my first job in 1999. I learned to drive in 2000. I went to school and learned to speak English. I loved my classmates and my classmates knew. I understood that my dream was good. My dream came true. I love the USA.

I was a good student. Now I am late every day. I will be a good student.

## My Life

*Sain Thin, Roseville*

My name is Sain Thin. I come from Maela Refugee Camp, Thailand. I was born in Naung Loon village, Pa-han Division, Myanmar. My government is very bad because everybody is fighting. But my country is very beautiful. I like my country.

My parents died in my country. My family is very kind. I have one brother. His health was no good. He was so ill that he could not eat or drink. He was very unhappy. He tried all kinds of medicine and consulted all the medicine men. Yet day by day, he grew weaker and weaker. At that time I went from

our village to the Thailand refugee camp. That time was the last time I had contact with my brother.

Maela camp is bigger than other refugee camps in Thailand. In the camp live many different peoples. They are Karen, Chin, Mon, Burmese, Rakhine, and Shan. They live together in that camp, but they are quarreling and jealous of one another. I arrived in Maela camp on July 18, 2002. I stayed there from July 18, 2002 to July 30, 2007. And then I went to the United States of America.

## Untitled

*Guillermina Pérez, Saint Paul*

My name is Guillermina Pérez. I am from Mexico City. I live here in Minnesota. It is very cool in winter. I came to Minnesota in 2003 and for my work I make bagels. This is a good job. I do not work anymore because I broke my ankle, so I can't go. So now, I go to the Neighborhood House to the English class. I need more English. My family lives in Mexico. Over there are my mom and my sister. Guadalupe has children. Their names are Edgaruzziel, the boy and Cinthia Liceth, the daughter who is the youngest. I call every day at night. The favorite food is birria and rice, soup, and for drink orchata, tequila, and it is fun to have piñatas for the children.

*Guillermina Pérez is originally from Guadalajara, Mexico.*

## Skills of Learning

*JuliAnn Randall, Alexandria*

This book I am reading is a little bit of a struggle. I am starting to see what the title means in my life. Everyone struggles a little, all the time. I guess what I am saying is that when you struggle is when you begin to



learn. That is the way it happened to me, and I know it is different for everyone. Student, good luck this year. I hope to spread my knowledge to people that need to start at the beginning.

When I became a student at ABE Learning Center, if you showed me a letter, I would have said, "A." You are thinking "Why?" Because I had memorized the alphabet song and "A" was the first letter in the song. My tutor was showing me a letter I thought was "A." In reality it was another letter. I give applause to all of you. Good luck to all of you that are beginning and those who are giving this their all both new and old students.

### My Story

*Angélica Ruiz, Eagan*

I'm from Colombia in South America. I remember my country and I miss my traditions, relatives, friends, and my job. I have been here for five years. I came with my husband and my beautiful daughter. We decided to come here because it's a safe state with many opportunities to study and work. Three years ago my son was born. Now we are a complete family and I love my children with all my heart. I'm very happy because I have time for my kids and we enjoy family time.

Now I'm studying English because I want to improve my English skills. This will be good for my life and make it easier to reach my goals. I would like to thank all the teachers and volunteers for all the help that they have given my family and me. I'm very grateful for all of their help.

I like living in Minnesota because people in this state are very friendly and they work hard to support everyone that is new in this country. I hope my life continues to be this wonderful!

### My Story

*Yeng Xiong, Maplewood*

I am from Minnesota. I am Hmong. I came to the United States, to Minnesota, 18 years ago.

### My Story

*Jamila Abdi, Minneapolis*

I came from Somalia. I was born in Mogadishu. I am 26 years old. The civil war started in 1990. After that we moved to Nairobi, Kenya. I was a little girl. I don't remember, but my mother told me many people died at that time. I was learning in middle school and the holy Quran. I left my family in Nairobi. I moved to Atlanta, Georgia on September 20, 2005. I stayed for the four days, then I moved to Nashville. I found a job and I lived there for two years and three months. I came to Minnesota to live with my friends and brother. I did not get a job. Finally, I now study English at the Hubbs Center.

### My Life in Mexico and the US

*Irma Romero, Saint Paul*

I am from Mexico. I am 18 years old. My favorite color is blue and I like roses, music and dancing, but I love football (soccer).

My family lives in a small village named Hidalgo de San Antonio in Durango City. We are 11 in the family. I remember my mother every day and she will always be in my heart. In my country I have best friends. We studied together. They are very intelligent and always helped with my problems at school. My friends are happy, honest, and they are very good people. Their names are José Antonio, Manuel, and Hector, but I also have a special girlfriend. My best friend is Mireya. We loved to play football and she always helped me to

make a good decision in difficult moments of my life.

My country is beautiful. There are many mountains, forests, gold, and petroleum. Our people are very hard working, but Mexico doesn't have many jobs. I came to the USA in December 2008. This country is nice and cold, but I do not speak English. I live in Saint Paul, Minnesota. My apartment is small and beautiful. I live with my sister, my niece, and my nephew and I think all people from my family will be together in the future.

## Together Again

*Martha E. Díaz, Fairmont*

**M**y name is Martha. I came from Mexico. In my family we are five sisters and three brothers. My three sisters and my three brothers moved to the United States with my parents. Me and my other sister, we stayed in Mexico with our husbands and sons. Three years later, they went back to Mexico and we were invited to come to the US for vacations, but we liked the country so much we stayed. Our kids started to go to the school. They like to learn another language. It was very hard for us because we didn't understand English. Somehow we knew about a program called ESL. We started going to the classes and now we can help our children with their homework and understand the idioms thanks to the people who help with the ESL program.

## Moving from Laos

*Toua Her, Brooklyn Center*

**I** came to America on March 19, 2008. It is very exciting for me because it is my first time to see snow and cold weather. On the other hand, there are many tall buildings and a lot of traffic. I like the USA, but everything is difficult for me because we are new people

in America, but I can study English and I can learn American culture. I must for my dream.

I love my country, Laos. During the time I lived in Laos. I enjoyed being with my friends very much because we went to Vang Vieng. Vang Vieng is the most beautiful place in Laos. It has many high mountains, caves and clear rivers. We took pictures of each other. Those are many memories. I hope I will be going to visit my hometown in Laos in the next couple years.

## My First Experiences in the USA

*Myriam, Minneapolis*

**I** came from Uruguay, South America. I am 35 years old and live with my husband and my four kids. I remember the first day I came to the USA. I was very tired. It was a very long trip in the airplane, but the kids were very good.

The first day in the USA was very short. We had family in New York and every one came to visit us. It was very exciting because we had not seen the family for many years. The first two months we lived in New York with my family until my husband rented an apartment for us.

At the beginning it was very hard for me with the English language. I didn't understand what the people said to me in English. I didn't speak any English and I was feeling very bad and sad. When my husband started to work I was all the day at home with two of my kids because the two others went to school. I remember how sad I felt when people spoke to me and I couldn't answer, or on the phone, or a letter from my kids' school. I remember when my husband came back from work I asked him all the time, "What is the meaning of that...?"

After a few months, my husband had a job

opportunity in Minnesota. At the beginning he came alone while we were staying in New York for a few months. After three months we decided to move to Minnesota and live there. A friend of mine told me about ESL and I started to participate in it. It's incredible how much it helped me. Now I can speak, read letters, and answer the phone. I recommend everyone who lives here and who doesn't speak English to participate in ESL. It will change their lives. Now I am very happy living in the USA.

## My Country

*La Moo, Maplewood*

**M**y name is La Moo. I was born in Burma. I lived in Burma. My father and mother were farmers. I have four sisters and two brothers. My country is very beautiful. My country has many rivers and many, many mountains. There are many animals. I remember planting rice and many, many vegetables. My sisters and brothers went to school. My mother, father, sisters, and brothers all lived together and were very happy. On Sundays my father, mother, sisters, and brothers went to church. I married in 1992. I went to the refugee camp in Thailand in 1995. Many people live in the refugee camp. Every day I remember my country. I think I will go back to my country.

## A Little Bit About Me

*Natividad Meza, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Natividad Meza. I am 42 years old. I am from Mexico. I am a student. I study English at Northside ABE. I have a job. I clean offices. I live in Minneapolis. I like living in the United States. I like that my family is living well. I miss the manners of my culture; I like to meet with my neighbors on

the street, and to eat fresh fruit off the trees.

I come from Mexico. Mexico is located on the North American continent. There are 108 million people living in Mexico. There are a lot of interesting places like beaches, restaurants, nightclubs and a lot of tourist places. People find these places interesting because they feel free. Mother's day and the Virgin of Guadalupe are the most important traditional holidays. We celebrate these holidays with Mexican food and mariachi music. It is a big party for all people. I never go to visit Mexico. Sometimes I feel I want to go back because the weather is temperate.

## My Life

*Delfina Cruz, Saint Louis Park*

**H**i, my name is Delfina Cruz. I was born in 1971. I am 36 years old. I remember when I was ten years old. I lived with my family in a village named Jalpa in Mexico in a home of adobe with my dad, mom, three brothers, and one sister. My father was a farmer who grew corn and beans and we went to school.

Then my father fell ill. He had rheumatism and we did not have money for the medicine. So I had to leave school after sixth grade and help get money for my family. When I was 13 years old, I had to go to Mexico City. My aunt worked as a cook in a home and she looked for work for me. I worked in a home caring for two persons of old age. That was in 1985, but my father was still ill. He was diagnosed with diabetes. We were sad to see that. Only God knew why, but we kept working for the treatment.

In 1998 I married. I went to live in Morelos, Mexico with my husband—his family lived there. After that I had my first baby, a girl. When my baby was six months, my husband decided to come to the USA because the economic situation was very

difficult for us. It was a difficult separation. After one year, my father died. In 2003, when my daughter was four years old, I came to Minneapolis, Minnesota with my husband, but I was sad because I left my daughter in Mexico. I was very sad.

My most difficult challenge in the USA is not speaking English. My dream is speaking a lot of this language, and to understand English and to get a good paying job. So I am now learning English.

I most hope that in Mexico City there is a solution for the insecurity, and for the USA to find out one solution to the economic crisis, and to generate more jobs, and that in all the world there is no more war, and we live in PEACE. I dream for my family in the future that my children can do anything they want in their lives, go to university, be good human beings, and live spiritually in front of God.

### My Life with My Family

*Santiago Camposeco, Minneapolis*

When I grew up in my country, Guatemala, I suffered because I had a big family. We are eight brothers and four sisters. When we grew up together we suffered because my family was poor. Right now I live with six brothers and one sister here in Minnesota. The other three sisters and one brother stayed with my father and mom in my country.

### Introduction to Me

*Soua Thao, Minneapolis*

My name is Soua Thao. I am from Laos. I am a student at Northside Adult Basic Education. I study the English language, math, and computer lab. I am married but we haven't any children now. I have a part-time job; I work in a factory making clothes to

sell at the market. I like living in the United States because there are many seasons and the people are friendly. I miss many things from my country, because the weather in Laos is warm. There are two seasons, winter and summer.

When I arrived in the United States, I went to travel around in Minnesota. I went to shop in the supermarket. In January I went to visit my brother and my sister in Madison, Wisconsin. The first time I saw snow I was very surprised but I thought the snow was beautiful but I didn't like the weather, it was very cold. We couldn't go anywhere.

### My Favorite Food

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

My favorite food is okra. I make this sauce with mutton. First, I dry it and put the oil on. After that, I add the mutton after the mutton is ready. Then, I add the okra, tomatoes, cumin, garlic, and black paper. I eat this food at lunch time with a bread called Cesar. I eat this in Sudan and America. I eat this food because it's healthy.

### Coming to the United States

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

I remember when I first came to the United States. I remember the date, September 13, 2005. I came from Africa. After four months, I got a job at a company. I worked there two years. I stopped work January 1, 2008 and I prepared to get married. My wedding was on February 23, 2008. Before I married I was single and lived with my family. I have two sisters, three brothers, and my mom. Now, I live with my husband in an apartment with two bedrooms. My neighborhood is very quiet. I like my neighborhood.

## My Favorite Sports

*Hussein Dawid, Minneapolis*

When I was a little boy I used to play and watch different kinds of sports. But I liked to play soccer every day.

Now I like to watch world cup soccer matches on television because I can see all the professional players from all over the world. World cup takes place every four years in different countries. The next World Cup will be in South Africa in 2010. I also like to watch NBA basketball, especially when the play-offs start. I don't want to miss it. I also liked watching the Summer Olympic Games last summer.

## My Life

*Javier Marines, Saint Paul*

My name is Javier. When I lived in Mexico, I was very happy because our family was together. It was very good. Over there I worked outside and the temperature was very nice. Christmas Day was very nice because friends and family played together. I have lived in the USA for five years. I came to Virginia and four years six months after that I moved to Minnesota with my brothers.

## Roberto C.'s Story

*Roberto, Bloomington*

I was born in the town of Chilapa in Oaxaca, Mexico in 1969. I am 39 years old. I grew up with my family of eleven siblings—six girls, five boys and my mom and dad. My very first day of school was in 1975.

I had an okay life until 1979. In 1979 all of my family's lives would never be the same again. One day we were all the same like any ordinary day. Later, we found out that my father was dead. We were all shocked. The pain

was big. Then we all had to start working on something and help our mother. Every day we were all sore. We still had to go to school. I stopped going to school in 1982 because I had a big responsibility of taking care of my family and the farm animals, plants, and other foods to grow. But I will always remember my father.

In 1985, I went to the United States with my friend and his dad. I came to work. I lived in California for two months and then I moved to Washington for a job. They gave me a resident card and I lived there for seven years. In 1995 I went to California and got married. In 1996 I had a baby who was born in San Diego. In 2000 my other son was born. I then finally came to Minnesota because my wife would have gotten mad at me if I didn't. In September of 2000, I rented an apartment in Richfield for four years. And in 2004 I bought a house in Minneapolis. In 2008 I started English classes to learn English. So, that's the story of my life!

## My Childhood Memory

*Wah Eb, Saint Paul*

I remember my childhood. I had a big house, yard, and garden with many plants including banana trees, apple, and butternut from my mother. And I had many different kinds of vegetables. I also had a pet dog and cat and a dog to protect my house. When someone came to the house the dog protected my house. The cat caught the rats at night. But now, I don't have anything because my country is not safe so I moved to the US.

The US is a safe country, but I don't dream to buy a big house with a garden and many plans near my house because in the safe country I need money to my house and garden. In my country we don't need money to buy houses. I remember all my family

members in my memory with a big house and we felt very happy when we stayed together.

I remember all my parents and brothers and sister in the other countries. I want to visit them but I can't do it. We all stayed at different refugee camps, so when we moved to another country we went to different countries. We only talk on the phone.

*Wah Eh is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

## My Family

*María Ramona Bustillos, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is María Ramona Bustillos. I always lived in Mexico. In 2002, I came to the USA with my family, only for vacation, but we decided to stay. I woke up and thought, what is going on with me? I looked around and thought how difficult and different it is in this country for me and my family, because I have four children and my husband worked all the time.

The American Dream is not impossible, because my God always helps us. I remember my mom and my family in Mexico. But some day I will go back for vacation. This country is good. I love that one of my children is born here. We live happily and together, but the most important is that my children learn another culture and another language. We want to continue forward always together. I love my family forever.

## I Remember My Family

*Pa Houa, Minneapolis*

**I**remember my family from Thailand, my siblings and I climbing onto the mountain to find the firewood and carry the firewood home. We had fun everyday. I miss my siblings. I walked on the way where we carried water talking and laughing and I

didn't feel the heavy bottle water on my back. When I lived with my family I had many ways to make me happy. Before, I didn't know that one day I would have my life with my husband. I love my family and they love me too. And I will remember my mom, the nice person. My mom is nice to everybody in my family. My family is one of the largest families. In my family we have 17 people.

## My Lifetime

*Richard Shwe, Saint Paul*

**I**was born in the city of Rangoon in Burma. Burma is in Southeast Asia. When I was 15 years old, I moved to the Burma–Thai border, on April 12, 1984. I studied in Kaw Moo Ra High School for four years. On April 12, 1984, I moved to Thailand Refugee Camp Kywa Ka Loot. I moved to Thailand because in Burma there is no freedom for the Karen people. I lived there for 14 years. On June 10, 1999, I moved to Umpham Refugee Camp. I lived in Umpham for nine years. On March 31, 2008, I started moving to the US. I came to Minnesota on April 2, 2008. I live in St. Paul. Now, I study English at MLC in Arlington Hills.

*Richard Shwe is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

## The Fast Draw Way

*Walter Estrada, Coon Rapids*

**T**he Fast Draw Way is a fast way for drawing for people who don't draw but would like to draw. You can use the Fast Draw Way for making drawings small and big. This Fast Draw Way is made of wood and has four pieces of wood crosses. On one side of the Fast Draw Way you need to put the original drawing and in the other side put a piece of white paper. Start drawing the lines of the

original drawing and you can see how the drawing is made on the other paper.

I think it is a very good way for making good drawings and it is faster. Many people used the Fast Draw Way to make drawings for homes or schools and just fun.

*Walter Estrada is originally from Guatemala.*

## Joy

*Samson Elijah Waddell, Hermantown*

I'm the luckiest person in the world. One of the reasons I say this is because growing up I was blessed with six beautiful sisters and two handsome brothers. I happened to be blessed with a grandpa who taught me how to work. Also, I lack a substantial education, so that gives me more time to grow with learning. I'm the luckiest man in the world because I got joy.

## Untitled

*Phouangrath Phrommathed, Apple Valley*

I was born in Laos. I am 34 years old. I came to the United States in 1993. When I first got to Minnesota, I lived in Minneapolis with my dad. I got married to my husband in 1997. I have three kids. Now I live in Apple Valley with my family. The weather over in Laos is different from the weather in Minnesota. Laos has three seasons—summer, fall, and spring.

## Moving From My Country

*Arabu Nuru Berbe, Minneapolis*

I moved from Ethiopia to Kenya on September 27, 2003. In the morning, I took a bus with my father. I was seventeen years old. We lived in Eastleigh, Kenya for four years. I remember one day the Kenyan police

stopped me. They took 300 Kenyan shillings from me. In Kenya all the police are corrupt. We moved to Minnesota on June 6, 2007. Now we live in Cedar Riverside, Minneapolis.

*Arabu Nuru Berbe is originally from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

## My Name is Monica

*Mónica Barrera, Minneapolis*

I'm from Chihuahua, Mexico. I came here ten years ago. I have lived in Minneapolis since August 1999. I am very happy living in the US with my husband and my children. Their names are Berenice, Elier, and Jennifer. This country gave me opportunity. For example, my children and I study different languages. I like my teacher, Mary G. She is excellent. My father, mother, and brothers are in Mexico. I miss them and I miss Mexican culture and food.

## English on the Job

*Rafael Moreno, Woodbury*

I am from Zacatecas, Mexico. When I was 23 years old, I graduated from the school of computer systems.

I came to the United States to earn money and go back to finish my college education in computer school, and see my family in Mexico. I have a problem with not speaking English well enough for my job. I am studying English now, so I feel better.

## What I am Proud About

*Tabukum Sabina, Coon Rapids*

I am able to read, write, and answer questions from a passage. I am able to speak English well and I can even tell a story in English to my classmates. I can also do

some computer lessons in the computer class. All my teachers are very helpful to me. I'm really proud that God has chosen the best teachers for me, and now I have the interest to learn and improve my education in this school. I am also proud for knowing many kinds of things about cars, markets, food, and even the US money. I hope to learn more things and have a better future in my life.

## My Life Experience in Minneapolis.

*Guled Jama, Hopkins*

I came here early in 2000. When I came here, American people and their city government welcomed me. I respected the rules and regulations. The culture was completely different here. In the City of Minneapolis, you see all kinds of people from different countries.

On the other hand I didn't know English well. It was hard for me to fill out an application. Because of my poor English, life was very difficult. So I had to struggle a lot. Despite the culture differences, I finally learned English. I asked my teacher many questions so I could understand the basic culture of American people. I also learned to drive a car in a big city. I had never driven a car in a big city like this before.

## I Love My Family

*Gloria Ávila, Saint Paul*

I got married six years ago. At the beginning it was a difficult time because I had to move from Mexico to Minnesota. I missed my family a lot, but my husband gave me support and was my confidant. Two years later, my son was born and that day was very happy for my husband and me. Now, my son is four years old. I am pregnant again. I feel excited for my second child.

Fortunately, in my family everything is very well. We love each other and we have good communication. I feel happy for my son, because he will have a sister or a brother to play with at home.

My family is very important for me, because there is so much love in it.

## Coming to Minnesota

*Hoang Kim Phan Nguyen, Minneapolis*

I came to Minnesota in July, 2007. I lived with my younger brother and his wife. My mother and two sisters and two younger brothers stayed in Vietnam. I rented one bedroom at \$600 per month. All my money was to buy food at the market. My existence was very sad because my sister-in-law was very ferocious. My mother was sad when my sister-in-law died. That was my first day of school. My teacher Mary Morrison, Carolyn, Stephanie, Gina, and teacher Kathleen are very nice. I am very touched, I will remember forever and celebrate my friends and classmates. I am distant from everybody. I went to California to live with my younger sister and younger brother. I had a good time.

## Coming to Minnesota

*Nurun (Muna) Nahar, Eagan*

Today I am going to introduce you to Muna. Yes, this is Muna from Bangladesh on the Asian continent. Bangladesh is not so big, but it is a beautiful, tropical country. My native language is Bengali. I came to America on September 13, 2008. I live with my husband in Eagan.

The two main challenges that I face here are the weather and the English language. I like Minnesota but I can't tolerate the bitter coldness of its winter. I prefer warmer weather. My second challenge is that my



English is not good. I am currently taking an English class at Woodland ABE School. The English language is not easy, but my teacher, Mary makes it easier for me. My English is improving little by little every day. I hope that someday I will be able to speak English like Mary.

### My New Life

*Daopeth Cida, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Daopeth. I come from Laos, which is a small, beautiful country. I have been in Minnesota for three months. I arrived here October 19, 2008.

You know my first time here was the beginning of winter. Winter here is very cold. I think it is more than five times colder than in Laos. However, I like it because snow is beautiful and it looks clean. I saw snow only on the TV when I was in Laos. One thing I don't like about winter is when snow becomes ice because it is difficult for people who drive to work and it makes traffic jams.

I'm here because my parents work here and I want to upgrade my education. Now I'm studying in Northside ABE School, and I have seen that everything here, such as people, culture, life style and language is different from my country. Those are new things for me to learn. Moreover, I have friends who are older than me too and they are here because they want to upgrade their education too. We come from different places and different languages. We use the English language to communicate with each other. I'm really happy to have new friends because beside the English language, I learned Hmong, Spanish, and the language from Sri Lanka to say hello and good morning. I appreciate this.

All in all, discovering new things is exciting to learn. When you always learn new things, it can make you be smarter and be

brave to show off your talent. Furthermore, it can help you kick off your shyness to become more self-confident.

### My Life Story

*Rosalba Mendoza, Richfield*

**I** was born in Mexico in 1957. I started school in 1968. I didn't finish high school. I got married in 1975. In 1980, I got a business. In 1997, I came to the United States. In 1997, I got my first job here. In 2001, I bought my house. In 2003, I lost my house because I lost my job. In 2003, I came to Minnesota. Then, I got a job in the Mall of America. In 2004, I went to California. I returned to Minnesota in May. I started school in 2007.

### My American life

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

**I** moved to Minneapolis from Italy one year ago. I have spent 12 years in Belgium, France, and Italy. When I was told by my husband that we had to go to Minneapolis, I was disturbed. I thought that America might not be safer than Europe. In fact, I am very comfortable with American life except the awful weather of winter. I must go out for a walk with my dog. It is a very hard in winter.

I can buy some Japanese food in a supermarket easily. It is easier than my European life. I feel that American Life is very convenient for me; it is like my Japanese life. The shops are mostly closed on Sunday in my European country where I lived. There was even a lunch break time in Italy.

I always appreciate an education system for adult foreigners in public schools. Teachers and volunteers make us learn English and volunteers make us learn English and American life. I get precious opportunities in which I can talk with people who are of

different nationalities.

I am not sure how long I will stay in the USA. It depends on the work of my husband. I will try to keep balance with a combination of English studying, taking care of my family, and leisure. I will maintain motivation of studying English and I want to lead a full and solid life in my American time.

## My Life

*Isse Afrah, Saint Louis Park*

**M**y name is Isse Afrah. I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1957. I learned to drive in 1975. I worked at Banider Company in Somalia. Then I got married in 1985.

I had my first child in 1986. Then I had my second child in 1988, the third child in 1990, the fourth in 1993, and the last in 1996.

I came to the United States on April 20, 2006. I lived in Minneapolis from April to August. Then I moved to Lexington, Nebraska. I got a job at Tyson Fresh Meat Company. I was there about seven months and then I moved to Minnesota. I started a job at Hopkins High School in July 2007. I finished that job in December 2007. I moved to Alaska in January 2008. I got a job at Trident Seafood. Then I moved again to Minnesota. Now I'm a cab driver with Airport Taxi.

## My New Family

*Mersy Carrion Tejada, Apple Valley*

**I** came to America on September 9, 2008 from the Dominican Republic. I had never seen my new family before, so I was really quiet, and for a while I was a little timid. After a while, I got to know them better, so I was more comfortable with them. Then I met Katherine and Genesis. They were so boring the first week because I didn't speak English and they didn't speak a lot with me. Then I

got to know them better and now Katherine and Genesis are my best friends. We do a lot of things together and we have fun doing crazy things. But overall the trip here was worthwhile. The benefits of Minnesota are the Mall of America, Valleyfair, the Water Park of America, and a fun and crazy family to hang out with. The disadvantage is the freezing temperature. Being Dominican, I have to get used to looking like an Eskimo just to step outside!

## Untitled

*Sophal Tan, Woodbury*

**W**hen I lived in Cambodia with my mother and sister, I went to college to study and work in medicine. Because of the war, I was not able to complete my education. I went to work selling clothes and things for my food for my family. Now I want to go improve my English, get a GED and study for citizenship.

## My Life

*Ofelia Pérez, Saint Louis Park*

**M**y name is Ofelia. I was born in Mexico. I have three brothers and four sisters. I am the oldest daughter in my family. I was a bank cashier as well as a secretary in my native country. I liked my jobs because I was able to earn a good salary. I came to Minnesota about eight years ago because of financial problems back home. I now work at a restaurant cooking food and at a retail store doing different tasks.

If my English was better, I believe my life would also be much better. I would be able to communicate with people more effectively. However, I am working towards my goal of improving my English by going to school on Tuesdays and Thursdays for a few hours,

although I need to practice my English every day and at every possible time, and not just in school.

Regarding Minnesota, I can tell you that I like it a lot. Yet, I can't stand the cold months, but the nice people that live here make me never want to move to another state. Sometimes though, I get kind of sad because I miss my family in Mexico and California and wish I could see them often, especially my sister who resides in California.

Thank you!

## My Life

*Amarech Mekengo, Saint Paul*

**M**y Name is Amarech Godebo Mekengo. I am from Ethiopia. I speak Amharic. I was born in Ethiopia on November 17, 1978. I went to Ancha Sedcho Primary School. I have a certificate from Wacham Secondary High School. I graduated from high school in 1994. After graduation, I got married. I have two children, one boy and one girl. I worked at Muger Cement factory from 2001 up to 2008. My position was clinical and production clerk. I came to the USA on May 6, 2008. I do not have a job. I learn English at the Hubbs Center. My class begins at 12:45 p.m. and finishes at 2:30 p.m. After class, I go home to take care of my children.

Amarech Mekengo is originally from Ethiopia.

## My Life

*Juan Serrato, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Juan and I am from Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico. I was born in 1985. I am 23 years old. My city is very beautiful because it has nice beaches. It also has big mountains and a lot of places to visit. Every day is hot. There is a lot of seafood

to eat. I moved to Minnesota in 2002 with my brother because there are not a lot of jobs in Mexico. Now I am working to help to my family and I am studying English at night. I like Minnesota because it has many lakes and parks, but I don't like the cold and snow. I hope that I can go back to Mexico to visit to my family.

## Untitled

*Beidemariam Abreha, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Beidemariam Abreha. I am from Ethiopia. I came to the United States in 2008. My father is dead. My mother is alive in Ethiopia. My family is two brothers and four sisters. My interests are reading the Bible and praying at the Ethiopia Orthodox Church of Saint Mary's. I am a Deacon.

*Beidemariam Abreha is originally from Ethiopia.*

## My Life in Two Countries

*Mai See Yang, Plymouth*

**I** came from the beautiful city called Xieng Khouang. It was in the center part of the country which had a million elephants. It was called Laos and it had a pretty nice climate. I was born with a nice family and was the oldest of the five daughters and I also had three brothers. All of them were in school, too. My parents worked together on the farm and raised animals to sell for a living. My family lived a peaceful and enjoyable because we loved and supported each other.

Life here in the United States of America in the beautiful city of Minneapolis is very exciting to me because everything is about living, shopping, school, and working to make things better. It's new and very difficult for me because I have to begin a new life and learn a new culture. I go to school for evening

class every day to study English as my second language to help me understand how to begin a new life in America.

## My Life

*Crispina García, Bloomington*

I was born in Mexico in 1976. I started school in 1981. In 1987, I stopped my school because, in my city, there were only five teachers. I met my husband in 1992. I got married in 1993. I had my first baby in Mexico in 1995. I had another baby in 1997. I came to the USA with my two children in 2000.

I had my last baby in 2005. I got my driver's license in 2005. I got my residence card and a job in 2007. I started in English school in SHAPE. I wish to learn more English.

*Crispina García is 32 years old and is originally from Oaxaca, Mexico.*

## My Life

*Kyong Persinger, Burnsville*

In January 1989, I met my husband who was in the Air Force at the time. On September 27, 1989, we got married. On August 11, 1990, our daughter, Lisa, was born. On November 17, 1990, I traveled to the United States to my husband's hometown of South Sioux City, Nebraska. We lived in Nebraska until the summer of 1999. At that time, we moved to Le Mars, Iowa. Our daughter, Christina was born on March 18, 2002. During the summer of 2004, we moved to Burnsville, Minnesota. We bought a beautiful house in Burnsville during the summer of 2006.

My husband and I both have wonderful jobs. My oldest daughter is in her first year of college. My youngest daughter is in the first

grade. I have two beautiful daughters and a wonderful husband. I feel very lucky to have such a wonderful family. Now I am taking ESL classes. I am learning English and I have a wonderful teacher.

*Kyong Persinger is originally from South Korea.*

## Letter to My Mama

*Kristin Jenkins, Minneapolis*

Dear Mom,

A turning point in my life was that I made a change by transitioning my life to another place. It made me feel anxious because I have been through a lot in my life that I really haven't ever told you about or talked to you about. I never really told you because I didn't know how to tell you and I didn't know how you would react. But now, since I have gotten him out of my life, I feel so much better that I am stress-free. This is important to me because I love you and I never wanted to keep anything from you. I am sorry that I couldn't talk about my situation and problem with you and I hope you can forgive me.

Love your daughter,

Kristin

## Untitled

*Claudia Suenaga, Eden Prairie*

I have been here in Minnesota for almost three years. I'm 34 years old and from Sao Paulo, Brazil, a beautiful city, with a lot of places to visit like great restaurants. It is a good place to live that I never thought I could leave one day.

My husband came here to work and it has

been a good experience for all of us. The first months were hard because I was away from my family, in a different country, speaking a different language and it was a cold winter. I saw snow, walked on a frozen lake, learned English and enjoyed the beautiful changes that came with each season. It was pretty to see how spring, summer, fall and winter can have their own grace. That is different in my country.

Minnesota feels like my home too. I love living here and here now is a better place for us to stay and enjoy all the good things that Minnesota has to offer for us. Of course, I miss my country, but every day here has been a great experience.

## Untitled

*Schmidt, Bloomington*

I was born in 1972 in Mexico. I am 36 years old. I went to elementary school. In 1986, I graduated from college. I had one year of computer in 1997. I got married in 1999. I came to the USA.

## El Caribeño de Cozumel

*Estéban Carachuri, Woodbury*

I was born in Acapulco, Mexico. I am 28 years old. When I was four years old, my parents and I moved to Cozumel, Mexico. It's an island in the Caribbean. I went to high school there and later, I went to two years of college.

In 1998, I met my wife while she was on vacation with her parents. We kept in touch for one year by emails and phone calls, but it was just like a friendship. After a while we became good friends and start dating. Then, she moved to Cozumel so she could be with me. I remember we had a great time down in Cozumel while we were dating. We also

traveled to different states of Mexico, just to know more about the culture and how beautiful it is. Then, we went to Montreal, Canada, which is also a beautiful country. The people were very nice.

After a while, I married my wife and I came to United States of America in 2006. Ever since then, I have been in Minnesota.

## My Story is Good

*Amina Abdi, Edina*

I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1974. I finished school in 1988. My country was in a civil war so I went to Kenya in 1991.

I lived in a refugee camp in Kenya. I lived there for four years and then I came to the USA in 1995. I lived in Georgia three years and then I came to Minnesota in 1998. I started working in 1999 at IBM. I got laid off in 2003.

I lived in Hopkins from 2003 to 2007. In 2008 I moved to Edina. I got married in 2001.

## Great Time in a New Country

*Fabio Iván Monroy Ramírez, Cottage Grove*

Hello, my name is Fabio Iván Monroy Ramírez. I'm 24 years old and I'm from a city called Tunja that is located in Colombia. I've been in the United States for about five months. I'm here as a Language Ambassador, working for Nuevas Fronteras Spanish Immersion School, helping the kids to learn Spanish and showing the community the culture of my country.

Back in Colombia I'm a Civil Engineer. I have my parents, a younger brother and an older sister. I also have two nieces and a nephew. I miss them a lot. I have lived with two different host families here, and they are really nice. Because my experience has been great so far, I'm very happy living in this community.

I want to travel inside this amazing country as much as I can, I have been up north to Lake Superior, I'm going to Las Vegas soon and hopefully, I'm going to travel to New York City, Washington D.C., Florida, and California. All of these adventures depend on the time and resources I can find while I'm here. I like the American culture, it's kind of hard sometimes, but these little differences between this culture and mine have made me realize that diversity and cultural understanding is an important part and the beginning to make this place we call Earth a better place.

To live out of the country has been a great experience. It has made me better person. I also enjoy being able to speak two languages. I'm still working hard on my English language skills, on the other hand, I would like to continue traveling to other places around the world to know more about different cultures and share mine as well.

## My Life Story

*Pablo Crespo, Bloomington*

I was born in Mexico in 1984. In 1986, I had a big operation. In 1989, I started kindergarten. In 1994, I won 1,000 marmols in a week. In 1996, I won a game of soccer. In 1999, I left high school. In 2004, I arrived in Chicago. In 2007, I moved to Minnesota.

## My History

*Luz Divina Morales, Richfield*

I was born in 1971 in Misantla, Veracruz, Mexico. I started school in 1975. I lived in the city of Veracruz in 1981 for one year. I graduated from high school in 1989. I came to the US in 2003 with a visa for work. My work was in Austin, Texas in the Omni Hotel as a housekeeper. I moved to Minnesota in

January 2004. I fell in love in May 2004. I got married in December 2005. I had a baby on October 21, 2006. I have studied at SHAPE since May 2008.

## Important Things in My Life

*Jonathan Boswell, Minneapolis*

There are many things in my life that are important to me. In my life, my family is very important to me because they always are there for me when I need help to do something. In Minnesota, I don't have a lot of friends because I don't have time to go out with them. I love to work and take care of my family in the United States and in Jamaica because I am the only one that has ever traveled and went to school to get a better education to help my mother and my brother and sister.

*Jonathan Boswell is originally from Jamaica.*

## America the Foreign

*Halimo Said, Minneapolis*

I'm from Somalia. When I came to America I saw a lot of different culture because America and Somalia are so different. They have different food, different weather, and a different language. I sometimes miss my country. I wish some day go back to my country. I like America, but I miss my country.

## Just for Two Years, But...

*Anonymous, Woodbury*

I have been here in Minnesota for about two years, but I feel it has passed much more quickly than I expected. It was a lot of fun for me to meet new friends coming from different countries and I was able to learn a

lot of things that I hadn't seen in my country. For example, I enjoyed having lunch with new friends after ESL class. Sometimes we had wonderful home parties where we could share different kinds of country foods. We spent many hours trying to speak English so that we were able to get across what we wanted to say. I have to get back to Tokyo soon but I am sure that I am going to be missing my friends and teachers of ESL in Minnesota.

## My English Education

*H.B., Moorhead*

I want to work on my education. Every morning as I wake up and get myself ready to go to school, I think about the reasons why I need my education. I need to learn to do more for myself and my kids. Learning English will help me do things by myself and better understand others around me. I would like to read the newspapers and magazines. I would like to read books from the library.

I came to the U.S. from Iran in 2003. In my home in Iran I spoke Kurdish but at school I spoke, read and wrote Farsi. I lived in Moorhead a little over a month before I started my education.

When I started school I didn't know any English. The first class I was in was English as a Second Language. Some days I went home and cried because I couldn't speak English or understand anything. I told my husband I didn't want to continue going to school. He asked me, "If you stay at home, do you learn any thing?" Then he encouraged me to keep going to school because everyone who comes to the US feels the same way at first.

For two years I didn't understand much. When I finally started speaking in English I was scared. I didn't want people to laugh at me so I became shy and didn't want to talk. In spite of my fears I continued to go to

school. Three and one half years later I passed my ESL test and moved to the GED program to work on my high school diploma.

My goal after getting my GED diploma is to go to college. In college I want to learn more to increase my knowledge, to improve my life, and to acquire skills for job opportunities. All of these things will help me to find a good job to help my family.

## Untitled

*Lidia Nava-Hernández, Minneapolis*

I have a better job, and friends. I'm really happy to be a student here. I feel better because I have many opportunities. Sometimes I can help somebody. I don't have more nervousness.

## In My Mind

*Orthai (Wai) Sereekhunakhun, Owatonna*

Before I came to the USA from Thailand, I was so excited and also afraid if I didn't get my US visa to come here. After I got my USA visa approved, I was very happy, because my hope and dream to gain more practice of the English language and experience a different culture would come true.

When I came to Owatonna, Minnesota, I could see some things that I've never seen before. Here it is strange for me because the houses, scenery, foods, and the most important the weather is very different. The weather here is very cold. But right now, I'm getting used to this cold weather.

I came to the USA as an Au Pair for work. I'm 26 years old. I'm a nanny. I have to take care of two children I live with in an American family. They're very kind to me, and they also give me a chance to study English in Owatonna Community Education.

# Poem About Me

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*Eric Balboa, Saint Peter*

*E*ric

Modest, clean, different, smart  
Lover of meat, fishing, crab  
Who feels excited, cheerful, thoughtful  
Who fears heights, being alone, drowning

Who would like to see the Bahamas,  
The world from an airplane, Shia Beuf  
Resident of the United States  
Balboa.

## *I Am*

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*Anonymous, Saint Cloud*

*I* am honest and helpful  
I wonder why people fight  
I hear birds sing  
I see the beauty of the world  
I am honest and helpful

I pretend to be a teacher  
I feel very lucky when I see my family  
I touch my children's love  
I worry about my brother's sickness  
I cry when I am really angry about someone  
I am honest and helpful

I understand life is different  
I say I believe in one God  
I dream about my friend in Africa  
I try to be the best parent I can  
I hope to have a higher education  
I am honest and helpful

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# *Me*

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*Jehovah Cross, Saint Peter*

*Jehovah*

Young, good looking, cool

Son of Mr. Cross

Lover of cars, trucks, boats

Who feels worthy, lonely, sad

Who fears people, dogs, rats

Who would like to see my mother, my father, my sister

Resident of North Minneapolis, Minnesota

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# *A Helping Hand*

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*Jason LuBecke, Duluth*

Sometimes I let others dictate  
a mental block state. I grow back  
to function again. I know where  
I've been. I have good intentions  
to educate my mind and sometimes  
it's an overdose of reading and  
writing. It soaks in my mental state  
and I bloom like a May flower.

People, the world is ours.

We are all the same as far as  
having a brain but unique in  
our own way.

# Rush

*James Trettel, Holyoke*

The blood boiling adrenaline rush and  
Alphabetical peace are same or similar  
But not to be alone in nothingness  
To have extreme excitement for what lies  
Beneath people's problems

Only to be thankful for great moms who  
Stand beside their sons no matter  
What the courts did

To feel what's deep down inside  
Like torture from lack of food  
To have your higher power fill that void  
Of your mind of what happened in the past

And strive for a better future  
with your girlfriend

# I Am

*Elizabeth Haugen, Saint Cloud*

I am serious and honest.  
I wonder what goes on when I'm not there.  
I hear good things that are said to me.  
I see life getting better.  
I want to be loved.  
I am serious and honest.

I pretend that everything is okay.  
I feel the pain I have put onto others.  
I touch someone's heart.  
I cry when things don't go right for me.  
I am serious and honest.

I understand that life can get hard.  
I say we can help each other  
I dream about having my own independence.  
I try to do my best as a mother.  
I hope my dreams will come true.  
I am serious and honest.

# *Dreams*

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*Bozel Rulford, Saint Peter*

Nights I clutch  
And hold on tight.  
Hope I won't have a bad dream tonight.

Before babies are born  
Do they get their mom's dreams?  
And if so they probably try to give their mom things.

I must have had my mom's dreams  
Because I ain't stopped yet trying to give my mom  
things.  
Sometimes dreams can be a message.

The message: Would you mess with it?  
Do dreams come from the mind of the heart?  
One day we'll find out what dreams are all about.

# *My Life*

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*Michelle Bergstrom, Duluth*

My life consists of  
My faith, it's strong  
My friends, they're never wrong  
My schooling, it gets me along

# *I Am*

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*Mohamed Mohamed, Saint Cloud*

I am honest and kind  
I wonder why people fight each other  
I hear good sound when my family members saying nice to each other  
I see good morning when I see my children playing with each other  
I want to be a helper in stressful situations  
I am honest and kind

I pretend to be laughing  
I feel happy when somebody helps me  
I touch things that make me happy, like flowers  
I worry about my future  
I cry when something makes me angry  
I am honest and kind

I understand God created every thing in this world  
I believe God is great  
I dream fruitful consequences  
I try to achieve my objectives  
I hope my dream will come true  
I am honest and kind



# Events, Holidays and Seasons

## A Wedding in Eritrea

*Daniel Missgna, Saint Paul*

In my country, Eritrea, a wedding is nice. Before the day of the wedding, the groom and groom's friends go to the bride's home around midnight and they dance. Then after a little bit of dancing the bride comes out to dance with the groom. When the time is done, the groom and friends return back home.

The next day, the bride wears a veil. The groom wears any kind of suit he likes. After that the bride and groom go to church. After that there is the big party. People enjoy being together, they eat, drink, and dance. If they have money, they can go on a honeymoon.

## New Baby

*Saytuun Shuuriye, Minneapolis*

Three and a half years ago, I had my last baby. I was alone with my children. My husband was at work. My aunt and my sister were working. I had a lot of contractions. I called my husband. He said, "In twenty minutes I will come." My aunt said the same.

My husband called again and said, "I had an accident. Call the ambulance for yourself."

I went to my landlord, Robert, nearby. I knocked on the door of Robert's house. Robert said, "What happened?" My son said, "My mom's baby is coming." I said, "Where is your wife, Brenda?" Brenda said, "What happened?"

I said, "I want to go to the hospital, but my husband had an accident. My little sister will come soon. Please stay with the children." Brenda said, "Okay. Go to the hospital."

I called 911. The ambulance came. I went to the hospital. The paramedics delivered the baby in the ambulance.

The doctor said, "You are lucky." I was glad. My baby was healthy. I was healthy.

*Saytuun Shuuriye is originally from Somalia.*

## Newroz

*B.M., Moorhead*

The biggest spring celebration in my country is Newroz, on the first day of spring, March 21. Grass is starting to turn green. Red, yellow, and white wildflowers

are growing everywhere. Some flowers are light yellow with long stems and smell like perfume.

The reason we celebrate the holiday is to enjoy our freedom from a bad king, Zahakis. He killed many kids in Persia and Kurdistan. He had a snake head on each shoulder. Each snake head had to drink human blood to protect its life. Zahakis gave the children's blood to the snake heads.

One farmer, Kowhai Ahead, and his wife, had seven children. They already had given King Zahakis six of their children. The soldiers were coming to take the seventh child, but Kowhai and his wife decided not to give their seventh child to the King's soldiers and to instead go fight for freedom from Zahakis.

The next day Kowhai and his friend went to the king's castle and they started the war. They went inside to catch the king and cut his head off. Kowhai was so happy to show everyone the head of Zahakis, as proof that the king's evilness was over. The people danced around the open fire and celebrated. From that day until now, March 21 is celebrated as a day of freedom from King Zahakis.

## Newroz

*H.A., Moorhead*

**I**n my home country on March 21 we celebrate Newroz. It's like the Fourth of July in America. The night before, we build a big fire from car tires. The fire goes high in the valley. The smell and the black smoke spread all over the city. As the fire burns, people dance and laugh. We cook rice dishes: dolma (made from cabbage and grape leaf), and briani (made from brown spices, chicken, potatoes, almonds, and raisins). We drive to the park in the morning, bringing the delicious food with us. Some people drive as

long as one hour.

We wear Kurdish clothing. I wear a red keras dress with sparkling sequins. My mother and grandmother sewed it with their own hands a month before. That is how important it is to us. The weather is sometimes cold and sometimes warm. Green grass is starting to grow and some flowers are appearing on the ground. The flowers look like a red, white, and yellow blanket spread across the field.

We all eat together at the park. There are a lot of people there, families, friends, and more. We all have conversation about daily life things. After we eat, we make hot loose leaf tea to drink and join together in the park. Many families dance together. The music is great. The singer is doing an awesome job. He sings a special song about Newroz. Dancers are dancing their best. The events of Newroz will always be special and very important to me.

## My Wedding in Kenya

*Farhan Farah, Minneapolis*

**I** went to Kenya to get married. First, the bride and groom, Kin and I, went to the mosque. Next, I talked to the Imam and asked if I wanted to marry Kin. The Imam said to Kin, "Do you want to marry Farhan?" She said, "Yes." Then the Imam read the ceremony. After he finished the ceremony, he gave me the certificate. Before we came to the mosque, we called a taxi. The driver took five people to the mosque. They were Kin and me and three attendants. My attendant was my cousin, Abdirahman. Kin's attendants were her cousins, Shamso and Muna.

After the ceremony we went to the restaurant and ate. After two days I rented a hall and invited many family and friends for the party. The party lasted all day and night.

Finally we went home. Two months later I came back to the United States.

Three years later Kin came to the United States with my baby son Mustaf and her daughter Hibaq.

## Fall Season

*Maryan Ahmed, Coon Rapids*

Fall is a windy, rainy and sunny season. Birds fly south. The leaves fall on the ground. The leaves change their color. Days are short. Farmers harvest their seeds, such as wheat and corn, as well as apples and tomatoes. On Halloween night some people wear masks on their faces and scare other people. Some people make Jack-o-lanterns and put candles in them. Children go door to door and say, "Trick or treat." Thanksgiving is a holiday to remember the family traditions that are the most important. There is also a feast that consists of different foods.

There is no fall in my country. Somalia's climate is tropical. There are hot seasons and rainy ones, but it's never cold. Our farmers harvest bananas, mangoes, watermelon, corn, and beans. In our country some people start to go to school in fall. Others go to work and different business. We have a similar tradition like Thanksgiving. Our family gathers together for a feast.

I do not like fall because it is windy and rainy. I hate winds because they make my eyes teary. I do not like that leaves fall off the trees in front of my house. I like the sunny weather as Indian summer. I hate cold and snow because we need to wear a coat and socks. Sometimes you can fall because it is slippery. My opinion is that I like the summer time best.

## A Traditional Wedding in Vietnam

*Phuoc Nguyen, Saint Paul*

In Vietnam, the wedding ceremony is excellent. Traditionally, the bride wears an "Ao dai" and turban, the same for the groom. The Ao dai was designed a long time ago. Today, the bride wears a white dress or other color dress. The groom wears a black or white suit. Sometimes, the wedding has some attendants for the bride and the groom.

First, the groom's family prepares everything. A big party is held in a restaurant.

In the restaurant it is beautifully decorated with flowers and it's full of guests. Next, a matchmaker introduces the two sides. After that, the groom wears a ring from the bride. The bride wears one, too. The groom and the bride will kiss each other when they finish the ceremony.

Then, the party begins with a dinner. The food, such as beer, red wine, chicken salad, deep fried shrimp, stewed beef brisket, etc., is moved out on table. Then, the people dance at the party. A person sings for the people dancing. The bride and the groom go to every table for congratulations. The party is about two hours when it ends.

## Fall

*Vladimir Kochergin, Coon Rapids*

In Minnesota, fall is very beautiful. Leaves change their colors. Days become shorter. This time is very good for harvesting vegetables. I like to do it myself. Usually children go back to school after summer. In Russia students do not take their backpacks on the first day of school. They have two periods; the first period is about peace and the second one is about knowledge.



*Antonia Gutiérrez,  
Saint Cloud*

In Minnesota, people celebrate Thanksgiving. People are very happy because they can visit their friends, eat turkey, talk, and relax. In Russia people do not celebrate Halloween but there is November 7. Nobody goes to work.

My favorite time in the fall is the last weekend in September, because it is the birthday of my city. It is a lot of fun for all the people. Many people wear nice clothes and drink beer. In the evening we have fireworks at 10 p.m. If you would like to see the fall party, welcome to Rostov-on-Don.

*Vladimir Kochergin is originally from Russia.*

## My Best Day

*Tria Xiong, Coon Rapids*

Let me tell you about the best day in my life. It was a Christmas day. I like this holiday better because that day all my children came to my house. We had a lot of fun with foods, games, and presents. The whole family communicates and gets along very well. We started with food. There were all kinds of food: turkey, corn, green beans, potatoes, pies, cookies, and even cake. Then we played all kinds of games. Finally, we opened presents. Everyone was excited to see what they got when they opened their gifts.

I would like to thank the US, which made the very beautiful holiday for us. I will never forget about it. In my home country, Laos, we don't have a Christmas holiday. We have only New Year's Day, but we don't have gifts for everyone. We have many kinds of food for family to enjoy together for the dinner. Finally, all the children listen to the long stories from the old men or old women.

*Tria Xiong is 45 years old and is originally from Laos.*

## San Pablo, Apostle of Jesus

*Victoria Ríos, Shakopee*

In my town, Axochiapan, Mexico, on January 25th we celebrate San Pablo, the Apostle of Jesus. It is a big Catholic party. The people are very excited because in the morning everybody is ready to go to the plaza. The people watch the different styles of Aztec dancers. Some dancers put long peacock feathers in a crown on their heads. Other dancers wear a mask on their face. One dance is named, "Fly the Papancla," because the people who are dancing are flying too.

When the procession starts, four people walk around town carrying a statue of San Pablo on their shoulders; other people walk and pray the rosary. When we conclude the procession all the people go to eat many foods. It is free. When the people are done eating, they return to their homes to take a bath and dress up. At night they go back to the church and they watch fire works all night. It is beautiful and lovely. Sometimes it concludes at three or four in the morning. The people go back home and fall asleep.

## Winter Snow

*Sulaiman A. Subhan, Minneapolis*

I like the winter snow. It falls from the sky very fast. I don't like the cloudy weather. Minneapolis weather is good because one day snow falls, another day it is cold and sunny. I think a lot of snow falls in the winter. It gets very cold. Minneapolis is colder than my country, Afghanistan. The way to enjoy winter here is to walk in the skyway!

*Sulaiman A. Subhan is originally from Afghanistan.*



## Carnaval in Ecuador

*Jeaneth Quito, Blaine*

**H**ello, my name is Jeaneth Quito. I am from Ecuador. I have lived in Minneapolis for seven years. My favorite holiday is Carnaval (a Spanish word). It takes place in February.

We celebrate big with families and friends meeting in one home. The owner's home has to make food for everybody. We usually kill a pig, which we prepare together. After the food is ready, we eat. The eldest play cards and the youngsters play with water. We also throw water over our bodies. Then when we are all wet we go out to the street and see how everybody in the community is celebrating. We all start to play. We go home by home playing with water.

This holiday we celebrate for three days, so nobody works. If someone drives a car, people on the street stop that car and open the car's door and the driver gets wet. He doesn't become angry because he knows it is tradition. Everybody is happy on these days, so we all are like a big family and enjoy this time together.

## New Year in Japan

*Megumi Sato, Minneapolis*

**N**ew Year is January first and different from the Chinese one. We always celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. We eat buckwheat noodles called "soba" on New Year's Eve. On New Year's Day we greet each other and eat the Japanese New Year's dish called "osechi." Osechi is made up of some foods. We go to the Shinto shrine to pray for good luck. Because we Japanese aren't faithful, we only go one time a year.

On New Year's Day, New Year's greetings cards are prepared and delivered to each home. These cards are postcards including a lottery number issued by the public post office. Winners are chosen on January 15th. We have to buy the cards—one hundred or more, this amount depending on our background. We send these to friends, co-workers, superiors, and relatives.

The New Year's celebration lasts seven days, and we eat congee with seven spring vegetables to rest our stomachs on the seventh day. But most people start to work again on January 3 or 4.

## An Essay to Minnesotans

*Hoang Nguyen, Brooklyn Park*

**T**he wind is coming up. The weather is changing a little colder than before; it is not too hot, very nice. The leaves of trees change to many different kinds of beautiful colors. They're fully fantastic colors I have never seen before. The wind, like a musician, gives some nice melody to

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The wind, like a musician gives some nice melody to the leaves.

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the leaves. They are the same as dancers under the sun with some new wonderful colors.

It is the fall in Minnesota, the state where I have lived for seven years. I'm very excited about it.

Minnesotans at first sight give people a smile when they see you. Minnesotans have beautiful smiles it is still a gift to all people who just first set foot on Minnesota's land. Yes, they still give a nice smile to all of us and the fall in Minnesota is still my favorite season.

## The History of My Wedding

*Safaa Bernoussi, Minneapolis*

In 2006, I had a big wedding in Morocco. The first day, I had a small party with family and best friends. We drew something on our hands called henna. We made some food (Moroccan cake and thee) and we danced for a short time. The second day, we had a big party at night. I wore a lot of special clothes and my husband wore a tuxedo. Next, all my family ate the special food (bastila, beef, chicken, soda, and juice) and danced to a lot of Moroccan music. Then, I wore a special white dress and I cut a big wedding cake with my husband. After that, we went to a hotel to sleep a few hours. Finally, when we woke up we went to a wonderful honeymoon in an amazing city in Morocco for two weeks.

## Christmas Day

*Olga, Fairmont*

I don't know what to say about the past holidays because we didn't do anything special, except for the food. I did tamales and it takes too much time to do them. I do it one time each year and it is at Christmastime.

The day before Christmas I prepare the dinner because we celebrate Christmas Eve. I did ham, mashed potatoes, salads, rice, apple pie, and for the grand finale, TAMALES. My kids played Twister and Scrabble. My husband and I played with our granddaughters until midnight, because it is when we opened the presents. It was so funny. I helped my granddaughters to put cookies and milk out for Santa Claus and they were surprised when they noticed the plate and the glass were empty. They asked everybody if they saw something or heard the sound of bells, but Alexis, the four-year-old, the older one,

thought Santa Claus was fake and it was so confusing for her. Later, when we opened the presents, my older son and parent of my granddaughter said to my husband, "I'm sorry for the presents, but this year, Santa Claus had not too much money."

Alexis said, "It is not true, Dad, because yesterday we went to buy the presents, remember? Did you buy the presents, not Santa Claus?"

That was Christmas Eve. On Christmas Day I needed to clean the mess from the day before. I made a few phone calls to my brothers in Mexico.

*Olga is 46 years old and is originally from Mexico.*

## Ramadan

*Qali Hasan, Minneapolis*

Ramadan is a good thing for Muslims all over the world to celebrate. We observe our most important holy month with fasting, prayer, and charity. I'm very happy to do all the things in the holy month of Ramadan. I'm very happy to follow my religion. During Ramadan, adults and teenagers fast for the whole month. We do not eat or drink anything from sunrise until sunset – not even a sip of water or a piece of gum. Muslims fast during Ramadan to purify ourselves. We also fast so we know what it feels like to be poor and hungry all the time.

However, non-Muslims see negative things in Ramadan. They think fasting is a sacrifice to their bodies to the extreme. They always ask questions about Ramadan. They wonder how we do things while we are fasting – things like going to school, working, babysitting and many other things in our lives.

*Qali Hasan is originally from Somalia.*

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# Virgin of the Rosary

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*I*n my native city of Poncitlan, Mexico, the biggest celebration of the year is The Virgin of the Rosary. This celebration starts on November 23rd and lasts for eight days.

At five o'clock in the morning the people are inside the church and the mariachi band plays the Happy Birthday song. When they finish the song, everybody walks in the street with the mariachi music and drinks punch or soft drinks. Everybody dances for more than two hours.

During the evenings there is a carnival in the town plaza, with music, dancing, delicious food, punch, rides and a lot of excitement. The children are very excited because they like all the rides. The adults enjoy walking around the plaza visiting with family and friends. Young, single men look for girlfriends during this time. When a man sees a girl that he likes and she likes him, he puts confetti on her head, they walk around together, and he will buy flowers for her. People watch the dancers who are dressed in beautiful costumes. They are dancing for the Virgin Rosario.

This is a wonderful time of the year; eight days of celebration and fun.

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## Karina

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*Karina is an ESL student at Shakopee Family Literacy. She is 32 years old and lives in Shakopee with her husband, Ángel, and her two children: Cristián, age 5, and Ariana, age 3. They are expecting a third baby in April. Karina came to the United States five years ago from Jalisco, Mexico. She is a home-maker and enjoys crocheting and doing nails.*

## My Wedding in Venezuela

*Lerida Moco, Minneapolis*

When I got married I had two parties. Yes, two parties because I also had a civil ceremony in the town hall. At this ceremony only our parents attended. When we arrived at my house, I was surprised; all my family (brothers, sister, sister in laws, cousins, nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts) was in my house. They brought food and drinks and we had a familiar party.

Three months after, I had a church wedding. I wore a beautiful white dress and a hat with a small veil over my face. I was very excited. After the religious ceremony we had a big hall special for big parties. When we arrived at the hall, first my husband and I danced a waltz and had a toast with champagne. After the presentation of the newlyweds, all the attendants began to dance. There was a wonderful wedding party with a lot of seafood, hot and cool. I was happy. In my wedding there was my family from other cities too. At 3:00 a.m., we went on a trip to Mérida for our honeymoon. Mérida is a state in Venezuela. The mountains are the biggest of Venezuela and the mountains have snow. My family and friends had been with us two days.

## A Holiday from Ecuador

*Manuel Merchan, Minneapolis*

My name is Manuel and I am from Ecuador. In February 2008, in Minneapolis, my friends and I celebrated carnival. Most people splash water on each other and throw flour all over their faces. We grilled pork and we ate jelly with bread. We sang carnival songs like “La Voz del Carnaval” and threw a lot of water and flour at people. We had a lot of fun playing at carnival.

## Celebration in Mexico

*Anonymous, Rochester*

In Mexico, we celebrate January 6 every year. The celebration is about the Three Magic Kings. This holiday is my favorite and the children’s too. It is a child and adult celebration, so the children get gifts.

The parents have to buy the toys without the children seeing them because the children believe that the three kings come from the sky. The parents keep thoughts to themselves, so at midnight after the children go to sleep, the parents go to buy the toys. Before the children go to bed, they leave their shoes near the bed and a glass of water or cookies. The kings drink or eat what the children leave for them. Without the children seeing it, the parents leave the toys for everyone. When the children wake up, they see the toys.

During the day, the adults make a big rosca of bread. Small dolls are baked inside the bread. Everyone has to have a piece of bread. If somebody has one of the dolls, he has to make food for the next celebration that is on February second. Everybody who has the dolls has to make everything at the celebration called the Día de la Candelaria.

Since my family moved to the US, we don’t celebrate this holiday anymore because we only celebrate on Christmas Day. We miss a lot the Three Magic Kings.

## A Traditional Wedding in My Country of China

*Qingyu Zhou, Minneapolis*

About 30 years ago, there was only one typical wedding ceremony in my country, China. We learned a lot of new things from other countries during the latest years. We were so excited about some fresh things that we never ever had before. Now, most

couples prefer an American wedding to our traditional wedding, because they think that our traditional wedding is too old-fashioned. However, a few people still have a traditional wedding, perhaps because they like it so much.

The groom used to avoid seeing his bride's face before they got married. Because the ancients believed that if they met each other before the wedding ceremony, it would bring very bad fortune in the future. But we don't do that any more. The bride often wears a special red dress, because red is our traditional lucky color. The special red dress is called "sheath with slit skirt" in English. Some brides also have on a red blouse and a long red skirt. Nearly a hundred years ago, the bride used to cover her face with a red veil, and wore a heavy particular Chinese hat which was only for the bride. The groom usually wears a red shirt. Sometimes the groom has on a red and black shirt. Nevertheless, whatever the groom wears, he must wear something with a little red or pink. The groom needs to have on a hat. And the hat is usually black.

There was only one attendant for the bride in our traditional wedding ceremony. The attendant used to be a middle-aged woman, and she wore a red blouse as well. Nowadays, the attendant is often one of the bride's friends or mom.

If the bride's family or the groom's family lives in a house, then they'll hold the party in their own house, but most Chinese live in an apartment, so they always hold their wedding parties in a hotel. They usually rent a very large hall in a hotel. The wedding party is often a pretty big party. Most of them invite at least 300 people, including all of their relatives, friends, co-workers and so on. Sometimes they ask their old classmates and

teachers to attend, too.

## The Inauguration of President

### Obama

*Galina Koltun, Minneapolis*

I saw Obama's inauguration on my TV at home after school. I saw oceans of people. Some people cried from happiness. All of the people waved American flags. It was public enthusiasm. The economy in the world and in the United States has gotten worse. People are worried about their futures.

We heard in my past life in Russia

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But America showed me now that a black man from a simple family could be elected president of the United States.

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that America didn't have democracy—that black people didn't have the same rights as white people. But America showed me now that a black man from

a simple family could be elected president of the United States. I was amazed and admired how people were caught by their enthusiasm.

Barack Obama's speech was very inspirational and gave everyone hope for a better future. He could choose a very strong government. I believe he has the potential for being a great president of the United States of America.

*Galina Koltun is 75 years old and is originally from Saint Petersburg, Russia.*

## My Favorite Fall Holiday Tradition

*Teresa F. Rodriguez, Spring Lake Park*

I want to tell you how the holidays are in December when they arrive in my country. Everybody talks about it and I can feel the happiness and peace in my heart. Sometimes

when I was in Mexico, I traveled during this specific time to know other traditions of my country in other towns. I liked it because you never knew what you would find there. The traditions are big and cheerful. For example, when Christmas arrives, you can stay at home with your family, or you can go with your neighbor and have one of the biggest parties you can. The next day the party follows to the beach, and you can have reunions with your friends and family, break piñatas, bring lots of food, and celebrate all day and the rest of the night. I miss my country, especially at this season. I want to be there. My mind travels there every year because on the beach the life is really exciting.

*Teresa F. Rodríguez is originally from México.*

## Sankranthi

*Sisu, Woodbury*

Sankranthi is one of the biggest festivals for the Andhra Pradesh people in India. It comes in the month of January. This is the harvest festival. In this season the farmers get their crops of rice, lentils and sugarcane, etc. People celebrate the festival for three days.

These days are winter days and on the first day they celebrate as Bhogi. In the early morning of Bhogi, people gather by the fireplace and they sing songs happily. After that, they take a head bath using sesame seeds powder and wear new clothes. Women decorate in front of their houses with colors and flowers called Rangoli. In the middle of Rangoli they put a lump of cow dung decorated with turmeric powder, kukum, flowers, and nine varieties of grains and fruits. Teenage girls gather in a circle and sing songs. In the evening, people gather below the five-year-old kids and then give a shower of flowers, seasonal fruits, goodies and coins.

That means the children are blessed by all to have bright, healthy, wealthy, happy, and prosperous futures.

The second day, we celebrate as Sankranthi. That day people make rice pudding called a pongal. Everybody greets elders, friends and relatives. The third day, people celebrate as Kanuma. That day farmers worship their cows and the bulls which helped them in the field. They decorate the animals with new clothes, flowers and bells etc. Farmers give clothes, sweets, and bonuses to their workers.

People think that these days are good, so the Goddess of wealth will come in the form of crops. They want to welcome the goddess, Sankrathi Laxmi with respect and with a hope that the future will be happy and prosperous.

In India people celebrate every festival in a healthy point of view. By celebrating this festival which comes in winter, they make a fire to warm up their bodies and eat sweets made by sesame seeds which make the body produce the heat to give resistance to the body. They eat seasonal fruits which prevent cough and colds in winter days.

## Mexico Culture Celebrations

*Hadavbelia Castillo, Rochester*

Y early in Mexico, there are 25 different celebrations.

In winter, on January 1, we celebrate New Year's which means a new year. January 6 is Los Santos Reyes. Families buy a bread called la rosca de reyes which has up to four little plastic babies inside the bread. When it's time to cut the bread, the family gathers so each person gets a slice. If you get one of the plastic babies in your slice, you get to make tamales or some other kind of food that has to be set up for February 2.

On February 14, El Día de San Valentín, which means Valentine's Day, is celebrated. It is no different than it is here in the US. On February 24 it is El Día de la Bandera, which means Flag Day.

In spring, on April 5 and 9-12 is Semana Santa, which is a week when people celebrate making all kinds of different Mexican foods. April 30, El Día del Niño, is a day celebrated for kids, with piñatas, candy, food, and cake.

May 1 is El Día del Trabajo which means nobody works that day. May 5 is La Batalla de Puebla—that is when Puebla was at war. May 10th is Día de la Madre, which is Mother's Day in Mexico, and we celebrate with food and gifts to our mothers.

In summer, on June 21 is El Día del Padre, which is Father's Day. That is a day that is dedicated to our fathers.

In fall, on September 16, El Día de la Independencia de Mexico, is Independence Day. That is when Mexico was at war.

On November 1 and 2 is El Día de los Muertos, that is the Day of the Dead in Mexico. We dress up like the dead, then we visit our loved ones and we make them a small celebration with all different kinds of foods.

Finally, in winter again, on December 12 is the Día de la Doña de Guadalupe, that is the day of the Virgin Mary. That day we celebrate with tamales and punch.

December 24 is Navidad, which is Christmas Day in Mexico. We have something like a doll that we call El Niño Dios that is like a baby that we sing to and rock to sleep and lay him down to rest with a blanket. Our guests also have dinner.

Then on January 6 we do the thing over again, but instead of laying him down, we sit him up and dress him up again. On December 31 we eat dinner. Everybody gets 12 grapes with a glass of wine and we celebrate

New Year's.

I enjoy all the celebrations in Mexico, and I continue to celebrate them in the United States.

*Hadavbelia Castillo is 18 years old and is originally from San Luis Potosí, Mexico.*

## Engagement in Africa

*Christelle Sylvestre, Austin*

**I**n Africa, when two people love each other, they have to be engaged before starting dating. The engagement is very spectacular because it has some particularities. When a man wants to be engaged with a woman, the ceremony takes place where the woman lives, most often in her parents' house.

The man's aunts come, they sing and dance when they do their entry into the house. After that, they have to show all of the presents that they brought to the future bride. Sometimes some families refuse the man's family's presents because they think that the quality is not very good for their daughter. (They want gold.)

After the woman's aunts' agreement, the two families get together and meet each other. They drink and eat together, dance and make noise. This ceremony usually takes two or three hours and generally they do it on Saturday afternoon.

*Christelle Sylvestre is 25 years old and is originally from Africa.*

## Birthdays in Iraq

*Fadhil Albo, Mounds View*

**W**hen people in Iraq have birthdays, they make a big cake and cookies. Family, friends, and neighbors come together; everybody is happy. People bring a gift such

as money, presents, or toys. In my country the most important birthday celebrations are when a person turns one year old. Traditional games and activities during a birthday party are dominoes and card games. In my country it is important to cook different dishes and buy beverages and fruit. People buy candles and streamers for decorations. Everybody is happy and sings a happy birthday song.

## Winter Festival in Brazil

*Viviane Argolo, Minnetonka*

In Brazil, June is the month of a special celebration called “Festa Junina,” which coincides with the beginning of the winter. Schools, churches and communities from every city host their own Festa Junina.

This festival is mainly celebrated on the following days of the Catholic saints: Saint Anthony, John the

Baptist, and Saint Peter. Originally, it was celebrated to thank for the rainy period in the rural areas in the north of the country, but it has become very popular all over the country.

In order to celebrate, people get together to eat traditional food, which consists of special dishes made with corn, peanuts, and sausage, and to watch the “Quadrilha” dance, which can be performed either by kids or adults. People practice for a month or so to dance this dance. The Quadrilha is formed by couples and a bride and a groom who are the central attraction of the dancing. All the dancers should be dressed up for it. The dance is usually performed around a bonfire, accompanied by special music, which is only played on this occasion. The dancers perform special movements that represent the rural

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The dance is usually performed around a bonfire, accompanied by special music, which is only played on this occasion.

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life.

During the festivities special games are offered to the public. They are usually carnival games such as fishing and ball and ring throwing. A token prize is given to each player. This celebration is exciting, colorful and fun. If you ever go to a Festa Junina it's without doubt that you will have a good time.

## Christmas in My Country

*M. Magali Segura, Saint Paul*

In my country, Peru, Christmas is a great festivity. When December begins, all the houses are decorated with multicolored lights. Every family has their Christmas tree and also their nativity set. On Christmas Eve, the entire family is together. There are

a lot of people and a lot of food, too. Exactly at 12:00 midnight everybody greets each other and then...PARTY! We eat turkey with salad, hot chocolate and paneton, a kind of Italian fruitcake. Children open their

gifts and play later than other days. The next day everybody gets up late in the morning and goes to the church.

## Living in a New Weather and Environment

*Abera Berja, Cottage Grove*

My name is Abera Ameya. I am from Ethiopia. I came to the United States in September 2006 and now I am living in Cottage Grove, Minnesota. After a few months of my stay, I was able to observe the changes of color of leaves of ornamental trees planted on road sides, conserved forests, trees planted on back yard and front yards of several neighborhoods. The change in color of



leaves followed by complete dropping of leaves leaving only the trunk and branches. The green vegetation really looked like dried grass land trees. I was so amazed and shocked by that phenomenon and thought the trees were dying forever.

After a few months the weather became so cold and at the end of September snow began to fall. This was one of the things that made me worried and nervous because I had never lived in such weather. However, that moment did not persist. A few months after the snow, rain began to fall. The weather became so warm and the trees once again started to regenerate their new buds to flourish to deep green leaves and flowers. Like everybody, I was so happy by this situation. I was very surprised by the nature of the plants to survive the very cold weather and again revive during the warm season. Is that not a very cool phenomenon of nature?

From my two years of stay in Minnesota, I recognized that everybody is enjoying the various seasonal changes and admiring the natural seasonal changes even though there are a few side effects. Now, like many Minnesotans, I am adapting to the cold weather and enjoying taking these happenings like a fun.

## The First Thanksgiving Holiday We Had in the US

*Daiwei, Woodbury*

**L**earning about different cultures is an interesting experience for me. I have always enjoyed trying new things, which has helped me to grow and develop a better understanding of the world around me.

Many years ago my family moved here, to the United States of America. On our first Thanksgiving holiday, I learned about the history and traditions of Thanksgiving

through my daughter's elementary school project. It's about the pilgrims that held a feast to give thanks for the gifts of land and kindness of the Indians.

Now it's still a time for families and friends to gather around the table and give thanks for what they have. We tried the turkey, the traditional Thanksgiving food, for the first time on that holiday. I bought a small size turkey and followed the instructions to prepare it. While the turkey was roasting in the oven, I kept thinking about how different it would taste compared with the chicken we were used to eating. At dinnertime we finally got to taste the turkey. It turned out pretty good and my family liked it.

In the following years I tried many recipes to make it even better. I have enjoyed preparing turkey for my family and friends. We are thankful for the friendships and all we have here in the USA. Thanksgiving has become a joyful tradition of my family.

## Christmas is One of the Best Holidays

*Suad Arouni, Saint Paul*

**C**hristmas is one of my favorite holidays—there are a lot of differences between Christmas in America and in my country, Sierra Leone. In America, all they do is exchange gifts and go to work, but in Sierra Leone people will start celebrating a week before Christmas. On Christmas Eve, people will do lots of grocery shopping and buy lots of meats and chicken because they like to cook fresh food in the morning. On the day of Christmas, all you can smell is the good smell of different aromas—yum, yum.

Christmas is so special for us in Africa, because you will meet new people and it is time to reconcile and a time of healing. That's why the best place people like to go

is the beach with their small picnic baskets. They throw a mat on the sand and two or three other families will come and join them. Africans like to eat from the same bowl and like to share. I love to see little children running and playing soccer in the water while the old ladies will be in their traditional colorful cabacloth, and the old men will be in their traditional ronko woven out of cotton. There will be lots of people in different costumes dancing and playing games and doing their traditional dances.

The only difference about Christmas in Africa is that it looks like everybody is preparing the same dish like joll of rice, cassava leaf, and stew. In America you do have different choices of food from other countries.

## Birthdays in Vietnam

*Hoang Nguyen, Blaine*

In Vietnam, birthdays are important days to everybody when they reach the age of 1, 18, 40, 50, and especially at the age of 80 and 100. They often celebrate this event with their family, friends, colleagues, or partners. There are many places to hold the party such as at home, in a restaurant, in a classroom, or in an office. However, the preferred place is at the karaoke club.

The karaoke club is decorated with balloons, candles, streamers, and “Happy Birthday” signs by the servers. It is not only rather cheap but also easy for everyone to play the game and enjoy their own voices. Moreover, people can talk to each other as well as enjoy the traditional food served at the party: mixed rice, salad, eggroll, chicken wings, soup, mixed noodle, grilled fish, fruit bowl, and cake. People usually drink Coke, milk, or beer. Usually, the host will prepare all the food and beverages for the

guests. People go to the party either with flowers, presents, gift cards, jewelry, toys, and cakes given to the host of the birthday party as a best wish to him on that special day. The party will end at around 12:00 p.m. because the club will be closed at that time. Sometimes everybody continues their celebration at the bar or disco club.

*Hoang Nguyen is 25 years old and is originally from Vietnam.*

## The Inauguration of President Obama

*Asya Viner, Minneapolis*

Thanks to television we could participate in the great event—the Inauguration of President Obama. It was an amazing show. About two million people with different skin colors demonstrated their sincere feelings of respect and hope to the new president. They showed that they believe in Obama, the person they chose to be their president.

We saw the real level of patriotism of all American people. We are sure that Americans will overcome all problems because they understand that the fate of their Motherland depends on what each person can do for its prosperity.

*Asya Viner is originally from Ukraine.*

## Winter

*Nigisti Woldensilassie, Minneapolis*

What winter means to me is something with great fear because of its cold, but not only cold—too much cold to live in it. People's dress in winter is very surprising. It goes to the extent that people cannot recognize each other, even people in one family.

Places remain covered with snow. Nobody passes through or crosses. Ways to cross are very limited. Even sidewalks in some areas remain covered so that no one walks through. Driving is a problem due to snow. It affects visibility and makes roads slippery. Cold affects the batteries. Cars can stop in the middle of the road due to battery problems. Due to these things winter becomes difficult for people. The surprising part is that the whole area of city and state is white with snow.

## Winter in Minneapolis

*Ludmila Bas, Minneapolis*

Winter is a very beautiful season when there is snow. On the trees, on houses, on bushes, there is snow. It is nice!

I like winter celebrations like Christmas and New Year's. I like our park in winter. Snow, snow, a lot of snow! All very nice! I always play with my granddaughters, snowballs, making snowmen. My granddaughters like to skate. This winter a lot of snow falls.

But I don't like winter because winter is cold and very bad when it is windy. This week is very cold. I wear many things: sweater, fur coat, pants, boots, and gloves. I don't like to wear many things. The days are short in winter and the nights are long.

In the park there are no ducks, no birds. Only squirrels which hide themselves in

hollows and sometimes look for food outside. The birds flew south to warm country. They also return here in the spring.

The best way to enjoy winter: walks, to skate at the skating rink. Now in Belarus, it is cold too.

*Ludmila Bas is originally from Belarus.*

## Untitled

*Mohamed, Minneapolis*

I came from dark to light, to New York City, United States. Then me and my friend together headed to Reno, Nevada. The first day in New York, we missed the airplane. We stayed the night in the hotel. The next morning we flew to Reno City, Nevada. We met with our sponsorship agent. Living started from that moment. One thing that was funny, my friend didn't listen to me. He fell down in the snow then someone called for help for him, and he survived. God bless the United States of America. Thanks!

*Mohamed is originally from Somalia.*

## Hope

*I, Fridley*

My winter break was interesting. I spent a lovely time with my family. I did many things. I went shopping with my daughter-in-law and my grandchildren. We bought boots, gloves, and coats for snow. We bought some of them from Target and others from Wal-Mart.

I also relaxed at home. I slept more hours than usual because I didn't have to wake up early. I read different books. Some books I read were religious and others were English books (picture dictionary).

I spent wonderful times with family. We went out to Chuck E. Cheese's, and we had

lunch at McDonald's restaurant. The winter break finished, and I returned back to school again. I hope this new year will be good for me and for all of you too.

## A Wedding Ceremony in My Country

*Aniso Hassan, Minneapolis*

The groom gives the bride's father a camel. Then there is a ceremony. A man starts after that the women starts. The bride wears a white dress and braids her hair. We eat different food and we drink soda and camel milk. After that we start poetry and dance. After that we serve sweet desert. I miss my country and the wedding ceremony because we have camel milk, but here there is no camel milk.

## The Things I Enjoy Doing in My Free Time

*Vinh Dinh, Saint Paul*

I will tell about the things I enjoy doing in my free time. When I have free time, I like to watch TV and watch movies. Sometimes, I go shopping to buy some shirts and pants. Also, I like to go visit my friends. When I have a long free time, I want to go back to my country to visit my sister and brother, and my niece and nephew. I have a lot of fun when I have been there. I am very happy.

## A Wedding in Ethiopia

*Genet Meteku, Anoka*

When I was young I saw my cousin's wedding. At that wedding most of food was cultural food, chicken with hot spice, beef with hot spice. The bride wore a white dress and the groom wore black suit. Most of

the mothers wore white clothes. After that the guest went to the ceremony there was food, drink, and cultural dancing. Finally the bride and the groom went to home and the guests did too.

## Eid

*Balos Yusuf, Saint Cloud*

We have two holidays in the year in Somalia. Both of them we call Eid. The one that comes first is my favorite holiday. Every Eid, my parents bought for me new clothes. All the people of the city gather in one place to perform prayer. I used to see all of my friends in one day and there was no school. I used to get money from uncles, aunts, my older brothers, and everyone I saw.

## A Wedding Ceremony In Somalia

*Amina Mudhir, Minneapolis*

In my country, the wedding is a special celebration. First the groom's family comes to the bride's family and the groom brings some camels or money. After that, ceremony starts. The bride wears a special dress and the groom too. It is any color they choose. They have attendants and they wear a little different dress. The dinner starts and then a dance. We have a lot of food and drink and there is a cultural dance. We have something we call a honeymoon for seven days in the house. Someone is serving for all the days.

## Autumn

*Maria Espana, Shakopee*

This is the beautiful season of the year, autumn. Leaves are turning red and yellow, gold and brown. In the fall, many other things are changing; like the weather. There are changes in light and temperature.

Also the animals start migrating; the birds fly south.

Every type of tree has its own kind of leaves. The color of autumn leaves differ from tree to tree. Some oak leaves may be brown or yellow, while maple leaves may turn bright red. It is amazing how pretty the trees look with many colorful leaves. The green leaves change to red, orange, and yellow. It is awesome when the leaves fall down on the ground and make a colorful and beautiful carpet.

It is really awesome when the sun is going down behind the colorful trees. If you are under the trees and look up, you can see how pretty the trees look when the rays of the sunshine come through the trees. It is so peaceful, as if you are in the middle of a beautiful dream.

## The Spirit of April in Minnesota

*Yia Yang, Minneapolis*

**I**t is a wonderful time. All the flowers come out. The bees like this very much. The park has changed the colors yellow and red for a few months. It changes because the weather is going to change again. The leaves are going to change to colors yellow and red and fall down for the wintertime.

*Yia Yang is originally from Laos.*

## Easter Holiday in My Country

*Enit, Hopkins*

**E**aster is the biggest holiday in my country, Eritrea, and it is a special holiday. We start to celebrate from February 23 to April 19. We can't eat meat, milk, eggs and butter until the day of Easter and we go to church to pray. Easter is the only holiday we celebrate on Sunday. One week before the

holiday, we don't eat or drink from morning to four or five o'clock when we go to church. We stay at the church for the whole day. We go back home and we make lunch and coffee or tea.

On Friday, the day before holiday, we don't eat or drink from morning to five o'clock. Even children fast if they can. But they should fast until at least noon. They go to church with their family. They play after the break of prayer. We go to our own church. On Saturday we eat breakfast without milk. We can wash clothes, clean house, and we go shopping.

On Sunday we go to church before midnight. We finish praying at midnight because midnight is when Jesus Christ returned to life. We sing a song to Jesus in my language. When we get back home, we eat dinner. Wheat with butter is a traditional food. In the morning we make meat from goats or sheep. The Family gets together. On this holiday we buy new clothes and shoes, especially for kids. We wear new clothes and shoes. I like Easter because it is the biggest and most popular holiday in my country.

## A Wedding Ceremony in Ecuador

*José Borja, Minneapolis*

**F**irst, in my country the ceremony is very nice for that person who will marry. All people go and listen to the Father at the church. He talks to the two persons and puts a ring on each finger. After the marriage everybody goes where the party is. The attendants of the bride and groom decorate the place. They have special wine, a lot of food, drink and the music. The two persons are very happy and all the family is, too. They dance and drink. There, they get married and go on their honeymoon.

## A Wedding in My Country

*Lucina Pérez, Minneapolis*

**I** talk about a wedding in my country. Always there are beautiful parties. First in the house, the bride wears a beautiful white dress and a veil over her face. The bridegroom wears a black suit. The bridegroom waits for the bride in the church, where the minister celebrates a religious ceremony. They promise to love each other forever. Everybody receives a gold ring from the godparents.

Later, the guests go to the hall to the reception where the bride dances with all the family and her new husband. The bride gets on the chair so the groom takes the veil then all the women dance around her. They make a lot of food for all the guests. The newlyweds cut the big cake for all guests. Later, they thank every guest and the godparents. Finally, they go on their honeymoon trip to a beautiful place.

## Untitled

*Nezha Harrison, Minneapolis*

**I** moved to Minnesota in 2008. I remember I lost my luggage in New York City. When I arrived in Minnesota, I asked them for my luggage because I didn't find it. But no chance—to this day no answer about this luggage. So I was angry just about my album, because in it was the pictures of my parents who died and my kids when they were babies. So life here with my husband is good. I went to school and I do everything by myself. I am grateful for America and my teachers for all the sacrifice to help me. Thank you all.

*Nezha Harrison is originally from Morocco.*

## A Wedding in My Country

*Adan Quiterio, Minneapolis*

**I**n my country they have a big ceremony in the church. The bride wears a beautiful white dress. The family goes to the ceremony. They have a big party with a lot of food. They make barbecue for 400 people to get food. They dance to Mexican music. The family and friends enjoy music. They go to sleep at 4:00 a.m. After wedding, the husband and wife like to be together and have happy matrimony.

## My Life

*Shailesh Humagai, Minneapolis*

**I** am Shailesh. I am from Bhutan. It is an Asian country. My family and I left Bhutan when the government became autocratic. I had my parents with me and my two sisters and one brother. When we left Bhutan we came to India and stayed five days. After five days Indian police picked us up in a truck and threw us across the border of India to Nepal. We entered Nepal at night and the Nepali police came and checked us and asked many questions about us. After that, we came to the refugee camp. It was in the Jhapa district. The name of the camp was Goldhap. We all lived there for seventeen years. When I was in the refugee camp I went to high school but Nepali high school is up to only class ten. School is inside the refugee camp. I studied in class ten and after that my family and I came to the United States on June 11, 2008 to Minneapolis. I like Minneapolis very much. I love the summer season, but winter is very cold. After coming to the United States, I am in ESL. I am learning a lot.

## New Year

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

I like to celebrate the Viet Nam New Year. This is a big holiday. We were living all over in my country or a different country. On New Year Day, everyone must go back to our parent's house to visit relatives. But this year I'm so sad because I'm living far away and can only remember them.

## Christmas in My Country

*Roberto Grande, Inver Grove Heights*

Christmas in respect to my country, El Salvador, is totally different from the US. Last year it was my first Christmas away from my family, girlfriend, friends, and the people who know me. Here, everything is moved around work, even in Christmas time. So many people are still working on that day like it is a common day of the week. I didn't cook the last Christmas because I was working with my dad until late, so I didn't have enough time to cook any food. I know that the people here like to join with family, prepare some food, talk about themselves (plans for the future, goals, daily life, etc.), dance, drink a little and maybe get drunk.

In my country we have another way to celebrate Christmas time. We meet with the whole family or at least with the members of the family who live near our house. My mom and my sisters always cook something for that day, let's say, tamales or panes con pollo. We share with the family some fruit. My sisters dance. My brothers and I like fireworks, so we do that all night long.

I don't like Christmas time because it is kind of sad; I think for the year its ending. The last one was really bad and sad, because, as I wrote in the first line of this essay that it was the first one far away from my family.

I didn't receive any calls that day from my family, friends or my girlfriend because they are in El Salvador and the lines were busy that day. So, I didn't eat well and I went to sleep very late.

I hope the Christmas coming will be just a little better for me. I don't want to celebrate my Christmas season that way again my whole life. That's for sure.

## Christmas

*Hilda Rivera, Coon Rapids*

My favorite holiday tradition in winter is Christmas. In my house, we put up the Christmas tree with lights to represent the birth of Jesus. My family also always celebrates Christmas with a big party. We cook many foods: beef, turkey, rice, and many salads. We go to church. In the afternoon we eat, and at midnight we open the gifts. Now I'm teaching this celebration to my two sons, Bryan and Kevin. They're hoping this night will be very happy.

*Hilda Rivera is originally from El Salvador.*

## Untitled

*Sokly Chhay, Saint Paul*

My name is Sokly. I am from Cambodia. I came to the United States on Monday, August 12, 2008 at 12:30 p.m. I took a United Airlines plane to go to Minnesota. I liked to watch the United plane. The seat was very big and nice. I was excited and scared. I was very tired in my brain because the weather changed from morning to evening to very cool in a short time. I started to go to school at Neighborhood House on September 15, 2008. Today, I have very good teachers.

## My Best Life Experience

*Werdi Beker, Spring Lake Park*

One of the best of my experiences was living in a different country as a refugee. I am proud that I lived in Nairobi, Kenya from 1999-2005. During this period of time, I went through a lot of things. I had so many hard times, but good times too. I thought it was a bad time, but it was also a wonderful experience. I met a lot of friends. I learned different languages, different lifestyles, how to live with groups of peoples, how to live with communities, and how to help each other. That was my best life experience.

## Autumn

*Ekaterina Androsova, Shakopee*

I like autumn because I have a birthday in November. Autumn is a time when it rains. The autumn landscape is very beautiful, particularly the trees. Leaves become yellow and fall from the trees. Their colors vary from green to yellow to red. I like to walk around the park and enjoy this beautiful picture. Many artists paint and draw this beautiful image.

In autumn the cold spell begins. The rain begins in October and finishes approximately in November. When the outside is cold and misty, it seems to me that everything around is gray and gloomy. But when I had a wedding in Russia on November 23, the weather was sunny. In Russia, autumn is similar to the American autumn. On the whole, autumn is a very good season of the year.

## Winter

*Tatyana Levina, Minneapolis*

Winter is a season. It comes after autumn. Daylight hours are shorter in the

winter and longer in the summer. Minneapolis has a very cold winter, as it is in a northern state. It has the same weather as Almaty in Kazakhstan. Today is a day in the middle of winter.

The majority of people like winter because Minneapolis has many winter activities. There are many winter sports including ice hockey, skiing, skating, and ice fishing. Despite considerable snow, the city cleans the streets very rapidly. Everyone is responsible for cleaning their own sidewalks. There is plenty of snow for children to play in. Regardless of the cold weather, the people remain very active.

*Tatyana Levina is originally from Moldova.*

## Life in Minnesota

*Lorenzo, Minneapolis*

Summer in Minnesota is the best season for everybody. There are long and warm days here in the city. You can see people walking, running, biking, and cooking outside. Sometimes you can smell food on grills and see families and friends talking and laughing until the sun sets. Three months isn't enough of summer.

In contrast, for many people, summer is hot and humid. Hot weather could be dangerous for people. Temperatures could rise to 100° and the humidity factor makes for worse and uncomfortable days. Sometimes during the night people can't sleep because of the hot temperatures. Houses without air conditioning or fans aren't comfortable places to stay in or sleep in.

*Lorenzo is 36 years old and is originally from Mexico.*



## Mother's Day

*Susana Brochado, Blaine*

**M**other's Day is the only day of the year that everybody observes no matter what religion, race, origin, age, sex, or language. In my country, depending on the city or community, we celebrate the day having parties, dances, and especially a lot of food and presents to thank them and give them back all the care and dedication they have given to their families. Also, every family has its own way to celebrate. In my personal opinion, anything we do is not enough compared to the unlimited love of a mom.

*Susana Brochado is originally from Uruguay.*

## A Moment in Time

*Merlynn Paxton, Saint Peter*

Merlynn Paxton,  
Age 10  
Arizona State Fair  
Riding the Tilt-A-Whirl





# People

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## My Mother

*Diane Moss Baptiste, Columbia Heights*

**M**y mother's name is Margie Moss. She is a special lady. She is my mother and my children's grandmother. We love her so much. My mother was a good cook and listened to good Blues.

## My Crazy Great Grandma

*Luis López, Saint Paul*

**W**hen I was 16 years old my great grandma caught me smoking. She asked, "Do you have a cigarette for me?" "Yeah," I said. I handed her a cigarette. She smoked once. Then I could not find her. Finally, I found her in her room. She was trying to scare the mosquitoes away with the smoke.

*Luis López is 24 years old and is originally from Mexico.*

## Me and My Life

*Sherry Jensen, Buffalo*

**M**y life started out good, then it went down hill. I met a man that I was with for six years. He is now my ex-husband. Then I met someone that truly cared about me for the person that I am and we started to date. We fell in love. He fell in love with my kids, too, and my kids fell in love with him. He will do anything for me and I will do everything for him too. That is my life, and it is good.

## Deeg, My Mother

*Zainab Shire, Minneapolis*

**D**eeg is my mother. She died in 1997. She was a good cook. She cooked meat, fish and rice. She added salt, onion, tomato. She loved her children. There were four children in our family. Two of the children are living here in Minnesota. Two of the children are in Somalia. I am happy to be here.

*Zainab Shire is originally from Somalia.*

## My Special Friend

*May Moo, Saint Paul*

I was born in Burma. When I was five years old I started to go to school. I'm so happy because I have a special friend. She is so lovely and so cute. Her name is Paw Paw. She is more clever than the other students in the class. When we go to school we wait for each other. She always understands me. When I do not feel good she stays with me and she tries to make me feel better.

When we have summer holidays we go to the beach. We play in the waterfall and waves. We lay down on the sand together. We talk about education goals. We see beautiful hills, flowers, beaches, trees, pictures, and waves. Her goal is to be a teacher. My goal is to be a nurse. When we have free time we go shopping. She comes to visit me and we cook together and then we do homework. She is more clever than me. I miss her.

When I moved to Thailand, I often wrote her letters. I want to tell her I love you so much. Can you hear me? Sometimes I call her. Because we are so far away, I hope we meet again. Please remember me always, okay? I need to stop my letter. See you again, lovely friend.

*May Moo is 23 years old and is originally from Burma and Thailand.*

## I Miss My Mom

*Jamad Egal, Owatonna*

I miss my mom, because I have left Somalia. When I left my country, I was young. It was 16 years ago. The reason I left Somalia was because it was not peaceful in my country. I went to Kenya and I lived in Kenya

for seven years. I have been in the US since 1999.

I call my mom twice a month. It helps me, but still she is not with me. I used to stay with my mom all the time. When you are alone, without family and friends who are far away,

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When you are alone, without family and friends who are far away, it is not easy.

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it is not easy. I came from a big family. I have four brothers and nine sisters. I am happy to have a big family. Last

year, I was able to visit my country to see my mom again. I was so happy to go back again. I was very glad to see my mom again. I feel better now.

## My Youngest Brother

*Tuan Le, Minneapolis*

My family had ten people, my parents and eight children. My youngest brother was more like a son to me. I miss him very much. His name is Minh. When the civil war ended, my family came back to my city. I was teaching in high school. I taught math. My brother was a student in the same high school. In 1979, the government took the young men to be soldiers. Minh had to join the Army. He commanded the troops and led them to the border of Vietnam and Cambodia. After five years, he had to leave the Army. He came back to the family's house.

Two years later he lost much of his memory. After that he went mad. Now I live in the United States. I always call him and hope to visit him in Vietnam.

*Tuan Le is 58 years old and is originally from Vietnam.*

## My Birds

*Rob Mauro, Duluth*

I have two birds. One is a mini-parrot and one is a cockatiel. My parrot is named Bandit, and the other is Eagle. Bandit is the mean one. Eagle is very timid. Eagle was my first bird, and he is my favorite bird. He's a cockatiel. When I first went to the pet store he flew onto my shoulder and I said, "I want this bird." I had a friend that gave me Bandit. When I first named Eagle, he did an imitation of an eagle. He has a wingspan like an eagle. He also loves to get his head scratched. Bandit is different. I named him because of a black mark between his eyes like a mask a bandit wears. The only way to touch him is to let him on your finger.

## My Mother

*Derartu Ahmed, Hopkins*

Her name is Munira. She was born in Harar, Ethiopia in 1970. She is more than everything to me. I love my mother with all my heart. She raised me without a father. My father died when I was five years old. After my father died, she took us to the biggest city for school. After five years, everything was gone. She lost her job, her car was in an accident with six people, and her uncle died. Everything happened at the same time. She was very patient. She demanded us to continue our school. Fortunately, she did. Finally, she got her own business. Now she is happy with her seven children. I'm proud of my mother.

## Grandmother

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

My grandmother has seven children, three daughters and four sons. My mother is

her first daughter. My grandmother is very nice and kind person. When I was a child, I didn't know her. When I was two years old, she went to Saudi Arabia for eight years. After that she came back to our country, Ethiopia. When she came back, we started to live together. She is very nice and she has a good character. She is now 82 years old.

One thing I like about my grandmother is that she is a very generous person. Back home there are a lot of poor beggars. My uncle used to send US money for us every month, three hundred dollars. Back home, that is equal to around 2,500 Ethiopia birr. We bought monthly food and she told me that she didn't cook only for us. She cooked more and more food. When a poor beggar came, she gave food to them. If I didn't cook enough food, she didn't eat her food. She hid food under her bed because when the poor beggars came she gave them her food. That is why I had to cook more food. I like to like my grandmother.

## My Friend

**Hannah**

*Xue, Gaylord*

I came to the United States two years ago. I made some friends.

Hannah is one of them. Hannah lives outside our town on a farm.

She studies at *Kennth Bohlman, Faribault* home. Her mother is her teacher. Hannah's home has two horses for her and her sister. Her older sister went to the college in the city. She only returns home over the weekend.



One day we made an appointment to ride horses. Hannah is really a good teacher. When I was in China, I also rode a horse, but a man walked in front of the horse. The day we rode horses, at the beginning, when the horse moved, I was scared and screamed. I learned how to use my legs and the reins to control and allow the horse to know where I wanted to go. Only three hours, and I learned how to ride a horse. Hannah said that I was the fastest learning student. A good teacher and a smart student, the result of course, we all know. Ha, ha, ha... After a month Hannah taught me how to make horses run together, and what posture to use to maintain a balance so I don't immediately fall off. I learned in one hour.

I am really glad to know this good teacher. Hannah likes to talk about the Bible. I don't know much about the Bible. She patiently told me so it makes me more interested in the Bible also. The 17-year-old girl is very mature. I am very fortunate to have such a friend.

## Mariposa

*Erika Godinez, Eagan*

**M**y pet animal is a dog. Her name is Mariposa. The name was picked by me because I like butterflies and colors. She is very small and white. She has long hair. My mom gave her to me when I was 15 years old in Mexico.

When I married, my husband said, "She is a bad dog. She makes things dirty and sometimes she plays with things and destroys them and she can't live in another country." I said to my husband, "Please! Let Mariposa come with us!" Mariposa came with my husband and me to the USA. My husband and I like my pet.

Three years ago we moved to Minnesota. When I became pregnant with my daughter my pet would not play with me, she would not eat, she was sad. And I felt sad for my friend. Mariposa didn't like to play or walk in the park every morning with my daughter and me. Before my daughter was born, my dog played with my husband and me like she was our daughter. When I was pregnant and had other children my dog was jealous. I love my dog very much.

## The Man of My Dreams

*Isabel Suazo, Shakopee*

**M**y first day in Minnesota I met the man who would be my husband. It was in March of 2002. When I met him, he already had a girlfriend. She was my friend too.

Once, my future husband, my friend, and I went to the store to buy shoes for work. We shook hands, our eyes met and I knew we both liked each other. Then he put a CD of romantic music in the player and I knew he meant it for me because my friend did not like his music.

Three months later I saw him again at the same job, but this time he didn't have a girlfriend. Later we went out together to the park and walked hand in hand, talking about our lives. He stole a kiss and it took my breath away. My heart was beating very fast. A couple minutes later, he asked me to be his girlfriend. I told him I had to think about it for two days, but the next day I told him, "YES."

Now we have three children.

## Remembering My Cousin

*María E. Ávalos, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is María. I'm from El Salvador. I want to narrate something about my

cousin; he passed away almost two years ago. He was born in El Salvador. He came to Los Angeles very young. He worked very hard; sometimes he had three jobs, and he didn't have time to have a good life but always had a smile. He married and had two boys.

After a few years he divorced. He moved to Arizona. He was going to be married again and he had one more son, but life was not long for him. When I called him, he told me he had a stomachache. When he went to the doctor they told him it was a virus. They gave him medicine but it did not work for him. He insisted he didn't feel good. He insisted the doctor make another examination.

The answer was very, very bad news. He had cancer. I told him that everything was okay. "You need to be strong. God is with you." He had chemotherapy, but the cancer was going and going. My cousin died. But I will remember his BIG SMILE forever.

## My Heroine

*Ka Naw, Saint Paul*

**M**y heroine is one of my sisters. She is courageous, patient, a hard worker and she loves me so much. She is also very beautiful and a sociable person.

When I was ten and my brother was six, our family became separated. We were young and needed our own parents. My mom left us with our dad but he remarried. My sister already had one daughter. She had her own family, but she didn't let us stay with our stepmother. The time was hard to take care of one person, but she took care of two.

She worked hard every day to let us get into school. It was very tough for poor people to get into school. She gave us all food and clothes we needed. She let us go to school in a big city but she stayed in the small village

and worked for us. She always told me to be strong and she didn't let other people complain about us. She never ate good food, only grain from the farm. She didn't let us go back to our village because she didn't want us to see how hard her life was to support us. She never mentioned her difficult time to us.

I graduated from high school when I was eighteen. My friends who had parents quit school in the middle grades and helped their parents on the farm. My sister didn't let us quit and work for her. I was very proud of my sister and the whole village was proud of her too.

Then a terrible thing happened in my village. The government tried to kill all Karen people. My sister told us to come back to the village and we escaped to Thailand. She protected us all the way and carried the supplies that we needed in a new land. She looked for the way to survive and got arrested by the Thai police. She went to jail for one month and they sent her to the border. Finally she came back to us and connected with the

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Then a terrible thing happened in my village. The government tried to kill all Karen people.

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United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Now, we are in a safe place. She found a new life and hope for us. She took care

of us since we were young. She never lets us get into trouble and always protects us. She is patient with us when we make a mistake. She is my mom, dad, sister and my incomparable heroine.

*Ka Naw is originally from Burma.*

## Mother

*Candy Rodríguez Colón, Hastings*

**M**y mother's name was Adela. She had a round face, long hair and black eyes. My mom was an honest and hard working woman. She was a great cook. She was also very strict and loved going to church. My mom had twelve children: six boys and six girls. We were a very large family and struggled with my dad to support us all.

When she was younger, I remember that we had a party every Saturday. I still have fond memories of those days. We didn't have much, but we had each other. Later on, my mother developed diabetes and died of complications from her diabetes. She passed away twenty years ago. The day she died was the worst day of my life. I still miss her and every Mother's Day I'm reminded of her strength and her faith. I know that some day we will meet again.

*Candy Rodríguez Colón is 63 years old and is originally from Puerto Rico.*

## The Best Day of My Life

*José Barragan, Coon Rapids*

**T**he best day of my life was when my first son was born. That day was very incredible. My wife went to the hospital in the morning. She called me at my work. I felt very lucky and crazy. The only thing I was thinking was to go to the hospital and see my wife. She began crying because it was the first time she was pregnant.

When my wife took my hand and very slowly pressed to me, my son started to come out. That moment was very incredible because in my mind, in my head, many things were going all around and around. The seconds were very important for me. When I saw my

son come out he started to cry. He was born at 12:08 on November 4, 1994. That was my best day of my life. I'm never going to forget about that day.

*José Barragan is 49 years old and is originally from Mexico.*

## Overcoming Obstacles in My Life.

*Anonymous, Eagan*

**I**would like to write about the obstacles that I have overcome in my life.

First, are the ones that I had in my country. When I was a child in preschool age I didn't like spring and summer because during that period the freckles came on my face. The children in my neighborhood that I usually played with picked on me and laughed at me. When I came home, I complained to my mom and cried. It was very painful. I was always ashamed to meet with new friends because I worried the children would start to pick on me in front of others. When I turned seven, I went to first grade. Since the first day I did my best so I could be a good student and I made it. The children that picked on me stopped and turned into my good friends. From these experiences I learned not to hurt someone's feelings. I also learned to be strong and persevering.

I remember when I was in third grade I had two operations on my abdomen. I was weak and could hardly walk. I stayed at home for many days. When my teacher said, "You can't manage third grade. You missed a lot of days. You will be able to retake this third grade," I did not want to do it. Even though I was weak and couldn't go to school, I studied at home. While I was at home, I kept up my good grades and finished third grade. I am thankful for my mom for helping and advising me to overcome these obstacles.



When I came to the USA, I faced many obstacles like language, culture, and finding a job. To find a job depends on how we speak English. This is the biggest obstacle, but to overcome it is not very hard because all around me are very nice and helpful people. First I started to study English in New York and I am continuing in Minnesota. Now I can speak, talk, and I can write a story in English. I can also open my mind. It makes me happy. I am very thankful for the English teachers of the USA.

### Sister Quang (A Catholic Sister)

*Dong Nguyen, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Dong Nguyen. I was a Colonel in the South Vietnamese Army. I was a prisoner of war. I came to the US in 1996. Now I am an American citizen. Thirty-five years have passed and today I am remembering you, Sister Quang, and I am writing a letter to you. I'll never forget you. Your picture, your face is always in my heart.

During the Vietnam War, after a bloody fight, I was wounded. I lost blood for many hours. When a US helicopter evacuated me to a military hospital, I saw you first with your black dress and the silver cross on your neck. In Vietnam all Catholic Sisters wore a black dress. I saw you standing on the side of my bed. You helped me and you saved my life. I was wounded by a bullet in my right arm. I could not hold a spoon to eat. I remember you helped me to eat. Today I'm 82 years old, but your nice face remains in my heart.

*Dong Nguyen is 82 years old and is originally from South Vietnam.*

### My Older Brother

*Halimo Ali, Minneapolis*

**I** like my brother Abdullahi very much because he helped me when I was younger. He told me stories about hyenas and lions. Sometimes he talked. He liked singing and laughing very much. He brought me gifts sometimes. Now when I call Africa, Abdullahi asks me to send him money because he doesn't have a job and he has six sons and four daughters. I like my brother very much. I hope he has a good life.

*Halimo Ali is originally from Somalia.*

### I Didn't Believe It Myself

*Johar Omar Abdella, Minneapolis*

**A**bdul was my best friend in my country when we were children many years ago and he still is today. Now he is a gentleman. He studied for five years in university in my country. After that he moved to Saudi Arabia for two years. Then he got a visa to Italy. In Italy he was a taxi driver. I don't know how he came to America, but after I came here, one day I went to Starbuck's to drink coffee and I saw him there! I couldn't believe it myself! From that day until now we've been together.

*Johar Omar Abdella is originally from Dire Dawa.*

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I saw you standing on the side of my bed. You helped me and you saved my life.

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# *My Homeless Love*

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*I* have had a fire lit under me. Yes, that was the last time I went to the shelter. I had always gone there just to bring food and clothes to the people who needed it, but that time was different. How could I have been there without noticing him, with those big dark eyes looking at me from underneath that little hood? Wow, how could I have been so blind, not only for not noticing the little boy, but for denying myself the opportunity to know the little boy, to know all of them; all those people with different stories and a reason why, behind those dirty ugly clothes and miserable faces, there is a past, a love story, a lost dream waiting to be found? You know? Not so different than ours.

I also have a dream and a love story, or better than that, a love story dream. But okay, rewinding that day: When I went to bed at night, and I put my head on my pillow, the first thing I saw when I closed my eyes were his round black eyes. I couldn't get them out of my mind; they seemed so tender to me, but without hope. I just felt the necessity to give him all that he had lacked throughout his young life, all the hugs he had never received—those kinds of hugs that leave you without breath and when you're released you feel weak like a sheet of paper.

I wanted to fill him with kisses, a lot of kisses, so the first thing I did when I woke up the next morning was to get ready. I bought a cup of coffee and drove to the shelter with my heart beating at 100 miles per hour with the fear of not being able to find him. However, luck was on my side because when I got there, he lifted his head and looked at me. I couldn't hold my smile, and neither could he. I opened my arms and he began to run towards me, just like I had dreamed the night before. I picked him up and held him and hugged him so hard. I felt so good having that little baby in my arms, but the best part is that since that moment he has become a part of my life and I a part of his.

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## *Claudia Lorena*



*Claudia Lorena Agudelo is 26 years old and an ESL student in the South Washington County ABE/ESL Program. She came to the United States six months ago from the city of Armenia in Quindio, Colombia and now lives in Woodbury. Her family includes her mother, Lucia, her sister, Diana, and her brother, Juan. In her spare time, Lorena enjoys reading, drawing, and traveling.*

## He Didn't Forget Me

*Rahmo Mohamud Farah, Minneapolis*

I have a lot of brothers and sisters, but one is very important to me. His name is Mahamud. When I was young and the civil war started in Somalia, we ran away from our country. Mahamud traveled to Europe. He sent a lot of money to me and my husband. After that, my husband traveled to the United States and I stayed in Kenya, but my brother didn't forget me. From when I was young until now, he has called me every month. He calls me and my children. He doesn't forget me and I don't forget him.

## Nanny's Miracle

*Coty M., Shakopee*

I would like to tell you a story of this little guy I know. In my family we have a lot of girls and only one little guy. His name is Montel. When he came into the world we were all so excited that God had blessed us with this little guy. I remember days, weeks, months, and years coming and going. He grew to be a very active, loving, courageous, and unique little man. I had the honor of being his nanny. When we would spend time together we always made it a time to remember for a lifetime.

Every time I came through the door, he would hide from me. Then he would shout, "Come find me." Of course, I would say, "Where is Montel?" It's so funny because he would not come out until I found him. I'd start searching for him in all the places I knew he would not be and I'd say, "Did he just disappear or what?" I would look between the mattresses, under the couch, under a piece of paper, under shoes, in the closet, in the birdcage, and every time I looked I would be calling his name, "Montel,

where are you?" Or, "I don't see you. I'm going to find you." I'd literally look under the silliest things and said out loud exactly what I was looking under so he could know that I was looking for him. The whole time I could hear him laughing, waiting for me to find him. Then finally I would grab him, tickle him, and hold him so tight. We did this for many years. We built a strong bond between us by making it fun and exciting from the time I walked through the door until the time I left. Until this very day he remembers how much fun we had and how much his Nanny loves him. It's cool because now he will send me cards with his love to tell and show how much he loves me.

## A Great Person

*Kanika Lim, Eagan*

First of all in this story, I would like to say thank you to Glenda. She is an immigration lawyer for my family. The first time I was in Minnesota I had no place to live, so my aunt asked her to help me. "Could Kanika live with you for awhile until she gets her own house?" Her answer was, "Yes." Then I moved in with her right away. I was so excited to live with her. Also the day after I began living with her, she asked me, "Do you want to go to work with me?" I replied to her so quickly, "Absolutely, Yes!" Since I began living with her, I have had a good life.

One problem I faced was I had to go to school in the morning, but I didn't have a driver's license yet. Fortunately I have a good dad and a good helper. My dad always came to Glenda's house to pick me up to go to Woodland School every Monday and Tuesday. The two other days, Glenda dropped me at school and came back to pick me up to go to work with her. The days that my dad dropped me at home, she always left some work for

me to do too. I have been so happy and have gotten a lot of practice speaking English with her and experience from my job. Five months later I got my driver's license. Now I always go to school by myself. After school I go to help her at her office in Saint Paul.

Now you know why I chose to write about her. She is a great person. Since growing up I have never met someone outside my family who is good like her. She helps a lot of people. The end of my story is my wish for Glenda to be healthy through old age. I will do everything for her no matter what it will be, because she gave a good life to me. I would like to say thank you to her again and again and forever.

*Kanika Lim is 20 years old and is originally from Cambodia.*

## Sam and His Therapist

*Afrak Alkhalaidi, Fridley*

Sam is a five-year-old boy. He is autistic. He was diagnosed with autism when he was three years old. His mother didn't even know what autism was.

When they told her that her son was autistic, she was like, "What is autism?" That day was a life changing day for our family.

Since that day, everything has changed. I'm always on the road because I go to therapies with my son, which I really truly like to do. It has really changed his and our lives to a better life because his social skills have improved as well as his speech. I am really very happy about the way things have been changing, although sometimes doing

some very easy stuff is a challenge with him. Going shopping or going to the restaurant with him is really hard because it is hard for him to be waiting.

But things are getting better. I am trying to help him to have a normal life now and in the future too. And I will never ever give up on him. By the way, he is a very handsome, sweet little boy.

## Children

*Paulette Griffin, Minneapolis*

I believe the children are our future. We need to raise the children, and it takes a village to raise them. When I was small, my mother had to work during the daytime and sometimes on split shifts. I was old enough to take care of my brother, but because of our fighting, my mother asked a neighbor to watch us and keep me out of trouble. My mother showed me the importance of the village support. I am a part of the village and I am proud of that.

## A Thankful Heart

*Ana Chávez, Eagan*

I came to Minnesota 11 years ago and the first two years were the saddest days of my life because

I missed my family and friends so much. During those years I met wonderful people at my English school and some teachers and students became good friends. Some of the teachers, like Cathy, Jeanne, and Harla, were always there on my sad days, giving me support, love, and a lot of patience. After some years in the school, one of these great teachers (my friend) died. It was one of the painful times I had. I'll love her and miss her forever.

Some time passed and my parents had the opportunity to come to Minnesota two times

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When they told her that her son was autistic, she was like, "What is autism?" That day was a life changing day for our family.

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in the first four years. But unfortunately, my dad got sick (stomach cancer) and he died. It was the second hard time in my life.

I remember that I was content with just hearing my dad's voice by phone. It was great and made me happy. But the day he knew was his last day, he called us to say, "Take care of yourself, your husband, and always tell my grandchildren that I love them so much. I'll miss them and I'll be watching them wherever I am." That day was very sad and I'll never forget it in my life. I'll miss him forever.

To be in Minnesota has been a challenge and great. I love this state, especially the people that gave me their hand any time I was in need. Thank you so much to the beautiful people that adopted us as a family in this state and the wonderful teachers that with their patience, love, and support, help me every day to improve my English. I am grateful. I love you all my friends.

*Ana Chávez is 42 years old and is originally from Mexico City, Mexico.*

## Remembrance Day

*José H González, Minneapolis*

I remember my two nephews because they were with me in the war. I miss them because I lost the two soldiers. I feel so sad because they were very good soldiers. They were also my confidants and I loved them a lot. They were very young. Tony was 18 years old and Ernesto was 20 years.

*José H González is 70 years old and is originally from Nicaragua.*

## Deathless Love

*Krishna Adhikari, Saint Paul*

The day was grey and dark too. With a cup of solemnity and a plateful of hope, I sat in the corner of the restaurant watching

the candle die. When I went out, the world became a familiar stranger. I heard nobody else except my

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We were together almost every minute of our life, directly or indirectly we always needed each other in any lugubrious situation.

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heart's yelp in agony. I was in extreme anger for that hated girl.

Then I rang her up. She picked up the phone and said, "I'm busy." I melted immediately with her single word of apology. The next day in school she came to me. Her eyes were cold and craving for the condolences and I was grinning.

It'd been two years that we had been living with one soul, but still there were some things that I was afraid to ask her. We were together almost every minute of our life, directly or indirectly we always needed each other in any lugubrious situation.

One day in the classroom, she was sitting next to me and I asked her, "Have you ever loved anyone?"

She said, "Yes, my family, my friends, you know. You are my best friend." And there was a pause. The situation became sudsy and warm. I was about to ask her that question, the question which my heart wanted to know, but my speech was gone.

Days went on, but I could not console myself. She was beautiful and good in all her activities. This lets me feel that I am a tear drop member knocking at her door. She was sitting with every hue, so the one she would quest would be as bright as a star.

One day she came to me. She looked so much more beautiful than ever before. She touched me gently and asked me directly, “Will you go to the picnic with my family?”

I did not oblige her and she went back with a venomous look. In the night I was waiting for the phone to ring. When I heard it, I rushed to pick it up. I was about to apologize for all my misconduct. I was about to say the truth—that I loved her. Something was emboldening me from inside to go on, before it got too late.

But the call was from her friend. She was mumbling and hesitating to say something, which brought a deep fear to my heart.

At last she said, “Khusi had an accident and died on the spot.” Then she said, “Khusi had something to give you and I will come bring it tomorrow.” She also said that she had empathy, but no one can break eternal verities.

My vision became dark, my heart crumbled and it was so loud that I was unable to hear any other sound. I was so shook up and crushed. To me everything looked dreadful, devastating and dying. An ember of living desire died. I tried to burst into tears, but masculinity was stopping me. The turtle dove is dead, trees lost their lives and the bower was gone.

*Krishna Adhikari is originally from Bhutan.*

## The Joys and Challenges of Caring for a Child with Disabilities

*Tammy Domeier, West Saint Paul*

When my child was born, she was normal for her first four years of life. Then, I was wondering why she kept losing weight all the time. She also couldn't talk. I took her in to be tested and found out she had a disability. She also had an underactive thyroid

on top of that. She is a joy when she makes me laugh when people are down. She takes care of everybody that is sick all the time. I really enjoy playing dress up all the time with her.

When she went to middle school her teachers were doing too much for her and I felt she was not learning as much as she should in school. She is 14 and she still has some trouble with her reading. People that don't have a child with disabilities don't know what parents go through with our child that has disabilities. We always have to make sure our children have more of an education than others. It's also hard dealing with your child's behaviors and knowing that sometimes there is nothing you can do because it's part of her disability.

My daughter gives a lot of joy to my whole family. She is everything to me in my life. She is very special in everybody's life.

## My Little Friend

*Yee Xiong, Saint Paul*

Every morning I take my little friend to school. I'm so proud of him, because he is very serious about studying. My little friend told me when he finishes his education he will be a doctor and that he wants to take care of my family. I am happy because I have a good friend. I also hope one day he might be a doctor. So I really love him because the little friend is my son!

## The Story about My Marriage

*Maryam Omar, Rochester*

And my husband had been dating for seven years. Before we got married, we promised to be honest to one another even if it took a long time. We were ready for that and we never hesitated to trust one another.

The first time we were introduced to each other, we were in Kenya. Then, our relationship was very good and respectful. Finally, we got married and after that, I came to the US alone. I left him in Kenya because I had a visa from my brother.

When I had been living here about four years, I went back to him for three months. Then I came back to America, and I sent him a visa to come to me, and he came here. Then we got together again and we got kids.

We became a big family and now we have five children. In addition, we are a happy couple. So we are hoping our marriage will last a long time—the rest of our lives. Let me say this means so much to me from deeply in the bottom of my heart.

## Twins in My Family

*Samy, Saint Louis Park*

**M**y name is Samy and I came to the United States of America in July, 2006. After a month my wife joined with me. After eight years of our marriage life, we have been blessed with twins—a baby boy and baby girl on October 23, 2008 at 10:35 a.m. and 10:36 a.m., respectively.

My baby boy is a very active and tall kid. My baby girl is a calm and tiny kid. My boy is not allowing us to give him a bath. If we do he will cry like anything. But my girl is very cooperative and she will not cry like her brother. If we are not feeding her on time she will cry like her brother. We need to feed both of them at the same time. My boy is always sleeping with his mother and my girl is sleeping most of the time in the crib.

We are planning to provide higher education as per their wish and trying to teach our traditional Indian culture to them. We would like to teach our own Indian native

language to them that will help them to survive in our country. Now my boy and girl are recognizing our faces and my boy does not gel with others the way my girl is doing. He is very possessive. He always wants to stay with his mother. We hope we will raise them as great human beings and teach all great things to them.

*Samy is 30 years old and is originally from India.*

## The Call

*Lizbeth Guzmán Jiménez, Minneapolis*

**O**ne day I received a call from the United States. It was my older sister. She told

My sister told me that my mom had suffered a stroke. The doctors announced that my mom couldn't walk or do effort for herself ever again.

me the news that made my life change drastically. My sister told me that my mom had suffered a stroke.

The doctors announced that my mom couldn't walk or do effort for herself ever again. I took the decision to come to Minneapolis as soon as possible. When I came to the US my mom got better. However I was going to take the risk that she wouldn't be able to recognize me.

The next few months I helped her to move and to do exercise for her rehabilitation. My mother was afraid to walk and carry heavy things like a simple dish. Now her life is normal again. She continues going to appointments and taking pills that she will take the rest of her life.

I began the school to learn English. I started to work and met a lot of people. I never thought to live here! The life is difficult and nobody prepares you for bad situations, but with your force and courage you can succeed.

Only trust in yourself and in God, enjoy your life because you don't know what will happen tomorrow.

## My Influential Person

*Teklu K. Mazengia, Maple Grove*

**M**y father was the most influential person in my life. His name was Ft. Kelemework Mazengia. He grew up in the Orthodox Church and served as a priest. This opportunity gave him the chance to grow up with good faith and manners, which means in his real life he was a judge. And he judged the people honestly and innocently. He was strongly against corruption. And he gave up his life, money, and time for the people who needed his help. Always, he was there.

When I was a child he advised me. He said, "My son, if you want to be happier and successful in your life, try to give up your time, money, everything you have for your country and all humanity. Help everyone who needs your help as much as possible you can. And try to be the right person at the right time in your entire life."

Eventually, I did these things of his way of life. At this time I'm working a lot of volunteer jobs under the Humanitarian Aid Association with my own money and time. I'm investing everything I have to help the people at the right time as much as I can. So it makes me stronger and happier the rest of my life.

*Teklu K. Mazengia is 41 years old and is originally from Ethiopia.*

## My Love Story

*Diep Nguyen, Woodbury*

**I**t has been about 27 years since I met my boy friend. He is my husband now. He was

my first love and I was his first love too. By the time I met him I was 17. We dated for 10 years and he left. He had to go to the United States with his family. We got engaged before he left. After 10 years in a relationship we had to separate.

The day he left I was so sad; I wondered if he would ever return. I was waiting hopelessly because at that time immigration from Vietnam to the United States was hard.

Fortunately, everything went well. A year and a half later he came back and we got married. He stayed with me for about three months and went back to the United States to carry on with school. Again I continued to wait for five years until he got his citizenship and I could immigrate to the United States.

I waited and waited and waited with all my love. Finally, we are together with our two boys who are 14 and 11. I brought with me a big handbag of our letters.

"Love is patient. Marriage must be built upon a foundation of love." —*Love*, by David Baird.

*Diep Nguyen is originally from Vietnam.*

## My Greatest Gift

*María Mendoza, Blaine*

**O**ne of the best experiences was when I had my first baby. It was on September 5, 1990. It was a wonderful experience because after that day I was now more like my mom. I felt the hard pain like she did. I think that is because to have a baby is not so easy. Now my son is 18 years old. It is wonderful because he is a responsible boy and respectful too.

Now I have two children. The first one, Rolando, gives very good advice to the younger one, Javier Junior. Rolando is four years and six months older than Junior. And, Rolando is smart because he always says to



Jr., “You need to listen to our parents because the people we need to learn from first is from them. We came into this world because of them, and if you don’t pay attention, they will worry every day for us.”

## I Miss My Mother Very Much!

*Somaly Prak, Savage*

**M**y mother was born in Cambodia. Her name was

Savan. She was 27 years old when she passed away due to heart disease and at the time I was only 12 months old. I had to grow up without my mother. I never got to know her. I would not remember hearing her voice or seeing her face.

One time, as I got a little bit older, my father and my relatives brought over my mother’s picture and showed it to me. My mother was a very beautiful woman based on what I could observe from this picture. Then my father, along with others, would tell me that when my mother was alive, she loved me very much and she would do everything to care for me since I was her only child.

My mother was a very kind and warm hearted woman. Everyone who knew her would say that she was a generous and loving person. She would always share food or anything that she would make among her neighbors and family. She would often invite people over to eat when she cooked. Her actions stood out among many people as she was a caring and compassionate person. Many people were very sad to see my mother pass away at such a young age and leave her small

son that she loved dearly to grow up without her.

Sometimes when people started to talk about my mother and what a wonderful person she was, I often felt very sad with tears, because I realized that I never got to know her, remember her voice, or even her face. I never got a chance to care for her as she would have cared for me. I miss my mother very much.



*Luan Vu, Waite Park*

*Somaly Prak is 61 years old and is originally from Cambodia.*

## Who I Admire

*Shablo Umarova, Saint Paul*

**W**e always admire someone for her or his personality, behavior, and talent.

The person whom

I admire is my mom. There are a lot of reasons why I admire my mother. She is very intelligent, patient, hard-working, responsible, and social.

I really admire her because she has always worked hard in her life to achieve her goals and our goals, too. When she got married, she was a medical student. While she was studying at university, she gave birth to me and she had a hard time taking care of me. Even though she had a family, she completed her training and got her medical degree. Those things taught me to try to be a patient person and achieve my goals.

The other reason why I admire her is her dual role in life as a mother and a wife. My father has always been thankful to her because she has respected, loved, and assisted him a lot in life. As a mother, she is a very responsible woman. I remember very well

when I was a child she always paid attention to me and my sister. For example, she always helped us to do our homework, played with us, read books to us, and she introduced us to different activities. With all her help, I graduated from dancing school.

My mother also taught me to be an honest, strong, and kind person. She is the woman who raised me and changed my personality forever. This is why I am so proud of her.

*Shablo Umarova is originally from Uzbekistan.*

## My Father

*Claudia Garcia,  
South Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Claudia García. I was born in Mexico

and I came to the United States 12 years ago to work. I started working in my house with my father who has a disability because of an accident that happened in the hospital. My father and I started preparing Mexican meat. After preparing the meat we sold the food to houses and apartments in Minnesota.

As time passed, we sold more and more meat and I decided to buy a market business. My brothers work at the market and told me that someone was selling a store. We bought that store in 2005 and we still have the store right now. I thank my dad for teaching me to work and giving me his secrets. That is why I tell everybody that they have to listen to their parents and spend more time than usual with them and never leave them alone. Be with them every time they need to talk and let them feel competent.

*In memory of a trusted friend and a fantastic father,  
Armando García. With love, your daughter, Claudia.*

## The Person I Admire Most

*Patricia Lorena Cando, Minneapolis*

**I** admire my Grandma Victoria because she was a deaf person and she loved me very much. My Grandma Victoria was very smart. She spoke the language that her parents taught her when she was kid, but she didn't speak Universal Sign Language. She was a very loving woman with everybody, especially with me, and she was a very hard-working person. My grandma was a unique person in my life who I loved very much. I

miss her because she was the only person who understood me and loved me. I feel alone now.

*Patricia Lorena Cando is originally from Ecuador.*

## My Family Life

*Mai Chao Vang, Minneapolis*

**I** will write about my family life a long time ago. My parents had nine children, but they weren't lucky because four children died. My parents' life was very difficult when we were little. In the daytime my parents went to farm, but in the evenings they came to take care of us at home. They worked 12 or 13 hours per day. They worked like that for many years until my sister and I were bigger.

When we were bigger we knew how to do everything. My parents felt very happy when they had bigger children and had someone to help so they could relax sometimes. But now my parents are, again, working hard because now I stay far away, my sister had to get married, and my brother has a wife and a job as a teacher in another town. Right now only my one brother and one sister live with them. They help my parents a little but not too much because they go to school every day.

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That is why I tell everybody that they have to listen to their parents and spend more time than usual with them and never leave them alone.

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My husband and I expect one day that my parents will come and live with us in the United States because they don't want to work hard and we would like for them to relax because they are old.

## My Thoughts about Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Chemeda Lemessa, Minneapolis*

I'm very happy to know about the interesting history of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because he was a man fighting for freedom and equality. His dream from his "I Have a Dream" speech has finally come true in America right now. I felt sad because he was killed by somebody who did not like his actions and because he was so young when he died.

I'm also interested in John Lennon's song, "Imagine." The song, "Imagine" and the speech, "I Have a Dream" have the same meaning for me. I'm proud of Martin Luther King, Jr. because I'm black, too.

In general I like my teachers, because they teach us what is new and whenever holidays come. We have to know about the celebration.

*Chemeda Lemessa is 31 years old and is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Be a Mother for the First Time

*Nedelka, Saint Louis Park*

Becoming a mother for the first time has been one of the most unique and meaningful experiences to me. I never thought that I would create a new life inside of me. The new life was a boy named Justin who I carried, took care of, fed, watched grow, and saw as he learned to walk, run, jump, talk etc.

All these unique experiences were good and they made me feel very mature, devoted, and responsible. Now I want to teach my little boy to be more independent so that he can put on his jacket, shoes, hats, and mittens. Another area that I want him to develop is his thinking skills such as developing language, creativity, and social skills.

Having Justin has changed my thinking about what is important in life. Before I had Justin, I worked full time and only cared about myself. After I had Justin, he became the most important part of my life. Justin is my motivation to live. I want to teach him what he needs to know as he grows up.

Overall, I enjoy being a mother for the first time, it is a great experience, and it is a good personal change that I live.

*Nedelka is originally from Panama.*

## Big Family

*Anonymous, Bloomington*

I was born in Budbud Somalia in 1984. I'm from a big family of 19 kids, but my mother had only eight kids. All together I have three brothers and ten sisters who are older than me and three brothers and two sisters younger than me.

My father married four wives and my mom was the last one he married. My father was 50 years old when he married my mom. Some of my sisters are older than my mom and they already had a family when he got married to my mom. All my stepmothers and my mom lived in the same city except two sisters and one brother who were living in Mogadishu and had their own families.

My father had a store in Budbud. He used to sell clothes and gas. My mother and stepmothers used to stay at home with their little kids. When I reached the age of five, I

started going to the mosque with my sisters, brothers, nephews, and nieces to learn the Qu'ran and Muslim religion.

One of my sisters and her kids moved to Kenya as refugees in 1991 when Somalia had a civil war. She stayed in Kakuma, Kenya for three years with five children. Then they got a visa from the UN to come to the US. After one year she sent for us as a sponsor, but we were in Mogadishu at that time. She called Dad and told him about the sponsorship so we had to go to Kenya. Two of my stepmothers passed away and one of them refused to come here, so only Mom and Dad and 11 children came here together. So we are 12 here now; two sisters and five brothers are back home. We came here five years ago.

## My Favorite Teacher

*Bekele Bogale, Eagan*

**M**y favorite teacher in my country was my high school biology teacher because he was a very creative and intelligent teacher. He taught me by making different models, pictures, and charts. He also likes doing field work. He has special skills to judge the students' learning styles and understands their psychological problems regarding their family, friends, and LOVE. For these reasons, my favorite teacher is Aba Bazezew.

*Bekele Bogale is 23 years old and is originally from Ethiopia.*

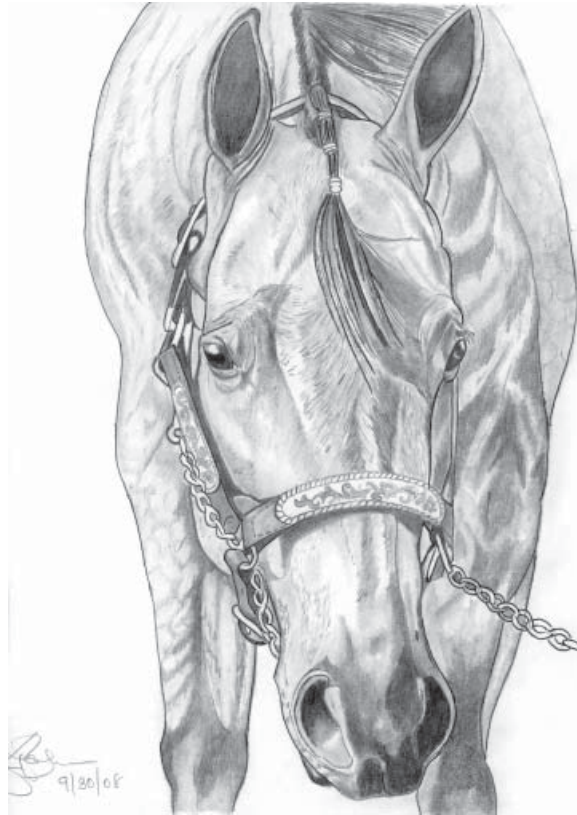
## What is an Au Pair?

*Florencia, Woodbury*

**A**u pair is a French term that you can easily simplify by saying "nanny" or "babysitter." An Au pair is anyone who travels alone and sometimes crosses oceans to live a new experience. That person is

going to take care of children and live with a family for a whole year. The new member of the family needs to learn the normal routine of the house, the rules, and schedules in order to adjust himself/herself to the new life. The beginning is always hard for both because they need to know each other, so the communication between the host family and the au pair is really important. If they express their mind and talk, trying to resolve the problems, even though the barrier of language could be an issue, the whole experience becomes easier and enjoyable.

*Florencia is 22 years old and is originally from Argentina.*



*Kennth Bohlman, Faribault*

## My Lovely Parents

*Lilian Rapalo, Saint Louis Park*

I was born in La Ceiba, Honduras. I grew up with the best family in the world. My first 16 years I was the happiest girl around my parents and grandma and siblings. After those beautiful years, something terrible happened in my family. My parents separated! The reason was another woman. That situation broke my heart, but at the same time it helped me to grow up faster. My family changed 100 percent and I started to be more responsible with my mom and brothers and sister. I'm the third in my family.

Sometimes I cried. I saw my mom suffer because of that other woman. She loved my dad a lot. But five years later, my dad came back home and said, "Sorry" to all of us and especially to my mom. By that time I had moved to the USA, but I was the happiest daughter in the world, because I know my mom loved and missed him all this time.

Two years later my mom was the happiest woman in the world to have her family together again, but God decided to take her. It was very terrible for all of us and sad. She died of a cancer called Leukemia. After we found out she was with us 45 days. You can't believe how my dad was especially sad. He was broken down for many months until all of us helped him.

Now he is with us, single, and living with my older sister. He helps me with my kids. And now he is the best dad and grandpa. My mom is with us all the time we will never forget, her. I love you forever, and thank you for everything you did to understand this is part of life.

## An Important Day

*Paty, Minneapolis*

My day started normally at 7:00 a.m. I sent my son to school, and after that I went to school too. After school I walked to my polling place to vote. I went back to my home in my neighbor's car. They were voting also. We talked before getting home about the important moment for all of us. We wanted a change, not just promises. Around 8:00 p.m. I started to watch the news. Obama started with more points than McCain. At maybe 10:00 p.m. the news anchors said, "We have a new President Elect. Obama is our next Head in Chief." I was so happy. Even my little son wanted to see Obama's speech. At 11:00 p.m. he appeared finally on TV for his first speech.

Hearing his words made me feel so proud. Obama said he would give insurance for all of us, but McCain would have taxed the \$5,000 he wanted to give us. Obama wants a better education for our kids. McCain would have spent less money; for me, that meant less money for schools and poor education for all, including my self.

Our lives will change and we will have a better future. Maybe one day we will have a woman president or a Latin American in the presidency.

# Sunset

*Brenda B., Minneapolis*

For my six children:

I always love to watch the sun set and rise,  
I get up before you to watch the sunrise,  
As I watch you rise as the days go by I hold you  
In my arms as we watch the sunset together  
Before I lay you down for a goodnight's sleep.

# Oba-Chan\*

*Megumi, Woodbury*

“Grandma!”  
Can you hear me?  
I can't see you.

One day, you left me without words.  
I felt like I had lost a part of my body.

Grandma, you were a great person;  
Sometimes you were like my mother,  
Sometimes you were like my friend,  
Sometimes you were my sunshine to brighten my way,  
And sometimes you were like a magician

Because you read my mind even when  
I was trying to hide something from you.  
Thank you for making me smile,  
Thank you for teaching me how to love,  
Thank you for giving me a lot of love and joy.  
You are not here anymore.

However, I believe that you live in me  
now and forever.

I love you, Grandma.

*Megumi is originally from Tokyo, Japan.*

\* [Editor's note: Oba-chan means “Grandmother” in Japanese.]

# Why?

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*Brandie Anderton, Moorhead*

## Why?

The big question is why?

Why does this have to happen to my mom?  
Why does she have to lose her beautiful hair?  
Why does she have to get so sick after chemo?  
Why does she have so much pain?  
Why can't I take the pain away?

At one point in time her long, straight, shiny,  
blond hair blew in the wind  
Now she has to wear a scarf on her head  
When she used to clean the house, she'd throw her hair up anyway and go  
Now she has to wear a wig that is definitely not her at all  
My mom looks so different these days  
When I look into her beautiful, blue eyes that used to be so full of light

All I see is pain  
Pain for her children  
Pain for herself  
Pain for her family  
She is such a powerful woman  
She was the type to never go to the doctor for anything  
Now she goes multiple times a week

Her face has shrunk and she's grown so fragile  
She's always in pain so the medicine is constant now  
She would have the smile that would light up the room  
Now she cries because she does not want to be sick anymore  
It made me so happy to see her excited to buy her unborn grandchild her first shoes  
I know that this little girl is going to bring a whole new world to her grandma.

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# *My best friend... I lost*

*A.H., Moorhead*

*We* were more than friends...  
We were sisters.  
We played, laughed, talked,  
And spent time together.  
We were a team.  
There were five in our team,  
But Intisar was my best friend.  
My mom was jealous of the team,  
Especially Intisar.

One day I told my mother I didn't want to talk to Intisar.  
I never saw my mother's face like that.  
It turned different colors—  
Yellow, red, even blue.  
And her mouth had a huge smile.

Then she asked me many questions.  
I don't recall what I told my mom in that time.  
I knew it was a silly reason, what happened between Intisar and me.  
I called her a bad person, using words I would not repeat today.  
For three years we didn't talk to each other,  
Not even in school.

In our first year of secondary school  
My best friend became sick,  
And she spent most of the year in the hospital.  
I went to visit her to see if she was okay  
But she wouldn't see me,  
Not until my third visit.



I wore my best dress in her favorite colors,  
The one that was yellow with black spots  
And matching earrings too.

Shiny black Roghan (Italian) shoes with  
High heels and a yellow flower on top.  
Three barrettes in my hair, two yellow  
And a black one in the middle to make  
My shoulder-length hair look its best.

I picked up my handbag,  
Shiny and black to match my shoes but no yellow on it  
So I attached a yellow plastic bear to the zipper that I took  
From my baby brother's karuc (bassinet).  
I walked to the mirror,  
Checking myself out more than ten times I think.

I couldn't wait, it was only 1:00 and  
I couldn't see Intisar 'til 4:00.  
The sound of the clock...tick, tick, tick... was making me crazy!  
And I was so worried that maybe Intisar  
Really didn't want to see me face to face.

I entered her hospital room and saw her.  
She seemed healthy.  
I didn't say sorry to her,  
We started from the beginning,  
Both of us scared to talk about the past.  
We knew our limits.  
I continued to visit her almost every day until she passed.

Now I don't have a friend like her.  
When I lost her, the world to me seemed so narrow.

# About the Little People

*Cassandra Schlottman, Sartell*

Little people everywhere  
Laughing, playing without a care  
From big to small, we love them all  
We kiss their boo-boos when they fall.

Mothers nurture their kids in every way  
We play all of the games they play  
Day after day we help them grow healthy  
We teach them happiness is more than being wealthy.

The first years pass by, then they're off to school  
Dressed to impress looking so cool  
With tiny hands painting pictures; just for mom  
Followed by snack, then nap, with a big yawn.

Wake up refreshed for recess outside  
Time to make some new friends, don't run and hide  
Just a few hours later and they're already back  
Waiting for the bus to walk them home for snack.

Moms are in a category all their own  
Our kids see us and smile a bond we've grown  
Most women today would like a baby to love;  
A child they say is an angel from above.

Let's all rush to meet the newest family member  
A beautiful baby for us to love forever  
Treat every child with love and understanding,  
Be patient with their feelings, don't be demanding.

I love my two little boys like there is no other  
They deserve the best from their devoted mother.

# *Hold On to What You Have*

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*Dennis Ray Bruce, Jr., Bayport*

*We* put alarms and locks on our doors and homes,  
But someone can still take the most valuable thing we own.  
Back when our love was fresh and special and new,  
I thought no one could love you like the way I love you.

We would walk around town with each other,  
Hand in hand, lost in love together...just woman and man.  
Every day was exciting.  
I couldn't wait to spend each day with you.

I hoped it would never come to an end.  
But after a while, after all the kisses and the hugs,  
The flame seems to have fizzled,  
Along with our passion and our loving.

So I would go out with my friends  
And leave you at home,  
Out having a good time...  
While you were all alone.

What a mistake. I wish I could take it all back now.  
You got fed up with my ways and started going out too.  
It won't be long now before you find someone new...  
And I'll be home all alone, like you used to.

I should have known if I let you go,  
Someone would steal you quickly from me.  
And treat you like you deserve,  
Like when you first dated me.

I know I took you for granted,  
Thinking only of my pleasure.  
But one person's trash  
Is someone else's treasure.

# You and Me

Janice L., Shakopee

It's you and me  
It's you and me  
Walking together  
With hand in hand  
With ups and downs  
It was you and me  
After twenty-one years  
We came to a crossroad  
Taken different paths.  
Lost you and me.

But along your road  
It carried you away as I wait  
To find you and me.

You found a lost girl  
Looking for someone  
In her selfish ways.  
She found you.  
You forgot me  
Forgot all about you and me.



Ana Rivera,  
Cottage Grove

As you moved forward  
With the selfish lost girl  
You always look back  
Hoping I was waiting  
You knew  
You knew  
It's you and me.

I am helpless and sad  
with secrets and lies.  
You took the selfish lost girl  
But always, looking back  
Wondering if I was still waiting  
Looking back for me  
You know it's us.  
You and me.

No more selfish lost girl  
No more secrets and lies  
No more looking back  
One last time you look back  
You knew  
You knew  
You had to find me  
You knew  
It's you and me  
You and me.

# *The Kidnapping of My Child*

*Patrick Herman, Saginaw*

*I* want to be a Dad  
Found out about you when you were already a year old  
My best friend called me; your mom said I left her

At least that's what he was told  
Being in the Army such a long ways away  
Wanted to see you so bad and thought about you every single day

Finally got to come home; you were such a nice little boy  
Big belly laugh, and beautiful blond hair  
You were such a precious joy

You were our bat boy when watching Dad play softball  
Remember seeing that big buck in the woods later that fall?  
Took you fishing your first time and caught your big one

Nobody can take that away from us; you will always be my son  
For some reason your mother accused me of child abuse  
That hurt so bad I really hit the booze

You were taken by the court without my knowledge or consent  
Sometimes life ain't fair; I could have been a loving parent  
The weeks turned to months, and the months turned to years

What happened to all this time in this sad veil of tears?  
I'm still your father. You are already 19 and a fine young man  
Please give me a chance and I'll do the best I can

# *I Am*

*Katie Pattison, Sauk Rapids*

*I* am a strong willed, determined mother.  
I wonder what life would be like if  
I hadn't sent my daughters to live with my dad  
I hear my daughters' laughter.  
I see my daughters and I running through a field.  
I want my dad to want me in his life.  
I am a strong willed, determined mother.

I pretend to hold my daughters tight and never let go.  
I feel angry that my dad will not let me be in my daughters' life or his life.  
I touch my daughters' pictures.  
I worry that I may never see my daughters again.  
I cry when I'm without my daughters for Christmas and their birthdays.  
I am a strong willed, determined mother.

I understand that I made mistakes in the past with the way  
I was raising my daughters.  
I say that I will see my daughters someday soon.  
I dream of the day I am reunited with my daughters.  
I hope my daughters will forgive me for all the years  
I have not been in their lives.

I am a strong willed, determined mother.

## I Miss My Best Friend

*Safia Hassan, Minneapolis*

I remember my best friend. Her name is Najat. She was born in Oromia. She was a very good friend to me. She graduated from college in Oromia. After that, she got married. She had three children. She stayed in my country. I cry when I remember by friend. She used to cheer me up when I was sad. We played and worked together. It was a very happy time. I miss my best friend. I wish a good life for her always.

*Safia Hassan is originally from Dire Dawa, Oromia.*

## My Mother

*Maria Leonor Oyarzabal, Eagan*

I will describe my mother. She is beautiful. She has big bright eyes and white skin. She is very strong and a very kind lady.

She is very special to me. I'm really grateful to God to be her daughter. She is like a friend for me. I love her very much.

I'm very happy because even though she had a very hard life, now she is in love and very happy with an awesome man. She really deserves it.

I hope to see them soon.

*Maria Leonor Oyarzabal is 26 years old and is originally from Mexico.*

## My Son Ahmed

*Deqa Mohamed, Minneapolis*

My son was born in October, 2006. I love my son, Ahmed. I was happy that day because I had a boy. He was born in a hospital. My doctor helped me. My whole family visited me. The first day, my father brought clothes. I also got money from my

family. They all helped me. I want my son to come here with me.

*Deqa Mohamed is originally from Garoowe, Somalia.*

## I'm Missing Mom

*Gisela Sánchez, Cottage Grove*

Here I am alone missing you and I ask myself, "Where are you? Would you be alone and sad right in this moment?" I wish I could hug you and feel and talk to you. Listen when I feel alone. I feel alone without my parents but you'll always be my special mom to me and my heart will cry for you always. You live in my memories. Thank you for being my mom.

## My Good Friend

*Ngae Lay, Saint Paul*

Long, long ago, I was a child. I had a very good friend. His name is Sein Htwe. We lived in the same village. My good friend and I went to school, did homework together, and after school, played together. I remember my good friend from my childhood.

*Ngae Lay is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

## My Parents

*Junita Htoo, Saint Paul*

When I was seven years old, my parents taught me about how to go to school because I didn't know how to go to school. They sent me to school and if I needed something they bought it for me. I remember one time, I wanted to race a bicycle. They taught me at night in the moonshine. When I could race the bike, they bought a new bicycle for me. Then I went to school with my bicycle because my school and home were 20 minutes apart.

I lived in the city. I liked my house because it was big and had three rooms. It was a wood house. When I was 15 years old, my parents taught me about my life and how to grow. I had to understand how my parents thought. They went with me to church and they taught me about the Bible. So I know how to read the Bible.

My parents are very lovely. They did everything I needed so my parents are very important to me.

*Junita Htoo is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

## **I Am Thankful**

*Tamika Matthews, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Tamika Matthews. I am one of five kids; I have three brothers and one sister. We were raised by both parents and for that I am feeling very blessed. I am thankful to have lived to have five kids of my own to raise. I have three girls and two boys. This is why I am very thankful having a big caring family. The boys' names are Joshua and Jayshawn, and my girls' names are Jazmine, Jozlyn, and Jaquana. The kids' ages range from two to 11. I love all my babies and I am very thankful to have them.

## **My Mother**

*Yusuf Abow, Minneapolis*

**I** remember when I was a little boy about me and my brother. My mother and I would go on walks outside to the city. My older brother would call to me when we went out. My mother was a nurse when she was young. I have a very old picture when she is young and when she was a doctor some of her friends called her Hawowilla. Hawowilla means hawoman. She acted like a man and she dressed like a man. I love my mother. She

was a business woman. Now she is very old. My Mother Hawo is 73 years old. She is a very strong and very kind lady. She cannot speak English, but she can read a little English and she can write very well.

We came on February 2, 2003 to the United States. My mom misses her country and her brother very much. Once a week she asks me if I will call her other family. She is a very religious person. Every day she prays. When she prays she asks God to give her country peace because she would like to visit Somalia and she wants to help people. She is a good mom.

When I was young I went with her everywhere she went because at that time I was the last one in my family. I remember when I got married she said "No, No!" and I said "Why, mother?" "Because you're too young. You can't marry!" But she is happy now because she saw my children. Now she is a grandmother and she is happy. She saw her last son, his children, and I am happy too because my mom she is 73 years old and she sees my children.

## **My Life in the USA**

*Vannasone, Minneapolis*

**I** came to the USA in September, 2005. I married to my husband in Minneapolis. We have a two-year-old boy. His name is Christmas Vue. My son is very smart. He likes to play basketball. He also likes to play soccer. Sometime he likes to play guitar, too. He speaks English better than Hmong.

## **I Remember**

*Anonymous, Coon Rapids*

**I** remember my family all the time because they live far away from me. I remember when I was a child we lived in Laos. Someone



killed my dad. I will remember that day all my life. Sometimes I miss him a lot. He was nice to me and he made money to buy things I needed for me. Now it is very different since that day. Right now I am 34 years old but I still remember him. On Father's Day, I miss him a lot. Now, my mom is very old and I am very worried for her.

## English on the Job

*Sabah Amin, Woodbury*

I have four kids. My oldest daughter is Dina. She and her son live in Cairo. I want to see her very much. I pray to God to see Dina. I want to learn English, especially talking and understanding what other people say.

## Coming to Us

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

I came to the US in 1994. It took me much time. When I decided to come to the US I never thought that the trip could take so long time. It was the first time that I left my country. I left my daughter back in my country too. When I got to the US my life was a sadness because I suffered thinking of my daughter. Although I lived with my husband, my brothers, and with most of my family, I felt an empty in my heart. Now I'm thankful with my God because my daughter came to the US too. After my daughter came I am completely happy.

## My Story

*Maria Doree, Cottage Grove*

I was five years old when I went to church with my parents and I raised my hand and prayed. I promised God to always be close to him. I'm happy and respect everything because God blessed my life.

## Small village

*Khou Yang, Maplewood*

My dad and mom came from big family. My dad told me that my grandpa passed away early and my grandmother has remarried not too long after her husband passed away. In my culture, she is not allowed to take the children with her if she remarries. My grandmother decide to remarry and leave all kids behind with her in-laws.

My dad was the older child, so he had to watch out for the younger ones. He worked at the farm everyday and night. At night he only used moonlight because there was no electricity. Then he served in the military. After he finished his term he came home. He had no education, but he encouraged his brothers to go to school. His sisters helped him at the farm. They had their own plantation.

They work at my Dad's uncle's farm also for a place to live. They have to prepare daily meals. After his mom remarried they didn't have dishes, not many clothes, and no job to depend on. He said it was very hard to start a new life with empty hand.

He dated many girls, but he couldn't marry to them because his was poor even though the girls fall in love with him. They, the parents, did not allow them to marry a poor man. His ex-wife was an orphan too, so they decided to get married. After the marriage my dad found out that she was lazy. He divorced her.

Years after, his uncles meet my step-mom. They said that she was hard worker, caring and loving person. She was pretty. They told him to marry her. He didn't like her. Somehow, after marriage everything turned out good. They moved out after one year and had one boy. He was able to run a small business as a salesman. He started to provide

little income to his own family. A couple years later he decided to marry my mom. My mom and step-mom are sisters.

After awhile my dad made his decision to keep the step-mom. Even through my parents divorced he still takes care of us. We came to the United State together. After 14 years he went to Laos, his homeland. He passed away in April of 2006.

*Khou Yang is originally from Laos.*

## My Hero

*Teresa Córdova, Minneapolis*

**M**y hero is my mother because she was one important person in my life. She dedicated all her life to teaching me and my brothers. When I felt sad, she encouraged me. She was dedicated only to her family. She was an accomplished woman. She had a home with a husband and children. She was a good mother. I remember my mother when I was a child would do many things. She would get up very early and make dresses and shorts and many people would come to her to fix their clothes. My mother was a good example for me.

*Teresa Córdova is originally from Mexico.*

## What is the Value of Friendship?

*Lynn Bui, Cottage Grove*

**F**riendship is one of the most important things that I think about. According to me, people do not live by bread alone; everyone needs relationships with others in family and society. It gives us an identity and provides a psychological satisfaction. Like all other ties, friendship brings joy and happiness in our life.

I am very lucky to have a good friend. Her name is Esther. We have known each

other for 20 years. Remember the proverb, “A man is known by his friend.” We have many similar things. We grew up in poor families. Both of us were students in the University of Education, Vietnam because we love children. There were too many helpless children around us in those days. We used to do our best as teachers to help them after we graduated. “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” She always stands by me in my tribulations. She is also a great source of consolation and comfort in my troubles.

Friendship is inseparable from one’s life. We try to keep the friends that we have. Live to share and live to help them!

*Lynn Bui is originally from Vietnam.*

## My Daughters

*Chong Xie, Owatonna*

**I** have two daughters, one is seven years old and the younger one is five years old. The older daughter is shy, however, the younger daughter is an extrovert. Although their characters are different, they like to play every day together. They didn’t know how to speak English that much, because they came to America just a half year ago, but now they know more. I love them very much. They are in my heart.

Chong Xie is originally from China.

## My Family

*Imelda Piñones, Shakopee*

**T**he most important thing in my life is my family because they are beautiful. I remember when my first baby was born—a wonderful moment for my husband and me. He cried. I went to my sister’s house because my husband went to work. My sisters took

a lot of special care of my baby and me. Everybody was most attentive to me and my baby. My brother stayed here until my mother came to help me. To share with my family and friends this experience was wonderful for me. Each moment, everything and everyone was very nice—my child, my husband, my mother, my sisters, and my brother. I love my family. I am very happy with my family.

### My Favorite Sport

*Russell Zastrou, Alexandria*

**S**uperbowl was a good game. Pittsburgh had a good game. Pittsburgh won. The score was 27-23.

### Blues

*Anonymous, Coon Rapids*

**I** miss my big dog in my home in my country Sudan because I am here in America. I would like to see my sister in Australia and my brothers in Sudan. I miss people in Sudan.

### Mothers' Day in Mexico

*Carolina Peña, Shakopee*

**I**n Mexico, Mothers' Day is very important because we remember all our mothers on this special day. We visit and give her flowers and other things she likes. Every family remembers this day differently. Some people celebrate Mothers' Day because "their Mother is the only one."

In my case, my brothers and sisters celebrate Mothers' Day every day, because every time we are with her she makes us feel good. Sometimes she feels bad (sometimes I say bad words and she scolds me and she is right because she has more experience than me). We are always there for her because she gave us life and we will never finish paying

her for everything she gives us. My mom gives me love, affection, good advice and good values. She told me, "When you have children, you will know how to be a mother."

In my culture, the mother is the most important person because she leads by example and helps us fulfill our roles as mothers, wives, and individuals in society.

Before, I missed my mother because she lived in Mexico, but five months ago my parents arrived here in Minnesota and now my siblings and I are very happy.

*Carolina Peña is 34 years old and is originally from Mexico.*

### About My Mother

*Wah Wah Say, Saint Paul*

**W**hen my mother was pregnant with me, but she had no food because the soldiers came and fought our village. So my mother and her family went away to the mountains. My father went to the farm and my brother and sister went together.

When I was born, my mother was very happy to see me. But I had to go away to another village. I lived there for three years. My mother and father planted many fruits and many vegetables in the garden. When I was ten years old, my mother told me about them and I was very happy.

*Wah Wah Say is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

### A Beautiful Family

*Miriam Rivera, Shakopee*

**T**he most important thing in my life is my family. We will always stay together. My husband and I can watch our daughters, Yahayra and Deyanira, grow into beautiful young ladies.

Some day my husband and I want to go back to Mexico and have a little home for our family. Until then, I can always be loving and caring to my daughters and my husband. I am learning to be a good mother and teach good things to our daughters. We have a good life together today and will have in the future.

## A Special Gift for Mom

*Anonymous, Shakopee*

**O**n a special Mother's Day two years ago, my sister Veva and I wanted to give our mother something special. We thought that some pictures of our sister who lives in Mexico would be nice since our mother had not seen her in five years.

My sister bought food and I bought a cake for a little party. I wanted to surprise my mother, so I put the pictures in a bag with balloons. When my mom opened the bag she thought the gift was balloons, but when she saw the envelope, she said, "Is it money?" When she saw the first picture she cried and cried when she saw my sister, my nephew and niece. My mom was very happy, but also sad because she only saw my sister in the pictures. I was very happy because my mom was happy.

I think my best Mother's Day is thinking about when we will all be together again for Mother's Day.

## My Experience with Children

*Betty, Shakopee*

**I**really enjoy being with children. I like to care for them and also to have fun. I enjoy being with children because of the way they talk. Their spontaneity makes me feel happy and interested in spending more time with them. That is why I always think that nothing is better than being around children. I like to

take care of children because I love them and I think that children are a big responsibility that we have to take seriously. I was a teacher in Mexico and had the opportunity to teach a class of kindergarten and high school students. That was an enjoyable experience.

*Betty is originally from Veracruz, Mexico.*

## My Role Model

*Ruth Sandy, Brooklyn Center*

**M**y role model is my husband who is Phillip Sandy. He is a person who is very caring, selfless, and thoughtful in helping. Phillip loved to think about others first and also believed in making other people's lives better by using his little gift that God gave to him to help children read and write during the holidays. It was a blessing to other lives.

I remember when I was at the age of 11, Phillip was one of the Vacation Bible School teachers for children during holiday time. He started focusing on me and making sure all my schoolwork was read and done and I was all ready for school. He was even using his own money to buy my school supplies when I entered high school. Phillip was loved and likeable by my church community because of the service he rendered and the way he was so humble by having respect for his elders.

Phillip started visiting our home frequently and also requesting that I go for a holiday in the city, which was my first experience and that changed my life greatly. So, as a result of him, today I am able to read and write, and I am proud to call him my role model.

*Ruth Sandy is originally from Sierra Leone, West Africa.*

## The Inauguration of President Obama

*Nikolay Yakovlev, Minneapolis*

If you're walking down the right path and you're willing to keep walking, eventually you will make progress.

*—Barack Obama, 2005*

People watched this inauguration especially impatiently. People are tired. All want changes. People connect these changes with the new president. For the first time America has a black president. He has a good education, is a good orator, and he promises to lead the country out of the economic crisis. His first actions allow us to judge his serious intentions. He has chosen experts in economics, including former members of Clinton's team to advise him on economic issues.

People want to be proud of America. All are tired of wars and economic problems. People from every state came to the inauguration. It was surprising to see this number of people. I have never seen so many people in one moment. This moment is very meaningful for the American people.

*Nikolay Yakovlev is 76 years old and is originally from Saint Petersburg, Russia.*

## My Family Life

*Mai Chao Vang, Minneapolis*

I will write about my family life a long time ago. My parents had nine children, but they weren't lucky because four children died. My parents' life was very difficult when we were little. In the daytime my parents went to farm, but in the evenings they came to take care of us at home. They worked 12 or 13 hours per day. They worked like that for many

years until my sister and I were bigger.

When we were bigger we knew how to do everything. My parents felt very happy when they had bigger children and had someone to help so they could relax sometimes. But now my parents are, again, working hard because now I stay far away, my sister had to get married, and my brother has a wife and a job as a teacher in another town. Right now only my one brother and one sister live with them. They help my parents a little but not too much because they go to school every day.

My husband and I expect one day that my parents will come and live with us in the United States because they don't want to work hard and we would like for them to relax because they are old.

## Childhood Recollection

*Malgosia Poplawska-Keefe, Eagan*

This Christmas I was very surprised. I went to my mailbox and I found a letter from my old elementary school teacher. Mrs. Zapedowska taught me in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. She taught Polish, history, social studies and she was my class block leader. She was a very interesting person with a warm personality and she worked very hard with us. Mrs. Zapedowska helped many people in my class. She helped us with the paperwork for high school. She placed me in German class in high school and I think that was a good idea because I studied more German than in the common class.

I'm very lucky Mrs. Zapedowska can remember me after so many years. Now, she is a pensioner and lives in a pretty house with her only son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter and grandson in Lodz, Poland.

*Malgosia Poplawska-Keefe is 47 years old and is originally from Poland.*

## My Feelings About the US Presidential Election

*Ger Vang, Saint Paul*

I feel worried about Barack Obama being the next president of the United States. I don't think that Obama will let the troops leave Iraq because he has to be a strong president in the United States. That means he'll make the US stronger than before so that other countries will know that no one can make trouble with the United States.

Also, Obama doesn't have enough experience to take good care of the US. No one knows what will happen in the future, and I don't think that he has enough experience to handle future problems. In addition, I think that he'll make a lot of mistakes while he is president of the US. He promises that he'll give medical care to everyone in the United States and he'll raise taxes to help poor people that don't have jobs. I don't believe that Obama will do everything that he has told us. I know that whoever wants to be the next president always says good things to make people believe that he'll change everything for people in the United States.

I feel worried that he'll make a lot of mistakes while he is president of the United States. I hope that he'll do everything like President George Washington.

*Ger Vang is originally from Laos.*

## The Inauguration of President Obama

*Gregory Mnushkin, Minneapolis*

I am proud of the US. I have seen two inaugurations of presidents of America during my life in this country. Both times this procedure made a great impression on me because in my former country there was

nothing of the kind.

Especially impressive for me was the inauguration of President Obama. In my opinion, it was a superb inauguration at which were present more than two million people. The November 2008 election cycle was historic in more ways than one. The US elected its first black, active, mobile and likeable president, Barack Obama. He is a restrained person in any situation. Just now our country is in an economic crisis. I found on the street a folk song:

*The economic drama  
Is not for Obama.  
President Barack  
Is the people's servant.*

*Gregory Mnushkin is 80 years old and is originally from Russia.*

# *Special Lil Lady*

*Yvette Suzanne Albrecht, Montevideo*

*F*lowers are all the colors of a rainbow, beautiful in all their splendor!  
Butterflies are a delicate delight, made special by the angels above!  
The sunshine shines brilliant as can be, giving light for all the world to see!

You are beautiful in all your splendor,  
Made special by the angels above, you are magnificent and a wonderful  
delight,  
sent from the heavens with love!

And

The sun can shine or it can be dreary and gray!  
It can be dark as night or bright as day,  
You can be up in the clouds or a lil down in a slump,  
A very happy camper or a sad lil lump!

Cuz

You're the best lil lady, no one shall disagree,  
You've been patient, kind and considerate,  
when you really didn't have to be!  
You've brought beauty and gentleness into my life  
where there has been none.  
You are specially special, especially to me!  
I thank God for you and the things you've done.  
There are a few ladies that have my eternal love,  
But in my book of Lil Ladies, you're quite possibly  
Number One!

# Love

*Alfred Moen, Bayport*

I will always love you.  
I thought I'd never find love,  
'Till the day I followed you out that door.  
I knew the old life I lived would change.

Yes, it has taken some time and work,  
But think of how far we've come!  
I spent my whole life searching  
for what we share within our souls.

The lovely laughter that filled the air...  
Thinking of your voice in my ears...  
The softness of your skin...  
The ways you make love to me.

Words cannot describe  
how you make me feel inside.  
All I can say is what I have said before...  
When we make love, our souls become one.

My love, you are my one and only...  
Soul mates forever and ever,  
'Till death do us part.

Not even death could tear apart  
This special love we share.

## Daddy's Girl

*Sarah King, Spring Lake Park*

Feeling lost without him  
Feeling empty, too.  
But I am my Daddy's girl  
I know this is true.  
Although we have split apart  
And gone our separate ways,  
I pray to God each night,  
To bring us together again some day.

I fear it is not possible  
Not right now anyway.  
But I will hold onto hope  
That we will be together  
Again one day.



# What I'm Grateful For

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*Jessica Platt, North Minneapolis*

I would like to tell you about the things I'm especially grateful for:

I'm thankful for Jesus.

I'm thankful for my faith.

I'm thankful for my first-born daughter, Amanda Marie.

I'm thankful for my second daughter, Destiny Faith.

I'm thankful for Joe, my daughters' dad.

I'm thankful for my mother, Brenda.

I'm thankful for my brother, Shon.

I'm thankful for my sister-in-law, Rosie.

I'm thankful for their four kids.

I'm thankful for my big sister, Melinda and her six kids.

I'm thankful for my brother-in-law, Geo.

These are the things that I'm especially grateful for, and

I'm grateful for being me!

# *Joined by God*

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*Elronza Williams, Bayport*

I know a melody that makes a beautiful song,  
And this melody is sweet as a hummingbird.  
This melody sings to the core of my heart...  
What God has joined together, let no one split apart.

To me this melody is a perfect rhyme  
And if loving this melody is wrong, then consider it a crime.  
I live for the love song this melody sang to my heart the day we met.  
No matter how many years go by, that song I will never forget.

When I heard the sound of this beautiful melody,  
My once caged heart was finally set free,  
And deep down inside,  
I knew as one we would be.

This melody is now that beautiful song of my heart...  
What God has joined together, let no one split apart.

Please never change who you were when you first sang your way into my life,  
Because every essence of who you are is the reason you are now my wife.  
I know that my melody isn't perfect, but the way I look at you, nothing is wrong,  
Just to hear you breathe is a sweet and beautiful song.

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You're such a beautiful melody to my heart.  
I can't explain in words how much you mean.  
But I know I'll always respect you,  
As a king would a queen.

Keep your eyes on the sparrow, and to my heart,  
Sing, Melody, sing.  
You're a whole lot of music and, I must add, then some.  
God made you from my rib and named you wisdom.

You and I were meant to be; me for you and you for me...  
What God has joined together, let no one split apart.

He knew I would be at peace by the sound of your beating heart.  
When I looked into the mirrors of your eyes, I saw a story being told.  
The one thing I fell in love with most  
Was the beauty I saw within your soul.

I just want you to know...  
You're the Melody of my heart.

# *A Healthy and Sumptuous Recipe*

For All the Ethnic Groups and Cultures of the Whole World

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*Margarita Quiroz, Little Canada*

*F*irst you will need:

300 grams of love  
300 grams of gratitude  
300 grams of respect  
300 grams of humility  
300 grams of compassion  
300 grams of feeling emotion

Then you'll take out:

all of the hatred  
all of the arrogance  
all of the intrigue  
all of the resentment  
all of the bad parts

You will cook all of this with much care using the perfect amount for getting a very good life in harmony with all the human people.

It is a recipe for all the people in general. So we can learn how to live in love and harmony between all the different ethnic and cultural groups. We can learn to love and respect one with another without making any difference for the color of the skin or defects and without apartheid. We come from different thinking, but we have to know that even though some are white, black, brown, or yellow, all of us have the same color of blood.

Let's live a better life in harmony with all the people who live in this world. Let's start taking care of each other without hatred or resentment. Together we can do it.



# Places, Here and There

## The Grand Canyon

*Annette Kossow, Duluth*

I grew up in New Mexico. When I was about nine or ten years old, my family went on a nice vacation to the Grand Canyon. It was so big. It was about 277 miles across and a gorge cut through, and down below there was a river, the Colorado River. We went to the National Park, and there were trails, mule-pack trips, and river rafting.

I was able to see caves and other dwellings that people lived in during prehistoric times. The colors were so beautiful, mostly red and a lot of gray, and pretty green, pink, brown, and violet. There were a lot of varieties of animals. There were squirrels, coyotes, deer, bobcats, and other animals we could see all around. It was a very nice time, and I will never forget it.

Now I am an adult, and I recently went to see the movie Grand Canyon. I was so disappointed to see how the Grand Canyon had changed. The river was so low you could see the colors in the rocks. The animals were going to live in other places. The trees had been chopped down. The people were the

worst. They polluted the river, the camps, and other places in the park.

## My Travels in Ecuador

*Pablo Quizhpi, Minneapolis*

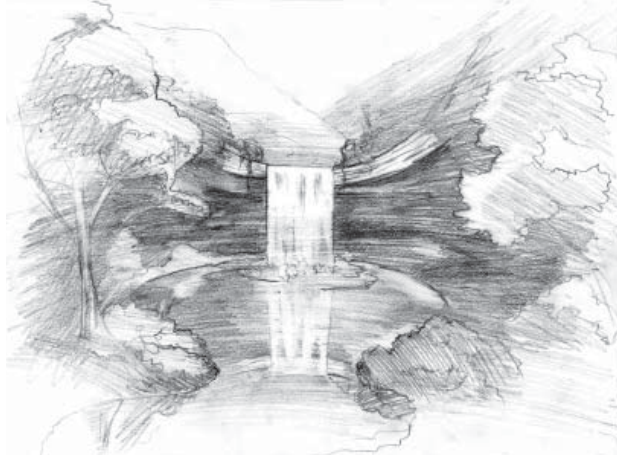
My name is Pablo Quizhpi. I was born in Ecuador City. My mother's name is Soyla Angamarca. She is from Cañar, Ecuador. She is the second of six siblings. My father, Enrique, is from the same country. He is the third of six siblings. So I come from a very nice family.

When I was a little boy, I got to know many places in my country. I took trips with my three brothers and my parents around the country. I was in each state in the republic of Ecuador. The beaches, the colonial city, the farms, and big cities like Cuenca and Quito, all of them. My dad was a businessman so we traveled with him. When I became an adult I showed the beautiful places in our country to many friends. I think it is necessary to know something to love it; if you do not know it you can't appreciate it.

## Beautiful Canyon

*Sergey S., Blaine*

I want to tell you about one beautiful place in my country. I used to go to this place whenever I could. In this canyon you can see a waterfall and rocks. The churches are from the fifteenth century: the footprints of the first culture of my country. They've stayed in this place for more than four thousand years. There are no cars and buildings in this place. There is a clean forest, many birds, flowers and beautiful nature in the canyon. I liked going to this place with my friends. We went camping there. We cooked on the fire and went to the forest. In the evening we would sit around the campfire, play the guitar and read stories about different travels. The sky is very clear at night. Every day one can go to different waterfalls. There are many geckos and birds there. It is a very good place to relax.



*Sergey S., Blaine*

## Northside ABE is a Great School

*Kee Khang, Minneapolis*

Since September 2006, I have attended the Northside ABE school. First, I had to take a test to show which class I should go in. After that, I realized I was in level 5-6 in Anne Ellen's class in the afternoon. I was in her class for about one and half years. It was a great time with her and her class. She had great ideas and great books to teach us as her special students.

While I was in Anne Ellen's class, I also attended Ruth Elias' math class on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in the afternoon. She had good math lessons to teach us. I learned a lot of math such as fractions, decimals, division, and multiplication. She was a great teacher. Now I know more about math than before.

And I also attended Richard's evening GED class for a while. He had great GED lessons for us, and we also learned about mathematics. I learned about the essay and it was really hard to write a five-paragraph essay.

After that, I attended Darlene's transitions class in the morning. In this class we have learned analogies, news words, and math too. She was a very nice teacher, and had great ideas. We have learned a lot of things. Sometimes we learned about social

studies and sciences.

Northside ABE is a very great school with great teachers. I am proud that I have been attending this school, and I hope that I will be at this school until I get my GED.

*Kee Khang is 25 years old and is originally from Laos.*

## Winter in Minnesota

*Mikhail Bas, Minneapolis*

Winter is a very big season. Winter in 2009 is very cold. People wear hats and gloves. The days are short. The nights are long. It is slippery. Many people fall in the winter and break their arms and legs. Many inches of

snow fall in the winter. It is not good.

Winter in Minneapolis in 2009 is colder than winter in Belarus. Sometimes winter in Belarus is colder than winter in Minneapolis. It was in 2007.

In winter I like to observe children playing. They make snowmen and throw snowballs. The children go sledding. I like winter holidays, Christmas and New Year's. They are very big holidays. Minneapolis is very much decorated in winter's holidays. I like holiday parades. For the children, the best way to enjoy winter is winter playing, skating, skiing, but for me, the best way to enjoy winter is to sit in my apartment with my family and watch TV.

*Mikhail Bas is originally from Belarus.*

## About My Country, Laos

*Manolak Sivongsay, Prior Lake*

**I**n my country, Laos, there are so many different things than the United States. My country has very warm weather. It has only two seasons, summer and spring. In the spring it is windy and dry. In the summer it rains a lot and is very hot and humid, but this season is good for the farmers. The most famous crop grown in Laos is rice. Other crops grown are fruits like bananas, papayas, coconuts, and almost every kind of vegetable. The time difference is very big because the day here in the US is nighttime over there. In my country, the driving age must be 15. There are no rules for drinking and driving, and children can buy alcohol.

The national holiday is April 15 to 17. All the schools, companies, and government offices are closed. They call this holiday the Laos New Year. Everybody celebrates for three days. They throw water on each other. Some families party in their own house. They

invite a lot of friends and family to come enjoy the party. The meaning of doing a party in your house is that you will have good luck in the New Year. A lot of people like to go back home to see people they love and respect to celebrate together.

## My Grandpa's Farm

*Safio Ismail, Moorhead*

**M**y grandpa's farm in Somalia was a very large farm. It had many kinds of plants. The first part had tomatoes, onions, garlic, potatoes, broccoli, lettuce, cucumbers, spinach, and peppers. This part was a vegetable garden.

The second part had mangos, oranges, and bananas. This part was an orchard. My favorite fruit was banana. Banana was a very sweet thing in Somalia.

The third part had many kinds of animals like camels, cows, goats, sheep, horses, and bulls. When I was 13 years old, I visited my grandpa's farm. I liked the third part best because it had my favorite things. My grandpa gave me a gift of a lamb. My brothers and sisters got kid goats. My siblings' gifts were on the farm but I took my lamb to my house. She was two days old and I fed her every morning. I loved my grandpa's farm because it was beautiful.

## My Countries

*MaLee Vue, Minneapolis*

**I** like my country of Laos because we had the freedom and independence to go hunting. You don't need a license or to pay income tax. Your gross pay is your money. There is no payroll, deductions, or paychecks. You want to visit the doctor, you pay. But if you are hospitalized and you are poor, you just pay a little bit. I remember a long time ago—April

6, 1991—I went to the hospital and it totaled \$5,500. My benefits paid and I only paid \$300.

If you have a lot of money you can do anything you like. You can be a professional. Here in the United States, if you have a lot of money you can think about opening a store on your own. It's easy to own your own business. I like it that here in the United States men and women have equal rights and it is easy for women to work at home and not outside. I don't like, however, that you need a license for so many things. If you want to open a little store you must have a license. It is difficult for some.

## A Miracle

*Immaculee Adjamah, Saint Paul*

I am thankful to the American government for establishing a lottery for visas. When my son won a lottery visa, this was a miracle for my family. He had just finished his university studies. There were no jobs in my country, Togo. Young bachelors went into villages, bought wood and charcoal and then went to sell it in cities. Other young people drive moto-taxis to survive. Life is very hard in my country. Government members do nothing to change the situation. They are always thinking of how they can fill their own pockets.

Oh, how I love my country! It is a small, beautiful country on the Atlantic Ocean. It has a beautiful beach. But famine, sickness, death, and robbers rage. I praise the Lord for opening this exit for me. America is really a shelter for many people in the world.

I came to the US with my son. I am living in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I am studying English for free at the Hubbs Center. This is where I meet people from all over the world, such as Somalia, Ethiopia, China, Thailand, Laos, Viet Nam, etc. Some women who speak

French are my best friends. After school at the Hubbs Center, the phone links us up for exchanging our thoughts.

I haven't forgotten my country and my people who continue to suffer. I know one day Jesus is coming to stop this life of suffering.

## The Best Place in My Life

*Ei Yang, Minneapolis*

Coming to America is the best time in my life. This country is the one that everyone in the world wants to visit or where they want to start a new life. Whoever has come to this country is the luckiest person. America is the door to enter to improve knowledge and get a better job.

Do you think coming to this country is the best time for the foreigners?

Coming to America is the best time in my life because I never had as good a life as when I came to this country. When I lived in my hometown, I never had a good house or car like here. I didn't live in the city. I lived far away from the city. What I had was just a little house that was covered by dry reed and walled by split bamboo. There was no car, no road, just a path for walking. People carried things by bamboo basket. Now, I live in a good house and drive a car.

America is the most popular country in the world, so most of the foreigners want to come to this country. The way to come to this country is not as easy a way as someone may think. It is complex, and everyone should go through many steps.

I never saw a country with unlimited education like America before. In this country they open the door widely for everyone who is interested in education, no matter what your race, gender, and age. In my country I saw and knew they care about race and age. For example, in Laos I have some cousins who



lived far away from the city, and they didn't have an opportunity to go to school when they were young. Also, in Thailand, for example, if you are Hmong or the minority when you are at high school, the school officials treat you equally. But when you finish your high school and you want to go to college or university, if you are the minority, then you never have a chance to go.

This country is not so easy to get into, but now I have a chance. This is the best time in my life. Sometime, I promised myself that I would never miss the opportunity to start a new life in America. Don't waste the chance that you and I never have had. This is the time to improve my and your life.

*Ei Yang is originally from Laos.*

## My Beautiful Country, Greece

*Elizabeth Mihailidis, Cottage Grove*

**M**y name is Elizabeth Mihailidis and I would like you to fly with me to my beautiful country, Greece. Greece has over 4,000 years of history, the second longest in the world after Egypt. You can enjoy everything! There are beautiful mountains, all green, wells, almost 5,000 islands with colors of blue, azure, and white, and sky, sea, and sun. There are flowers all over, long beaches on every island, and coastal cities such as Rhodes and Mykonos. The life starts there at 12:00 a.m. and goes to the sunset. On Santorini, you can see the most magnificent sunset and many more charming islands. Also you can enjoy the Greek cuisine such as delicious foods, different sweets, breads, and excellent wines. You can feel like an ancient goddess—only in

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You can feel like an ancient goddess—only in Greece, the place where it started.

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Greece, the place where it started.

Almost half of my life I enjoyed everything. Greece now for me it is a sweet dream. Eight and a half years ago I came to my favorite America. It is now my life. I have my husband and my beautiful daughter and I am very happy.

## Education for Forgotten People

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

**I** was born in Burma, in Southeast Asia and a very beautiful country. When I was three years old, our family moved to Northern Shan states where there are many ethnic minority groups. I grew up there, attended school there, and had many friends there too.

I had heard of many problems between the Burmese peoples and minority groups. For example, there are no Shan teachers or education assistants to help the kids in the classroom. All teachers who taught in school are Burmese teachers and the text books are in the Burmese language too. When I was in high school they told me that we had no self determination, neither did the Shan state. The state is just the name and it's controlled by the Burmese socialist government. Most of my friends in school decided to go to the jungle and join the Shan revolution army. We never saw them again until then. When I finished my high school, I moved to Karen hill and started teaching the Karen kids there.

First we had to build the small school building and play ground for kindergarten to second grade. We had to dig a trench for safety. We had to plant crops and find foods by ourselves. In ten years, the small school became a high school. The very small village became a township and there was a hospital, police station, banana farms, saw mill, shops, and the

center of the region. But in 1997, there was a Burmese military government offensive in the area and we all became refugees in Thailand.

We started building a new school with bamboo post, bamboo wall, and the roofing was plastic. The table and the bench were bamboo too. We never gave up in our education for the Karen people. In two years, we got a contract with the Netherland's nongovernmental organization. Then our school building changed. The roofing was thatches, the post was wood. We got green boards and other teaching materials.

Three years later an actress named Angelina Jolie came to our camp and gave some help for vocational classes. So we started



*Luan Vu, Waite Park*

to open the sewing, cooking, mechanic, and agriculture training center. There is a soccer and basketball field. In the next year we got some help from Mr. Bill Gates. So students started to get the computer for learning. In 2005 I got a chance to come to this country and became a student again. Hopefully in the future I want to be a teacher in my small village again.

## Euphoria

*Bethany K., Shakopee*

I was filled with a feeling of gratification as I pulled in the sandy gravel driveway. In my glazed, hazel eyes was the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. The old, Victorian-style home, complete with enclosed porch, was the color of an extravagant yellow lily with cream trim. The background was set with bright green rolling hills full of small oak trees and pale purple and white wildflowers. I took a deep breath of fresh air as I gathered my luggage from the trunk and walked up the few steps to the bed and breakfast. I was about to spend the most relaxing five days of my life in this extremely serene setting.

The creaky screen door had a rustic sign with white painted letters saying, "Welcome, Come On In!" There was a grand staircase to the left, a common area filled with antique furniture to the right, a long light-filled hallway dead ahead, and a desk at the foot of the stairs containing a service bell and guest sign-in log. I couldn't help but gaze around the room at all the antique photographs of ancestors and English settlers.

I turned around to find a tall dark-haired woman standing at the desk. She spoke in a soft tone and greeted me with a pleasant handshake and wide smile.

"Welcome Mrs. Romo, I've been expecting you! Your room awaits, will your husband be joining you?" I mentioned my husband would be along before dinner. She smiled and said, "Enjoy your stay and let me know if you need anything!" I thanked her and headed upstairs to freshen up and settle in before dinner. The room was painted a luscious cream with a mint green border. A flowing canopy draped over the king size bed. A plush comforter matched the color scheme and an overload of pillows covered the bed.

On the west side of the room was a private enclosed balcony that included a small table and two comfy chairs. I freshened up in a private wash area complete with a two person Jacuzzi. The room was perfect and had the sweet aroma of fresh lilacs that sent me into a state of euphoria.

## Where I Am From

*Román Ovillo, Minneapolis*

I'm from a green place with big mountains and beautiful views of small rivers crossing my town. It is wonderful to go hiking following the bank of the river with a gloomy place to go through and an open place where the sun is bright like gold. It is good to go hiking by a peaceful river with a small waterfall that takes you to the top of a mountain where the source starts, where a small breeze is like wind blowing in your face, and where the view is so wonderful. At night the sky is full of the stars where you lie down watching the sky and counting the stars, where you never see the snow falling down except only at the furthest mountain and it looks like they are playing with the stars.

*Román Ovillo is 25 years old and is originally from Ecuador.*

## Silly Questions!

*Adriana Marcela Alfonso Fagua, Woodbury*

My name is Adriana Marcela Alfonso Fagua and I am 27 years old. I am from Colombia and I came here to the United States for a length of nine months to improve my English language. Actually I am a Language Ambassador at Nuevas Fronteras Spanish Immersion School. That means that I am the Spanish teacher's assistant. I have had a lot of funny and interesting experiences

which have all helped me to reach my main goal to improve my English language.

It has been wonderful for me to hear about my country, Colombia, here in the United States. However, I wonder why some Americans don't know some good things about it. It's kind of sad, but on the contrary, I make fun of this wrong information. I have to figure out why nowadays in this country some Americans have asked me some silly questions like, "Do you have airports in your country? Do you have computers? Do you have a president? Do you have ice-cream? Do you have big buildings?" I realize that these occurrences are due to three main reasons.

First of all, the media sometimes only relays the bad information about my country, so people from here just listen to the bad news and in this way they are creating a bad image of Colombia. Second, the people are not interested in knowing about an underdeveloped country like mine, so because of that, there are a lot of misconceptions. And third, some people don't want to realize that there are more things outside of their world, that there are more people to know, places to visit, and more information to read.

Most people don't know that Colombia has the smoothest coffee, the most beautiful emeralds, the largest variety of bird species around the world, and the second biggest Gold Museum. It has famous singers like Shakira and Juanes, writers such as Gabriel García Márquez who won the Nobel prize in literature in 1982, and artists like Fernando Botero.

I know that my country is not the best, but I am proud of it because I was born there and I know that it has a lot of wonderful places, people, food, flowers, and landscapes to offer to the entire world. I love my country and I will until I die.

# *I Am From a Place*

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*I* am from a place where the sea surrounds the land. The rivers and the farms are together. A place where there is a beautiful sky and stars during the night. In the morning the sun is shining and the wind is smiling as it is raining. I am from a place where the girls are receiving and hearing poems and songs with smiles from a man who feels love for the girls. I am from a place where there are two waters mixing together. When you taste one side it tastes sweet and the other side tastes salty.

Africa is one of the seven continents, but I am from Somalia. Somalia is situated by the horn of Africa. Somalia has the longest national coastline (3025 km) in Africa. Somalia is a country that has farms, products of fish from the sea and animals such as cows, camels, goats, and sheep. Before the civil war, Somalia was an exporter of labor to other members of the League of Arab States.

I was born in Kismayo. Kismayo is the fourth largest city in Somalia. Kismayo is a beautiful city. It has beaches and farms. Twenty minutes drive from Kismayo there is a river. There is not only a river, but you also can see where the water from the river and the water from the sea mix.

*Abdullahi*

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*Abdullahi Mohamud is an ESL student in the Northside ABE Program. He is 28 years old and lives in Minneapolis. He is originally from Somalia.*

## My Life, My Country, and Culture

*Elizabeth Galanay, Saint Louis Park*

**H**i! My name is Liz. I am from the Philippines, officially known as the Republic of the Philippines. It is a country in Southeast Asia with Manila as its capital city. The Philippines is a tropical country with fascinating landscapes, active volcanoes, splendid beaches, coral waters and tropical forests. It has natural resources such as agriculture, forestry and minerals.

There are three island groups in my country: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Mindanao is the second largest and eastern most islands in the Philippines. My family and I are from the city of Cagayan de Oro. Through the warm and hospitable people that city became more known as “The City of Golden Friendship.”

Our variety of foods is influenced by Spanish and Asian cuisines.

One of my passions is cooking. I was a restaurant

owner. My kids and grandchildren helped me run the restaurant which made it a more fun and wonderful atmosphere for our customers.

Filipinos’ favorite pastime is videoke/karaoke. Filipinos are known as music lovers. During celebrations such as birthday parties, fiestas, Christmas, and so forth, having videoke/karaoke is a tradition of most Filipinos. My family and I love to sing. We are not only music lovers but music is a part of our life.

I love and value my family; they are my primary welfare more than anything. Regardless of the liberal influences, the family remained the basic unit of our society.

This is one of the Filipino traits. Some day I hope my family and I will be together here in Minnesota. I’m proud being a Filipino.

## My View of America’s Life

*M. A., Minneapolis*

**O**nce I had arrived in America I saw the world differently. First, America is full of misleading images, facts, and truths. You can trust anyone but that makes me more careful, more clever, and gives quick thinking. Second, I try to be American, don’t greet people all the time because you might not be answered, wear many clothes, etc.

I think everything was changed for me, even when I talk with my family and my friends. They were surprised and they said, “You are reasoning like Americans.” Some said, “America has changed you quickly.”

And I answer, “America is a good teacher. If you had to be alone in your apartment, wake up early to go to school or to work especially in winter time, and had to pay for every mistake or irresponsibility

you have done, you would change too.”

Everything is helpful in this country. But if you look at the food, it is not helpful, not encouraging for nutrition. There is too much fat food. People are too fat, otherwise, everything is big, people, food given to you at every occasion, etc. Everywhere, they give you food. Even at church every Sunday, you have food. People don’t realize that they eat too much. Me, I pay attention to my diet, and thank God, there is my country’s food here. I make my own food, I eat a lot but I stay skinny.

*M. A. is 32 years old and is originally from Togo.*

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The Philippines is a tropical country with fascinating landscapes, active volcanoes, splendid beaches, coral waters and tropical forests.

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## My Immigrant Dream

*Natividad Castillo, Eagan*

**M**y name is Natividad. I moved from the state of California four months ago. I lived there for almost 16 years very happily with friends and some family. California is a beautiful state. It has a lot of places to visit like Disneyland, Hollywood, Universal Studios, and San Diego Zoo. There are famous beaches like Malibu, Santa Monica, and famous valleys like Fountain Valley, Napa Valley, and Yosemite Park. Now we are in Minnesota. It is nice and quiet with very friendly people and one of the best states with a high level of education. Also, people can appreciate the four seasons of the year. I hope to meet a lot of friends and visit many places.

*Natividad Castillo is originally from Bolivia.*

## My Country, Somalia

*Ubah Yare, Minneapolis*

**T**o a stranger the land must seem endless. The vastness startles the imagination of those who visit my country, Somalia. Contrary to common belief, we do not live in snow-covered cabins far from civilization. Most of us inhabit cities that do not seem to differ greatly from those to the south of us.

Observant visitors, however, will note some differences. The variety of our national make up is, I believe, more pronounced than it is in the American melting pot. A newcomer to America and a newcomer to Somalia manage to keep something of the culture and customs of his or her ethnic background. Traditionally, that stranger has thought of it as a mountainous, snow-swept land of Indians and Eskimos, so it comes as a surprise that many have seen none of these. Most of us, as I said, are city folk.

Certainly it can get very cold, but it can also get very hot. In Balcad, where I was born and raised, I worked in tropical conditions cutting survey lines through a forest that was like a jungle. The Eastern cities suffer in the humidity of July and August and people actually move each year from the heat in Bossaso to Qardho. Roses and flowers bloom in December, but of course we Somalis also know what it is like to be cold in the US when the thermometer drops to minus 25 degrees in a place called Minnesota. We are a country of extremes!

## Social Differences

*Claudia, Shakopee*

**I**n Mexico, life is different because many people do not have money. In the United States, life is different because I do not see people who are very poor. In Mexico, there are not many jobs and the pay is very little. In the United States, children are in school and have the opportunity to learn.

Summer is the same, because we go to the park or walk in the afternoon like in Mexico. Mass is the same as in Mexico. I like church because it reminds me of my country. In the United States it is better for families because there is work with very good pay and life is better than in Mexico.

Here it is difficult to find work because we need papers, in Mexico we do not. In Mexico it is very easy to find work and the pay is very good if a person has a profession. The person who has a profession makes a very good salary and lives very well.

## I'm In America

*Kyin Sein Wong, Stillwater*

**M**y name is Kyin Sein Wong from Stillwater. I have never seen snow in my country. Back in 1995 on October 30 at night at 10:30 p.m. I first time arrived in America, especially Minnesota. I got out at the airport. First time I see the snow. It was very cold. This day my cousin came to pick me up. She saw I was wearing the jacket. She told me this jacket is not enough for this winter. You need a winter coat and boots. So she brought me to go to the store. I have not much money. I have to look for the cheap one. Next day she brought me to go looking for a job. On the way, I saw many trees with no leaves. I asked her why all the trees died. She told me the trees are not dead. Winter came and all the leave fall down. Summer came and all the leaves come up again. But I did not understand what she said because in my country the whole year the trees have leaves. I know now. This day I found a job and next day I started to work. I work at the Lowell Inn restaurant. I am very happy to get a job. I came to America and have nothing. So I have to start my life again.

## Guatemala, the County of the Eternal Spring

*Dinora Sierra, Cottage Grove*

**H**i, my name is Dinora Sierra. I'm from Guatemala, Central America. I have lived in the United States since 1995. I have lived for the last eight years in Cottage Grove, Minnesota. I'm married and I have two princesses, eight and five years old.

I would like to share some about my country. Guatemala is a nation with problems, difficulties, poverty, wars, maybe like every other country, but in this time, I would

like to share the beauty that God put in my country. Around the world, Guatemala is called, "The Country of the Eternal Spring" because during the whole year, flowers grow everywhere. It's wonderful. There are many, many colors, with many kinds of flowers and trees that are small and large. It's something to marvel at. In the center of the city, there is a clock of flowers. This is a big clock made with beautiful and fragrant flowers. The weather is so nice.

I love so much my country, and I give thanks to my God for giving me the opportunity to be born there.

*Dinora Sierra is originally from Guatemala.*

## My Country

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

**M**y country is in the east. It is called Kaw Htoo Lie. Kaw Htoo Lie is very beautiful country. There are a lot of trees, bamboo and mountains. It is very beautiful. Sometimes when we went to picnic, we saw the beautiful birds. There are many kinds and their colors are not similar. Some are red, blue, green, yellow, brown and white. Some are big and small. There are a lot of waterfalls in my country so that sometimes when I went to picnic I felt very happy in my country.

*(Instructor's note: Kaw Htoo Lie is the name of the Karen people's area in eastern Burma/Myanmar.)*

## What I Miss from My Country

*Anonymous, Hopkins*

**I** am from Somalia. I miss many things about my country. One of them is the beautiful weather. In Somalia we have summer and spring. I miss wearing light clothes and sandals. There aren't any seasonal clothes like here in Minnesota. Also kids can

play outside any time except when it rains. Another thing I miss is our fresh food which is all organic. The last is all my friends and relatives who are still back home. I hope one day I will get back everything I miss.

## Winter

*Galina, Minneapolis*

Minnesota is the northernmost state of America. The climate in Minnesota is harsh continental. It means there are mild days, windy days, cold and chilly days in winter. The people living in Minnesota like their state, and they like winter. They like to spend their weekends outside. They like winter sports. They like to skate, ski (cross-country and downhill) and go on sleds. There are many places for it, free or paid. I feel surprise when I see children as young as three skiing fearlessly downhill. And what wonderful winter holidays! Especially Christmas and New Year. Merry Christmas! Happy New Year to all!

*Galina is 70 years old and is originally from Russia.*

## My First Time

*Cher Vang, Minneapolis*

Last month I went to California. Last month I went to California I flew from Saint Paul to Los Angeles so I connected and flew Los Angeles to Fresno. I saw many, many things different in Minnesota. The house had no basement and it was short. It's not cold, no snow in California. It looked like in my country and I really liked it. There was no snow, so you can go anywhere. It is no problem for you all the way. I stayed there for four days so I came back. I flew from Fresno to Portland, Portland to Saint Paul. It was the first day of snow fall in Minnesota, December

8, 2008. I really like California. Maybe I will go there next year 2010. See you the next story.

## Four Seasons

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

I have lived in America three years now. There are four seasons in the year, spring, summer, autumn and winter.

In spring the weather is warm, there are flowers blooming. In summer the weather is hot and there is sunshine. In autumn the weather is cool, there are yellow leaves falling and we have rain. In winter the weather is cold, there is too much snowing and it is cloudy. In four seasons, I like spring because the weather is warm and there are apricot flowers blooming.

## Peace in My Country

*Khadiga Kon Zail, Coon Rapids*

My name is Khadiga Kon Zail. I am from Sudan. I left my country on October 5, 1991. I went to Egypt. I stayed there for ten years then came to America on August 30, 2001. I arrived in Chicago and from there I came to Minnesota. Now I have been in America seven years. The time is running very fast.

Today I am glad to be here in America. I am so happy to have peace in Sudan, especially in the south of Sudan. I hope that peace will continue because my concern is for the leader. I hope they will keep the peace or the agreement between the northern and southern Sudan because we lost three million people in the war from 1983 to 2005. It is my dream to have freedom from northern Sudan. One day the dream will come true. I am very glad to have peace agreement between northern and southern Sudan.

I am very excited to write about my



country, especially southern Sudan. I want to thank all the world leaders and the American people. Thank you for helping us to make the dream come true for all southerners. My concern is whether our leader can keep the peace we now have. My hope is to be loyal to the peace agreement. My concern is about the children. They don't get an education in the south. I hope for those children to have a wonderful future. I want all the children in the south to say to the past, "Bye, bye, bye!" and welcome the future. I hope those children can have a good education and grow up healthy and safe.

The reality is we need each other all the time. We need to build our cities and towns. Together we can do everything we need for our children's future. I hope to see my people again. I miss my sister, brother, relatives, and friends. The important thing for the people of the southern Sudan is to unite, to organize, and to build the country we love for new generations.

I thank my teachers for teaching me how to read, write, and speak well. When you study it is a wonderful thing, because you develop knowledge and skills for the future.

*Khadiga Kon Zail is originally from Sudan.*

## The United States of America

*Anatoliy Khmel'nitskiy, Minneapolis*

**M**y first visit to the USA was in 1991. It was my first visit abroad from the USSR. I came to New York to visit my sister and I was shocked. For one month, I was in New York, Washington, and Atlantic City. I very much enjoyed the friendliness of the American people.

Now I have lived in the USA in the city of Minneapolis since 2001. My daughter and her family have lived here for 15 years.

They speak English very well. Now my grandchildren have graduated and they work. Minneapolis is a contemporary city and not as big as New York. Here there are beautiful buildings and nature, beautiful lakes and very kind people. The city is green and clean. I very much like the USA. It is my country and I am now a citizen of the USA. It is for me a very big honor and I am very proud.

*Anatoliy Khmel'nitskiy is 76 years old and is originally from Russia.*

## My Beautiful School

*Paw Nay Bu, Saint Paul*

**T**he things I will never forget in my life are my good friend and my school. In 2001, I came to school to study about the Bible. I met a lot of students who came from many camps and many areas. We didn't know each other. On the first day and we started to introduce ourselves and we took a test. After that we were divided by class. My school had eight classes. We had to study programs. I studied the English Bible and other things.

My school was very interesting.

Everybody wanted to study in my school. My school had so many programs for practicing songs and working in groups. Every morning we had chapel and every evening we had a worship program. At Christmas, we had a present exchange. Every year my school took pictures for a calendar, and every December my school had a holiday. We would visit another camp or village. Some students would visit their families. My school was very important in my life. All of my teachers were friendly with the students.

*Paw Nay Bu is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

## Adult Education

*Yasmin, Saint Louis Park*

I study at Adult Options in the education center. This school is important to me and to others. I try to come everyday to learn new things. I came to get a school diploma. I am happy that I found Adult Options in the education center to finish my high school diploma. We have lots of students who want to learn and to get their GED and high school diploma just like me. Also we have ESL students who want to learn English. I am happy to have this opportunity to learn.

*Yasmin is 23 years old and is originally from Somalia.*

## California

*Svetlana Larson, Woodbury*

My husband planned on going to California for work and I asked him to take me on the business trip with him. We flew in the early morning and arrived in California in the afternoon. I was so excited! I love to travel a lot and I like to see very many new places.

We were staying in a small city, Vacaville. My husband had to work every day and I had to spend the day time alone by myself. In the morning I woke up and went to the bus stop to go to San Francisco. The big comfortable bus drove to San Francisco, about two hours. When I arrived in the city, I walked on the street and shopped. I felt a little bit bored, spending time alone, but anyway I was very happy. San Francisco is such a beautiful city and the weather was amazing—warm and sunny. In the evening, when my husband finished work, he drove the car to San Francisco to meet me. We went to Fisherman's Wharf and enjoyed time together.

## Friendly

*Jerome, Woodbury*

I am a Belgian who was born in Africa. When I moved to Brussels, Belgium, I was 20 years old and it was my first time in Europe.

Brussels is a very nice town with a lot of infrastructure. There were many things that were new in my life like the metro, high speed trains, etc., but my surprise was about people's behavior. People are not friendly. To say hello to someone is like saying something bad, and when the people laugh, it is not sincere. The people are distant. You must use a person's last name when speaking to them, and you need to use Mr. or Miss!

The pace of life is very fast in Belgium, and the people drive very badly and are very impolite about directions. My conclusion was that modernization goes without courtesy and some good manners! The pace of life in a big city changes the basic behavior of people! When I moved from Belgium to the US, I saw the difference. Here, people are friendly and fun. If you say hi, someone answers! If you need help, you find it! It really surprised me because having seen the bad climatic conditions of Minnesota, I was thinking people would always have sad faces—not happy. That just shows that in all circumstances of life, try to stay friendly.

## Health

*Asha Ahmed Hassan, Saint Paul*

In my home country there is better health than in the United States. My home country is healthier because my country has fresh food, fresh fruits, fresh meats, and we even have good weather.

## My Country, Burma

*Ma Nay Paw, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Ma Paw. My country, Burma, is very beautiful. My country has rivers, mountains, big beautiful flowers, and many trees. In my country I was a farmer. I planted and weeded many hours. I planted rice and many bushes in the soil. I usually planted banana and melon and mango and many bushes. In my country there are many animals and there are usually many vegetables. With my family I ate food and was happy.

## An Introduction

*Bee Yang, Minneapolis*

**I** am from Laos, located in Asia. I estimate there are about 50 million people in Laos. The interesting thing about the place is that there are a lot of mountains, rivers, trees, gold, and many other things. This is interesting because visitors are going to see the waterfall on the river and to see animals in the zoo. I am telling about my culture. Some culture is inside the home, some culture is outside. Also, we celebrate New Years, King's birthday, and in November we have a party giving thanks to God. In the future I want to visit my country and sometime I will go to live again. It is my country.

*Bee Yang is originally from Laos.*

## The Good Things about My Native Country, Mexico

*Alexandra Barreto, Elk River*

**M**y native country, Mexico, is very different from the USA. In my native country we have different food and a different type of life. In my country we eat spicy food,

a lot of tortillas, and the weather is always hot. You can walk to the different places like stores, schools, and sometimes to the beach. In the USA, they have different food, type of life, different weather, and you can't walk to the store. They always have to use the car. And the food in the USA is not spicy. They do not eat tortillas. In the USA you have spring, summer, winter, and fall and in Mexico all year it is hot. Well, in June, July, and August, it is raining.

Another type of difference of life in the USA to my native country is that in the USA, you always have to do the same thing. You have the same stuff to do and worry to pay the rent, bills, and food if you have money. In my native country every day is different. You always have something new to do every day, and you don't have to worry about paying rent and bills because in my native country you live in your own house that has belonged in the family for generations. Some people rent, but it is very different from the USA because it is cheaper.

## El Salvador

*René Quintanilla, Minneapolis*

**I** am from El Salvador. El Salvador is located in Central America. Seven million people live there. Visitors find this place interesting for the weather and a lot of interesting beaches. The beaches have white sand and palm trees. There are important traditions like the holiday of Good Friday. The people are mostly Catholic or Christian. The Holy Week is celebrated every year by all people. I visit my country every two years. I would like to live in El Salvador when I am retired.

## My Country

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

**M**y country, Mexico, is very big and has lots of big cities. The temperature is not cold. It is very good. My country has beaches and many mountains. All the buildings are concrete. Mexico has 31 states and one federal district. The federal district surrounds Mexico City, the nation's capital. I lived in the city of Luvianos with my family. We are eleven in my family, seven brothers, two sisters and my parents.

## Carlos

*Carlos Cayetano, Minneapolis*

**I** come from Mexico City. It is located on the North American continent. Approximately 106,682,500 people live in Mexico. There are many places, like the beaches and Aztec ruins to visit. Visitors find these places because they come from a cold climate and enjoy these places. Traditions are the dresses people use for folk dancing, the Mexican Revolution celebration, and the Day of the Dead on November 2. These are traditions because they are something that is passed on from the people who settle Mexico. I went to visit two times in three years. My family is there. It is a beautiful place.

*Carlos Cayetano is originally from Mexico.*

## Angel

*Ángel Jara, Minneapolis*

**I** come from Ecuador. It is located in South America between Colombia and Peru. This country has around 13 million people. The most popular place is the Galapagos Islands because people can find a lot of animals. Well, every town has its own traditions. Tradition

makes it special for the younger generation so they can continue the tradition for years. A lot of people visit almost every year. I wish to go back because the weather is great, especially for older people.

## The Town

*Miguel Ángel Bautista, Saint Paul*

**I** want to share something about the town where I was born. The town's name is San Isidro Presas, Hidalgo, Mexico. Its population is under 1,500 people, which means it's a little town.

Let's see, I will try to remember some years when I was younger. I have to ask myself some questions. Okay, I did it already. My town is a beautiful place, because it is green most of the whole year, except December, January, and February. The cold of this season is not like Minnesota, the lowest temperature reached is 5° C, which equals 41° F, but this is only in the morning and night. The other seasons are still warm, rainy some days, and sometimes others with hail.

Most people work like farmers, doing a lot of things, trying to provide the basic needs for their families. They grow corn, vegetables, and legumes. They also sell them to other states. They also sow grass for the animals, which is another way to make money. Being a farmer is so difficult, that's why a lot of them have to migrate to different places. The most common cities to migrate to are Mexico City and Tijuana, near to the border of the United States. Also, many people cross the border, because there are more jobs with better salaries.

*Miguel Ángel Bautista is 22 years old and is originally from Mexico.*

## An Introduction

*Mohamed Yusuf, Minneapolis*

I am from Somalia, located in East Africa. The population of Somalia is near 10 million. Most of them are younger and female. They are 65% of the population of Somalia. Visitors are interested in the forest, because that forest, it is very old and beautiful. There are important traditions in Somalia, such as folklore, dancing, and things that make these traditions special. These traditions show the difference of the people. You can go to Somalia if you take the airplane. For myself, I try to stay in the United States to get a stable life.

*Mohamed Yusuf is 29 years old and is originally from Somalia.*

## Why Minnesota

*Dionisio Sánchez, Crystal*

Many times, when I lived in Mexico, I knew that one day I'd come to the US. And why Minnesota? Well, this state is quiet, small, and so cold. I came from a big city, probably the biggest city in the world. Through the years I have been learning new things and getting experience with something different.

I would like to talk about my first day in the US. I felt alone and I didn't know anyone. I couldn't speak English and I had only a few dollars in my wallet so I tried to find a job. I got in at an American restaurant but nobody spoke my language and I had to quit. Three weeks later I found a job in a Japanese restaurant. It was really hard but I'm still working there and I learned to cook a new style of food. I'm meeting people from different countries and trying to improve my English. I speak a few words of other languages too.

Another thing that is very different from

my home country is the weather, I like the winter in Minnesota, but it is so long. We have similar holidays, like Valentine's Day, New Year Day and Christmas Day. I miss and I love my country, but I'm proud about my life in United States.

*Dionisio Sánchez is 39 years old and is originally from Mexico City, Mexico.*

## Miguel

*Miguel Palmas, Minneapolis*

I am from Mexico. Mexico is located on the North American continent. There are approximately 110 million people living there. Beaches like Acapulco, Cancun, Mazatlan, and Puerto de Veracruz are interesting to visitors. Visitors find it interesting because there are a lot of different plants, animals, and beaches. I visit Mexico every three years. I hope to live there because I have my parents living there.

## Untitled

*Anonymous, Hopkins*

Ethiopia is well known for 12 months of sunshine and exporting of sugar, cotton, leather, and coffee. The word "coffee" comes from Ethiopia. It is the name of the state called Kafe where coffee was found for the first time in the world.

In the world, Ethiopia is the second country next to Brazil for exporting sugar. In Ethiopia, the temperature is not hot or cold. It is really comfortable for the life of everything. Farmers in Ethiopia grow their crops two times a year. In Ethiopia governmental school from elementary to high school is free. Now, students pay for university and college, but before they did not pay anything for university and college. We have also private schools that cost a lot of money. People can use whichever they want.

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# *Loved Minnesota*

*Mario Estrada, Brooklyn Center*

**Peace is like Minnesota.  
Because I love winter and like this state  
because I have so many opportunities.**

*Mario Estrada is originally from Yoro, Yoro, Honduras.*



# Memories

## I Grew Up In Mexico – Guadalajara, Jalisco

*María Reynoso, Minneapolis*

I used to live in a big town. I used to talk with my mom. I remember my school. When it was break, I bought lunch when I felt hungry. I wore a white shirt and a dark blue dress. I remember my teacher. She was a good teacher. I had her for three years. I used to play basketball in gym. I remember one of the teachers. She was very strict. If we talked or ignored her, then she hit our hands or shoulders. I remember my best friend from school. She was very nice. I miss her. She was my friend for all school. Now, I tell my son about her. I will see her in the future.

## First Snow Sight

*Gechang Wangsher, Saint Paul*

My name is Gechang. I'm from Laos. I've been living in the US for three years. I remember the first time I saw snow. It was my first winter. Snow had been falling all night long. In the morning, I got dressed to go

outside. I said to my niece, "Katelyn, I have a surprise for you!" She was surprised to see so much snow.

We went outside and I had a little trouble walking in the snow. She found a way to keep up with me. We walked to the park. We saw the kids going down the hill on their sleds and I thought Katelyn could slide down the hill, too.

Afterwards, we went over to the pond. There were many people ice skating. Before I knew it, Katelyn ran onto the ice. She spun around and around. I was scared I couldn't reach her. "Oh no," I yelled, "watch out for my niece!" I got Katelyn out of there fast.

It was time to head back home. On the way, I saw my other friend Mai. She was making a big snowman. She asked me to help her. Mai made the bottom part and I made the middle. Then Mai rolled a smaller ball to make the snowman's head. I put the snowman's middle in place, and then I looked around for Katelyn. She was nowhere to be seen. Where did she go? While Mai was putting a cap on the snowman, I called and called for Katelyn. We heard a person say, "Hey look!" Mai said, "That was Katelyn!"

Thank goodness I found her. She had been hiding behind a pile of snow.

That was enough snow for one day. We rushed home for some nice warm soup. My first day of snow was quite an adventure. Snow days are even more fun in the winter.

## My Life is Difficult

*Neng Vang, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Neng. I'm from Laos. My life was so difficult after my father died. I was clueless. Nobody loved me. I was helpless because I was still a child. My mother only taught me how to plant corn and rice at the farm. I had no time to go to school.

When I was 12 years old I went to the group of soldiers on the mountain. I saw four people who died in the street and many people got hurt. I looked at the top of the mountain. Only soldiers of Laos carried guns. I looked under the tree. There was my brother-in-law!

He got hurt and he needed help. I knew where his son was.

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His head was broken, but he still breathed all day long until the leader told him, "Your head is all broken and your wife is already dead. I will send your daughter to your family, so you should stop breathing, please."

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I ran down to the river to call his son for help.

I called him, "Sue! Sue!"

Then Sue answered me, "What?"

I couldn't talk because I was so scared.

He knew.

He said to me, "Take it easy, take it easy. Slow down my friend."

After a few minutes I got more breaths of air. Then I said, "Your father got hurt at the mountain."

We both ran back to the mountain to help them. Twelve soldiers got hurt at that time but they all lived. At that same time we lost a

great friend and his wife too.

His head was broken, but he still breathed all day long until the leader told him, "Your head is all broken and your wife is already dead. I will send your daughter to your family, so you should stop breathing, please. I know you love your family so much and we will miss you too."

Then he died.

It was very hard for such a young boy.

## Lost and Found

*Keyria Abduzez, Minneapolis*

**W**hen I was a child, I was missing for three days. My mom used to have a restaurant in the big market. At that time, I was two years old. That day my mom didn't have a baby sitter. She took my brother and me with her. My brother is older than me. He was four years old. The restaurant was so busy we played inside the restaurant until my

dad came from work. Before that, my mom went to buy something. We stayed with the worker.

My brother

and I ran outside. Nobody saw us when we were outside because the market was so crowded. We were confused. My brother got back to our restaurant, but I got lost. I didn't know where to go. One lady took me to her home. My family was so terrified. The lady didn't report to the police and kept me at her home. She tried to take me away from my family.

The morning of the third day she took me with her to the market. She was selling fruit. One of my family saw me. He was so angry, he called the police. He used to work for the



city council. He took me to my home. My mother was so happy. She couldn't find me for three days. She told me the story when I was older.

*Keyria Abduzez is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Tornado

*Roda Dahir Mohamed, Minneapolis*

I remember my first week in America when a tornado came through Missouri. All the trees fell down and all the lights went out. All night my children and I didn't sleep. It was very scary. All night we cried. It was very, very hot. We were sweaty. In the morning my caseworker came. She said, "Roda, Roda! Are you okay? Where are your children?" She told me to sit down and have something to drink. She told me to go to the basement next time. We didn't have lights or electricity for two weeks after that.

*Roda Dahir Mohamed is originally from Somalia.*

## The Doll with Blue Hair

*Nataliya Kochergina, Coon Rapids*

When I was eight years old, I received a beautiful doll with blue hair. I was so happy. At the time when I got this doll, I was sick. I was in bed. I only looked at my doll. This was the doll from the history about Pinocchio—the doll with blue hair.

But when my younger sister saw my new doll, she started to cry. My mom took my doll and gave it to my younger sister. I wasn't sad because I liked my sister very much. I only looked at how my sister was playing with my doll. When I felt good and could get up from bed, my sister and I played together with my new, beautiful doll.

I saved this doll for about 12 years, and

then my niece broke her. The doll with the blue hair was my best toy. It was my favorite doll. I often talk about it to my daughter. The doll with the blue hair from my childhood, I will remember always!

## One Day

*Santio, Minneapolis*

One day I needed a "match" for a cigar and didn't speak English.

I said to somebody, "Can I have a 'bitch'?" The person said, "Not me."

I said, "Sorry," but I needed to light a cigar.

The person said, "I understand, you need a match, but I am not bitch."

*Santio is originally from Ecuador.*

## A Life Lesson

*Cynthia Torres, Blaine*

I think I have had many lessons in my life, but I want to share this one. When I was a little girl, I played all the time with my brother and my sister in my house. One day my mother told us that Christmas was coming and everyone needed to write to Santa Claus. I remember we did make a big list. My sister and I wanted a special Spa. I remember the advertising on the TV. You can cut your hair, you can paint your nails, and you can style your hair. We wanted these toys. My mother said, "Today is Christmas. Santa is coming. You need to sleep and tomorrow you can open your presents."

We were really happy. The next morning everyone opened his or her presents. My sister and I got the Spa. I remember my mother telling us, "It is just a game. Please don't cut your hair." We played all day. It was fun, but one day my sister cut all my hair. I felt

beautiful. When my mother looked at me, she felt really, really angry.

My mother asked me, "Who cut your hair?"

"Paola, my sister," I answered, "I look pretty you know."

My mother said, "Okay, you need to get a real haircut because your hair is so bad." My mother took my sister and said, "Okay, you cut your sister's hair so you are punished." And we both got our hair cut short. We both cried all day.

I think sometimes we remember this day and still talk about it.

*Cynthia Torres is originally from México City.*

## The Bad Day for Eating Fish

*Sophy Roëun, Saint Cloud*

When I was 12 years old, one day my dad bought a big fish from the fisherman. It was called baloung and was about ten pounds. When my dad bought it somebody said, "Nobody wants that fish, only uncle." That's what they called my dad. My dad didn't know what they meant because everybody liked to eat small fish and my dad wanted to eat a big fish.

Dad bought the fish for my mom to cook. Mom cut half of the fish head to make soup and half to make dry fish. When the soup was done, my dad invited my grandfather's family to eat together. Everybody said the soup was so delicious. They ate until it was all gone.

Thirty minutes after eating soup mom didn't feel good. She had a headache and felt exhausted. Later she breastfeed my little brother Somnang, he was 12 months old. At midnight everybody was throwing up. They all woke up except me and my third brother. We were fat and strong, our bodies could fight the poison. My grandmother knew

the poison was from the fish. She boiled tree leaves and gave it to everybody. It really could stop them from throwing up any more.

In the morning my little brother got sick but my mom and dad didn't know how bad. They just gave him medicine. It didn't help him. His body just went soft. My dad took him to the hospital but it was too late. The doctor just took him for an exam and took care of him for a week. Unfortunately, he died. Mom and Dad

were so very sad until their bodies felt sick. I had nothing to help them feel better. I was so sad too.

The dry fish also has a strong poison. My mom wanted to throw it away but my uncle said it's okay because it was dry. So he takes it to eat and it made him sick too. Then we told people we knew not to eat that fish forever. That's why I remember it forever too.



*Kenneth Bohlman, Faribault*

# *Injustice and Corrupt Officials*

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I was born in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. I grew up playing soccer like many children did. I played for several low-level teams in the neighborhood. Then I went to train with a big team, where my father was a coach. Slowly, I started improving and finally I got the chance to play. After one year of my soccer journey, in 2000, I was selected for the Ethiopian Under-Sixteen National Soccer Team. We participated in the East and Central Africa tournament, which was held in Kenya. We placed third and received the silver medal. Furthermore, in 2001, I was selected for the Under-Nineteen National Team to play in the Youth African Cup of Nations tournament, which was held in Ethiopia. We played with big African teams such as Cameroon, Egypt, South Africa, and Angola. We played five games of which we won two, lost two, and tied one. I played in all the games except one when I came out as a substitute. We placed fourth out of 16 teams and qualified for the World Cup for the first time, which would be held in Argentina.

After the round of tournaments we took two weeks off for further preparation. When my original team came back for the first session, we were surprised by unexpected changes. We assumed the same team would travel, train, and play together unless a complicated situation arose. However, I saw 20 new players and three new coaches join our team.

As the day of departure approached everything became progressively difficult. Governing officials of the team fired the former coach and his assistant, and replaced them with the new coaches. Furthermore, seasoned players were also slowly being replaced by the new additional players, one by one. Finally, I was replaced, which I never expected. When I heard this shocking news, I could not stand on my feet. I have never felt this way in my entire life because my performance and even my contribution to the team were much better than most of the players included in the squad.

Finally, I figured out that my replacement was not a coincidence, but a planned injustice. They dropped me because I was not from the capital city, I am not one to complain, and because I am Oromo. Finally, the team traveled to Argentina, and even if they played well, they lost all the games they played.

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*Aglan*

*Aglan Hussein is an ABE student in the Volunteers of America Program. He is originally from Dire Dawa, Ethiopia and came to the United States five months ago. He is 23 years old and lives in Minneapolis. In his free time he enjoys watching and playing soccer, movies, and running.*

## A Miracle from God

*Haredo Ali, Minneapolis*

**M**y first memory was a miracle from God. When I was three and a half years old, our family moved to the jungle where there was no water. My older brothers milked the camels and they brought us the big bowl of camel's milk. The other children drank the milk, but I refused and cried.

I said, "I want water!" My older brothers and sisters tried to make me drink the milk, but I clenched my teeth and cried. I said, "I really want water!" I looked to my right side. My father was standing there. I cried loudly again, and said, "Oh, my father—WATER!" again and again.

My father was a godly person. He was always praying, praising and begging God. My father looked up to the sky and prayed, "Oh, our God, send us water again."

I saw a little white cloud rise from the east. I was still crying and looking at the cloud. The cloud became a brownish-red color and was getting closer to us. The rain began. We filled all our containers with water—even the plates for food and the pots.

*Haredo Ali is originally from Somalia.*

## The First Time I Took the Airplane

*Sang Net, Rochester*

**I**'m Sang. The first time I took an airplane was when I emigrated to the USA from Cambodia. The flight made me scared, and I was afraid because I had never taken an airplane. When I went into the airplane, a stewardess introduced how to use the equipment when the airplane was uncomfortable. I didn't understand what they

were saying; my friends and I were worried. When the airplane went from the airport, my seat was reclined and it moved and I was afraid. My friends laughed at me. One asked me, "What are you doing?" I said nothing, but my face was very red and my eye was turned around. Other passengers looked at us. They laughed, and we laughed too. Afterward everything was okay, but we were still worried because we stayed 12 hours in the airplane. It flew over the sea.

Next, we arrived in Los Angeles, California. We looked like chickens and baby chicks. All that time we were together people looked at us and thought we looked funny. Then we were looking for the gate to come to Minnesota. Other people went to other states

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All that time we were together people looked at us and thought we looked funny.

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and a girl cried because she was afraid she lost her way; she didn't see her parents come to get her in the airport.

Afterwards, I left her and my friends when I came to Minnesota.

I was surprised because it was snowing, and I never saw snow before. I looked up in the sky that time. It was very cool and my hand and my leg shook. I couldn't even stand up. Then my family told me it was snow and they asked me, "Do you like it?" I didn't say anything, and I thought in my mind that Minnesota was a nice place to live and I liked it. It has four seasons, summer, spring, fall, and winter. Then I arrived home and we were happy together the whole night.

I was excited about my trip, and I will always remember it in my life.

*Sang Net is 38 years old and is originally from Cambodia.*

## My First Experience of Snow

*Toua Lee, Minneapolis*

When I first came to the US in September, 2004, I didn't see any snow because it was still summer. I asked my uncle, "When the snow comes, I want to see it." He said, "It comes in the winter. When it comes you will see a lot of snow, and it is very cold too."

Then after three months had passed, the winter season came. The temperature was ten below. My fingers and my ears were very cold. When I go outside I have to wear a big coat all the time. At that day, my uncle told me that, "Tomorrow morning you will see a lot of snow on the ground. I watch it on the news." After I heard that it made me very excited and I could not wait to see because it was my first time to see snow in the US. I want to touch snow with my hands. I want to taste snow in my mouth, and I want to take a picture with snow. I had never seen snow in my country. I only saw snow on the TV when I live there.

In that morning, I saw snow with my eyes. I touched snow with my hands, and I took a picture with my family on the snow ground together. That was my first winter time in the United States and I was very impressed by my first sight of snow in my life.

*Toua Lee is originally from Thailand.*

## My Favorite Place

*Mai Yang, Saint Paul*

My favorite place in my home town was on the mountain. When I was 15 years old, my father always took me with him to the mountain to find food to feed my family. One day, my father and I went to cut trees and bamboo to rebuild our house. Then we took them home one by one, because a tree

was heavy. We took a half day to carry all the trees and bamboo that we needed. It made me feel so tired, but I enjoyed it.

Also, there were many kinds of animals living in our forest, birds, monkeys, bears, wild chickens, deer, foxes, and tigers. I liked to take pictures of them. Most of all, wild chickens like to live in the forest, not in the city.

One time my friend took me with him to the forest to catch wild chickens. We didn't know how to make a trap to catch them though. That time we got nothing at all. We decided to come back home. We asked the elder to show us how to make the trap. The elder told us to use bamboo. He showed us step by step until we knew how to make a trap by ourselves.

The next day we decided to go again. We also brought many ropes with us. When we reached the middle of the forest, we saw wild chicken scratches on the ground that looked still new. We looked around, and saw small bamboo that we could use to make a trap. Then we cut five of them and we used the rope to tie beneath the top of each bamboo. We also tied a small branch before we made a circle beneath. We used two sticks inserted into the ground that were straight up and two sticks were straight across that were untied. Then we cut some small branches of the tree to make a wall on both sides. We bent the bamboo down above the two cross-sticks and we put a small branch in the middle to hold the two cross-sticks. We used dry small branches to put on the top of the second cross-stick and put the circle rope on. After we finished, we decided to go back home. The next day we went to check our five traps, and we found out that all the traps held wild chickens tied by their legs.

*Mai Yang is originally from Thailand.*

## I Almost Died

*Gaby Guzmán, Minneapolis*

This is what happened in Mexico City. My mom got a new house and we went to the last appointment to pay the rest of the money. My mom and I were on the bus and we had a lot of money with us. We never thought of what would happen!!! In a couple of seconds a gang came onto the bus and one man was screaming at everybody. He wanted to get all of our money. We were very afraid and then he started to shoot everywhere and one shot came in my direction. I felt I would die in that instant. However the shot was in my window and the glass was broken. Then the man was afraid because he thought that the shot went into me. He stopped and got out of the bus very quickly and didn't take anything from us. I felt like my life was finished in that time, however, it didn't happen. I was afraid for a long time. Now I only have the memories in my mind, that's why I will never forget that experience.

*Gaby Guzmán is originally from Mexico City, Mexico.*

## My Childhood

*Mohamed Gaabane, Minneapolis*

I was born in a rural city, nearby the river people call Jubba. This river is in Somalia, my native country.

I remember when I was seven years old my mom gave me 100 pounds of corn with a donkey. She wanted me to bring the corn to the city to sell. Then with the money I got, I should pay for tea, sugar, and cloth for my sister. When I got to the city, I sold the corn and I got money. Unfortunately, when I received the money, I sat in a restaurant and started to eat bread and tea with milk. The donkey ran away and I spent all the money I

had in the restaurant. After 48 hours I found the donkey but I didn't have any money to buy sugar and other stuff my mom needed.

When I got home my mom was very angry and she kicked me out. After that I decided to go to a city. I followed the men who lived in these areas and who traveled with camels. The city was very far from there. It was like 200 miles from my home, but I got to the city safely. It was 10:00 p.m. and the sky was dark. I didn't have any money. I didn't know anybody. I looked everywhere and looked around every corner, but I slept in front of a house. It was an old model restaurant they built of trees and grass, but I slept very well.

In the morning it was hard to get up. I stood up fast and looked around. I saw the white man. He asked some questions but I didn't understand. He called the young man who asked me many questions like, "Where are you from? What is your family? Who do you know in the city?" I answered everything and the white man ordered the young man to give me tea and one donut. I ate and when I finished he said, "Wash all dishes in the restaurant." The whole day I washed dishes and at night I slept there. I lived there one year. I made a little money and I brought it to my mother at home.

## Surviving a Rebel Attack

*Fidencia Othaniel, Rochester*

The year was 1992. I was in South Sudan with my dad, my sisters and my brothers when my aunt came to visit and decided to take my daughter with her. Because all of her kids had died, my dad asked if I would let her. That night I decided to go and spend the night at my uncle's with his daughter. At 11:00 p.m. the rebels entered the town and the only thing I could hear was gun shots and

different sounds. Houses were burning, and people were dying, and the sky was filled with smoke.

After that day, I didn't know where everybody was—my daughter, aunt, brothers, sisters, my dad, the whole family. I was there without knowing what had happened to them. I was there without food, money, or even a place to sleep. A week later the fight slowed down and I started to look for my daughter and my family. I found Dad and he told me that my brothers and sisters were okay, but he didn't know if my daughter or aunt were okay. Two days later I was able to get to my aunt's house. There was no one left over from the burn, no sign of even a dead body. I didn't know if my aunt and daughter were alive or not. I was there just lost, and it felt like every day was night.

One day I was just walking around looking for dead bodies when a lady who was my

aunt's neighbor found me and said she knew where my daughter and aunt were and took me to them. We got there and I saw them for the first time in two weeks of the attack. It was unbelievable; it was just like a dream. I couldn't stop crying for 20 minutes. Two days later I went back to my dad to let them know that I had found my aunt and Rose. From then on I stayed with Aunt and Rose.

In 1997 we learned that Paul, Rose's dad, was alive, and he wanted us to join him in the US. On April 20, 2002 we finally joined him here in the US. The rest of the family is doing okay; my dad, aunt, brothers and sisters are fine. Here we have three more kids, two girls, one boy, and we're happy here in the US. This is what we had survived from.

## My Favorite Place

*Pao Chua Yang, Saint Paul*

My favorite place was my village when I was younger. My village was poor and not so big, but my village had many people, about 20 to 25 thousand. People in my village were very helpful. For example, if your house got very old and you wanted to change your house, you just walked to your neighborhood house and told them, "I want to change my house." Then your neighborhood came and helped you. About 15 to 30 people came to build your new house free for you, but you had to make breakfast and lunch for your neighborhood to eat. It just took about a week to build your house. That is why my village was my first favorite place.

Second, my favorite place was my soccer field because I like to play soccer.

My soccer field was very different from in the US. My soccer field in my village didn't have grass. It just only had ground, but I was happy to have a soccer field. When I went to play

soccer, I joined many friends in the soccer field and we had fun. Sometimes we played soccer with Thai and Laos people. We had some drinks and food and played the game.

Third, my favorite place was the mountain. My friends and I liked to walk up to the mountain three to four times a month. "Did you and your friends bring some things with you when you walked up to the mountain?" Yes, we did. We usually brought water and food when we walked up to the mountain because the weather in Thailand was very hot. The weather in Thailand had only three seasons. There is winter, summer, and spring, but wintertime in Thailand didn't have snow and was not so cold like in the United States. "What did you see when you went up to the mountain?" We saw all of

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Houses were burning, and people were dying, and the sky was filled with smoke.

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our village and many things would change in each month, like new houses, roads, and cut trees. Then we had more houses, roads, but fewer trees. That is why we liked to walk up to the mountain to see the new things and change.

My village, the soccer field, and the mountain are three favorite places when I was younger. I really missed them when I left my village. I think and I hope some day I will be back there.

*PaoChua Yang is originally from Thailand.*

## How I Met My Spouse

*Tuong Vi Nguyen, Cottage Grove*

One day was so beautiful, I went to the church and after church I went to the supermarket. I just walked in the door and then I saw someone. He seemed like he kept watching me and then he smiled. I am thinking, he smiled with someone else, not with me, and I kept walking to find my stuff I needed to buy.

Then he followed me and kept asking, “Do you want that I help you with something?” I said, “Yes! Can you help me to find a thing I want? I can’t find it.” Then he helped me to get everything I needed. After that I said, “Thank you,” and left the market.

Now, I was all ready sit in the car and I saw him run behind me and then he gave me his phone number. A week later I tried to call him, but you know what? That was a wrong number. I am thinking, “He’s teasing me.” After I called him a couple times I said, “Okay. That is it. I don’t think about him anymore.”

Two months later, I went to volunteer at church at a concert—I saw him again. I didn’t remember him.

And he was just looking at me and he

said, “I think I have seen you somewhere.”

“Yes! I think so too.”

Then he said, “At the market two months ago.”

“Now I remember,” I said. “You gave me a wrong number. I was trying to call you many times. It wouldn’t work.”

He said, “Really?”

And then I gave back to him the number he gave me last time.

He took it and said, “Sorry.” He asked to borrow my phone and he gave his number again.

After the concert he called me and asked me to go to dine tomorrow night to say sorry because he gave me a wrong number. The next night he came over to my house to pick me up.

*Tuong Vi Nguyen is originally from Vietnam.*

## My First Cold Winter in Minnesota

*Adriana Saldivar Hernández, Minneapolis*

I arrived in Minnesota December 23, 2005, at 6:00 a.m. by bus. I traveled from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico with my brother Ricardo and my nephew Kevin. My first impression was, “Wow! Too much snow everywhere.”

I lived first in St Paul in a big, big house. It was very old. My sister Elizabeth rented this house because it was low rent. My first week, I slept too much because it was cold outside. Everybody worked and I stayed in the house with my nephew Kevin. He was bored. “Hi,” he said to me. “I need to go outside aunt.” I said, “I’m sorry Kevin, it is very cold outside. I’m sick with a high fever.”

My second week I had problems breathing and my fever was high. I went to the hospital. I was scared the doctor gave me too much medicine and used a machine for breathing. The doctor said, “You have pneumonia; you



need rest and sleep. Go back to your house.” Two days later I felt better and I went outside for 15 minutes on the porch. In the next days I went outside, it was very cold. I had a big jacket, sweater, hat, gloves and snow boots. It is very, very different in my country. I never used snow boots and thermal clothes. The temperature is regular in the summer and cold in the winter but not the same as Minnesota.

In the next weeks I felt better. I needed to know Minnesota. I went first to the Mall of America with my family. My first winter was a bad experience, but now it is different. I have experience with the snow. I remember to use special clothes in the winter. I don't like the hospitals. I now play in the snow with my nephew and nieces. I'll forever remember my first cold winter in Minnesota.

*Adriana Saldivar Hernández is originally from Mexico, D.F.*

## My Little Nephew

*Anonymous, Stillwater*

It was early in the morning on Monday when my sister-in-law started having contractions. Two hours later her older son, my husband, and I heard the baby's crying, and our cute nephew was born. When I saw him for the first time it was amazing and I almost started crying because it was so wonderful to see, hear, and hold the baby that before I could just feel.

## Tulips

*Monique Gool, Minneapolis*

A long time ago my sister and I had a holiday and we didn't know what to do. My mother was in



*Riffat Anis, Saint Cloud*

the kitchen cooking dinner. We decided to go outside for a walk or just do nothing. When we were outside we saw the lovely flowers (tulips) from the neighbors. So we cut them because we wanted to give them to our mother. My mother was very happy with the tulips, but then she asked a question. “Where did you buy them?” So we said that we bought them in a shop but she didn't believe it. An hour later the neighbors called and they were very angry because all their flowers were gone. My mother was very angry and she told us to stay inside for the whole week and go to the neighbors and apologize.

*Monique Gool is originally from the Netherlands.*

## My First Casino Experience

*Paw Mu Kha, Saint Paul*

On Christmas morning I went to the First Baptist Church because the Burmese section had a celebration. A lot of people came there and were enjoying themselves. Many people brought foods. I enjoyed myself very much.

After that, one of my friends gave me a ride to a casino. I saw a lot of elderly persons playing casino, someone in a wheelchair, someone with a walker, and someone with a hanging drip piece. I couldn't believe my eyes because in my knowledge, I thought the casino was only for the bad person or for gambling. But now, I saw everybody at the casino was really interested in their machine and very nice. How wonderful I felt. I walked around and looked from place to place. Wow, nearly a thousand people inside. Then one old lady won 700 dollars. When I saw she was happy, I was happy with her, too.

But, I'm not daring to do like that because I know myself and I am always unlucky. One thing that made me smile was

some were smoking but above their head the notice wrote, “No smoking.” This was my first experience at a casino place.

*Paw Mu Kha is originally from Burma (Karen Nation).*

## My Funny Story

*Chrit, Saint Paul*

When I was a student, one time in the morning my grandfather was going to read the Bible. He was very old and he could not see the Bible very well, so he needed his glasses to see better. He couldn't find his glasses, so he called everyone who lived in the house to help him look for his glasses, but nobody could find them. Suddenly we heard him laugh very loud, “Here my glasses. They were on my eyes!” And everyone laughed and laughed with no end.

*Chrit is originally from Burma.*

## Radio

*Tchuyi Vang, Saint Paul*

The thing I enjoy doing in my free time is to listen to the radio. From Washington D.C., there was a radio station named “Radio Free Asia.” This radio station announced mostly politics in the world. I liked to listen to it.

One day when I came home from school, I opened my radio to listen to the news in Asia. The Radio Free Asia announced: “Laotian Communist soldiers went to kill the Hmong people in the jungle where the Hmong were living for a long time.”

That same day afternoon, Radio Free Asia declared that the Communist Laotian troop went to catch six Hmong girls who lived not far from Longtieng CIA military base in

Laos during the Vietnam War in 1975. These Laotian Communist soldiers took them to do sexual things that violated them. These Hmong girls were only 12 and 13 years old.

*Tchuyi Vang is 60 years old and is originally from Xieng Khouang, Laos.*

## Love for Your Job

*Aneudy Nuñez, Minneapolis*

Many years ago I had to live and work by myself in a poor countryside far away from my house. This place is called Paso Bajito in Jarabaco. It is located in the center of the Central Range of mountains in the Dominican Republic. This experience was really exciting for me for many reasons. I learned to appreciate my family more and the things that I had, and to survive by myself. I met a lot of people and made a lot of friends who were very nice and hospitable to me. In addition, I helped resolve the community's problems and educated poor people about health topics. I enjoyed nature, went to the river and mountains and visited beautiful places over there. Also, I ate really good and healthy food including vegetables and fruit.

However, I had a hard time there too because I did not know anybody there. I had to take three vehicles to get there, through really bad and dangerous roads, and usually on the top of the truck. I had to live and sleep alone in a house on the top of the mountain, without water and other city conveniences. I visited my family only every two weeks. I had to cook for myself, wash my clothes, and clean the house. I got very cold, and I had to wake up in the middle of the night to take care of sick people sometimes without light and in too much rain.

*Aneudy Nuñez is 27 years old and is originally from Santiago, República Dominicana.*

# *As I Remember*

*M*y mom crying in her room like she just got beaten  
I cry as he comes into my room as he hangs me by  
My ankles and beats me  
When he was all done  
All I could see were welts on me  
The skin all over my body felt as if  
It wanted to melt off my bones  
And as everybody laughs and I remember  
I was just a kid still so tender

*Kev-O, Duluth*

# *Unforgotten Night*

*Mu Ree La, Saint Paul*

*B*eautiful mountains  
The flow of streams  
Forever green forest  
My peaceful village  
I never will forget.  
Unfortunately, one night  
I heard a loud sound in my village  
Then, I asked my parents  
What was that loud sound?  
They answered me  
It's fighting in the village.  
The entire village was destroyed,  
burned and covered with smoke.  
After that, we all fled into the jungle  
The terrible night  
The terrible night  
I will never forget  
The terrible night

*Mu Ree La is originally from Burma.*

I want to share a crime with you guys. I am interesting this crime so much because it's so sad.

I remember when I was in Thailand, I saw and heard Thai people said, "In the zoo had a couple of monkey was special. They were in love so much, the wife was not lucky, she left the husband.

The husband was so sad, he didn't know what to do. One day, a person of the

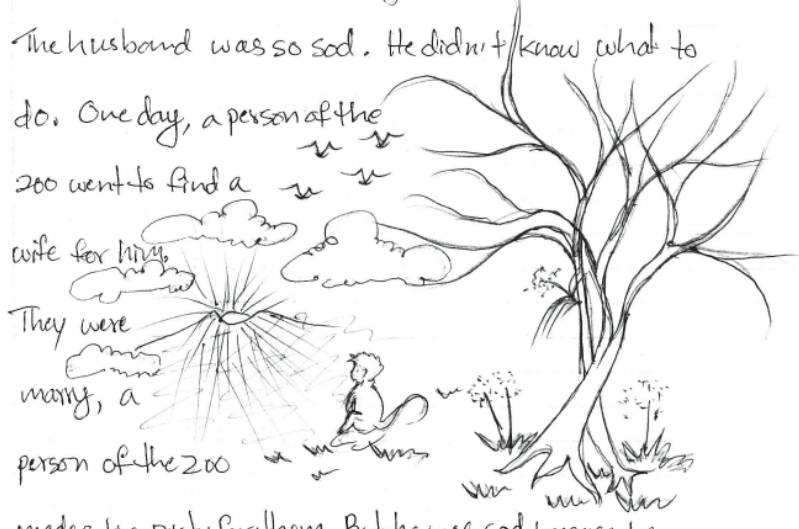
zoo went to find a wife for him.

They were many, a

person of the zoo

made a big party for them. But he was sad because he

worried by controlling. He lived with tears daily.....



from:  
Chue Thao

Chue Thao, Minneapolis

## A Man and Bicycle

*Long Thao, Saint Paul*

Ten years ago when I lived in the camp, I went to school one day. I saw a man riding his bicycle too fast, and the man fell down on the road. When he got up, he looked behind him, and he saw a tooth on the ground. He thought the tooth was his. He was very sad. He cried and was afraid. He took his hand to touch his teeth in his mouth, but the tooth on the road wasn't his. After that, he was very happy and laughed. He looked around him as if nothing happened. He said to me, "Thank you! Bye!" He rode his bicycle away, and then I went to school.

*Long Thao is originally from Hmong refugee in Thailand.*

## My Life in Laos

*Yia Yang, Minneapolis*

I remember when my grandma went to visit her sister who lived in a different city. One day in the morning, my friend and I went to the market to sell the vegetables. A man saw my friend and me. He told me he wanted to go with me. I told him not to go with me and then he was mad at me. I thought he was not a good person because he was a soldier. I was very afraid. I told my friend, hurry go home the man followed her. She then ran into her uncle while the man was chasing her. Her uncle yelled at the man and told him not to chase her anymore because she was scared and afraid.

I hurried and ran to the forest. I stayed in the forest for three hours. I think he didn't see me. I came up to a pond. I know my grandma was worried about me, and then I saw my

grandma come to the pond. I stayed near the pond. My grandma told me to go home. I was not scared of tiger and ghost. I was scared of a man.

## Attacked by a Hyena

*Damina Umar, Minneapolis*

When I was nineteen years old, I was attacked by a hyena. One night I went home from work on a farm. It was already dark. First the hyena hit me in the leg and I fell down. Luckily, some people helped me because I shouted. I was very scared.

*Damina Umar is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Growing Up in Somalia

*Anab Farah, Minneapolis*

I was a child in Somalia. I played outside. I had neighborhood friends. I helped my mother. I washed dishes and I swept the floor. When I came to the US it was difficult because the weather is different. My country is not cold. It is sunny and nice weather.

## Car Accident

*Hawo Ali Abshir, Blaine*

On October 11, I was in a car accident. All my family was in the car. My husband was driving the car. My car was a total loss. It was very shocking. My children said, "Back pain. Back pain." Next day we went to the hospital, but we were fine. Then my children said, "Mom, tomorrow we're going to school." When my children remember that day, they make fun, car hit us. We are fine, God thank you, we are fine.

*Hawo Ali Abshir is 34 years old and is originally from Somalia.*

## Life in My Country

*Valee Xiong, Brooklyn Park*

Back in the days when I lived in Laos,

I grew up living in the mountains. All year long the weather stayed hot. In the summer it was the time where flowers and plants grew. In the morning fresh breezes came and birds sang. I was still a little girl but I had to help my parents with the house chores. Also, I had to help take care of my younger siblings. My family also raised rice crops and farm animals.

*Valee Xiong is originally from Laos.*

## The Nicest Gift

*Lilia Makarevich, Coon Rapids*

**I**t was many years ago. I got a letter by mail. There was a ticket to the ballet called "Spartak" in the envelope. I decided to go to the theatre. It was the first time when I saw my future husband. He decided that it would be the best first meeting for us. And he was right. It was not usual, but it was a very romantic meeting. Later in the night we walked along the snowy streets of our town and were happy. After a half of a year we married.

*Lilia Makarevich is originally from Russia.*

## Memory of My Childhood School

*Svetlana, Coon Rapids*

**I**went to school when I was six years old. The girls had white, beautiful bands on their heads. They dressed in brown dresses, white aprons, white socks, and black shoes. They had some flowers in their hands for the teacher. The boys dressed in white shirts,

black suits, and black shoes.

The school had three floors. On the first floor, students from first to fourth grades studied. On the second and third floors, students from fifth to eleventh grades studied. The first of September was the start of school.

On the front of the school wall were many different colors and sizes of balloons. The students from eleventh grade gave a notebook and a pencil for students who came in the first grade.

I remember that day now very well because I was very happy to go to school.

## My School in Mexico

*Luz Castaneda, Richfield*

**I**grew up in Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco, Mexico. I used to live in a big house. I remember my girlfriends and my first teacher. I used to eat breakfast, coffee with milk and bread with butter. I remember I used to do my homework. I remember my first uniform. I used to play with my friends all the time. I remember my school, my teachers and friends. I used to go to school in a car, my brother or my father picked me up. I used to like to play volleyball. On vacations, I used to go to see my grandmother and my cousins. Sometimes I used to visit my uncle; he lives in Celaya, Mexico. We used to go to the malls. Other times I used to go to the Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

*Luz Castaneda is originally from Guadalajara, Mexico.*

## The Airplane

*Arturo González, Circle Pines*

**I**came to the US on March 6, 2003. When I came in on the airplane I was afraid. When the airplane came down to land, there

was a lot of fog at the Minnesota airport. The airplane could not land. I had to circle in the sky for two hours. The airplane tried one more time. All the people were afraid. Some people were crying and some people were shouting when it took longer than two hours. The airplane finally landed and all the people were happy.

*Arturo González is originally from Mexico.*

## When I Was Young

*Dhuuh Ali, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Dhuuh Ali. I'm from Somalia. I'm going to write some of my story when I was young. I grew up in a small city of Somalia until I was 12 years old. It was a peaceful place. My father divorced my mother so he didn't live with us. He lived in another city but he sent us money and sometimes he visited us. We were two brothers, one sister, and me. My mother took care of us. She taught me how to sweep and cook. Always she gave me advice and I tried to listen and obey my mother. Always I went to play outside at night with my brothers and my neighbor's children.

Our parents sat in front of the house. They were not warning us because the place was peaceful. I had more friends when I went to school or religion class. Sometimes we went to a small pool of rainwater for swimming when the school was off. I will never forget that place and those friends. It was so wonderful for me.

## I Remember

*Kiin Farah, Saint Cloud*

**I** remember when I was a child in my neighborhood. As a child I played with friends. We lived in a good and safe neighborhood.

I remember the weather in my country and the beautiful sunshine, not cold.

I remember the birds, the sights and sounds of different animals, like camels, goats, and cows.

I remember on Eid, the rich people helped the poor people and gave some money, clothes, or fresh food.

Every day I remember that I love my country. I hope one day they will stop the war and solve the problems.

I remember when I came to Minnesota I saw snow for the first time, and it was very cold. I like to live in the US. It is my second country. I live a good life, I am happy, and I am studying English. But, I miss my country, Somalia.

*Kiin Farah is originally from Somalia.*

## When I Was a Child

*Komi Afoutou, Minneapolis*

**I** was born in Lome, Togo, but I lived in my village Tado after my father's death. I have two sisters with whom I sometimes had arguments because I wanted to show them my male superiority. I did all this if my mother was present. When she went to work, I wasn't able to do it. But my sisters loved me so much. They protected me in dangerous situations.

When I was a child, I played games with my friends like football or soccer. We went together to the farms to check for mice and birds. This was very much fun for me. I started primary school when I was four years old because I wanted to follow my sisters who were in fourth grade. I liked reading books and drawing. I was good at drawing. This aptitude made me funny and some of my teachers loved me so much.

Today when I think about my childhood, I want to return to it because all things I

desired were given to me free. I didn't have to make any effort to have what I wanted, I just cried. My mother didn't want to make me afraid because I was the only boy. I didn't know how many things my mother bought for me. I thought that was her obligation. It is very nice to be a child and have all things you want free.

### Remember

*Pao Ge, Minneapolis*

I was born in Laos, then I was young in Thailand. I lived in Laos when I was a baby, until I became a child. I came to live in Thailand 25 years ago. I had many experiences in Thailand.

I remember Laos where I was born. I remember Thailand where I learned many things. I thank the two countries for all I remember.

### Untitled

*Mohamed Sheikh, Saint Cloud*

My first winter in the United States surprised me. I had never seen snow in my life. When I looked through the window it was very beautiful but the weather was not good. The first day I started driving in snow, I was in trouble because I couldn't control my car on the road.

### Untitled

*Juvenal Amador, Maple Grove*

My childhood was very happy, like a normal kid. I loved my childhood, the school, play after school, and watching cartoons. I have to be so thankful because my brothers and I always had something to eat. We loved all the food my mom made. I remember when my mom made enfrijadas,

enchiladas, and more. My favorite toy was a remote control motorcycle. My best friend as a child was Zicardo, we took dance classes together at school, but he had an accident and he died.

### I Remember

*Anonymous, Owatonna*

When I came to the US, I remember I came into western New York State to the city of Buffalo on April 23, 2007. I had my first winter in Buffalo. I was a roommate with two men of my friends, and all of us came from different countries.

One day my brother came and took me to his home and showed me the downtown. When I came back home, unfortunately, my friends weren't home. Frankly, I didn't have a key. I had only stayed one week in the US, and nobody knew me in this area. I was sitting in front of the house for four hours, and still they didn't come back. I couldn't call my brother, because I didn't have a cell phone, and he had already gone to his work. So I didn't know what to do. You know the weather wasn't hot and not cold, but for me it was so cold that I was shaking.

Finally, after that I saw the window was open. Then I said, oh! I'm so lucky. I started to climb into the window, and looked side to side. I was scared I would get caught by the police. I thought to myself, I could die outside if no one comes to help me, so I decided to enter through the window. After about an hour later my friends came, and I told them what had happened to me. This is a true story.

### My Family Life in Laos

*Mee Yang, Minneapolis*

I was born in Laos about 1968. When I was a child, I remember my family had five



people: my father, my mother, my brother, my young sister, and me. We lived together in a house. Soon, my father died in the Vietnam War in 1977. About one year after my father died, my mother took me with her. She got married to a new father. After about two years, my mother got sick and died. My new father helped me and my father's three sons. When we went across the river to Thailand, my new father drowned in the water. He died. I remember my mother and my two fathers.

*Mee Yang is originally from Laos.*

### A Kindergarten Memory

*Sal Wae Sheen, Saint Paul*

**I**n the first two years of my schooling when I was in kindergarten, I walked to school for about three hours and walked back home after school every weekday, Monday through Friday. I was never tired from walking about six hours every day, unless I was sick. I had to walk to school because I didn't have a school in my village and there was no transportation and no road for cars or busses. But I was very happy on my way to school.

I woke up at about 5:00 in the morning, changed into my clothes and had breakfast. My mother prepared everything for me. After that I started my walk to school and the school started at 8:30 a.m. I studied four subjects when I was in kindergarten. They were Karen, English, Burmese, and math. The school finished at 4:00 p.m. and I arrived home when the sun set. I didn't have much time to play on my weekdays but I played with my sister, my cousins and friends along the way back home. Sometimes I got home when it was getting dark. I was very happy with my life in the early years of school. I loved it.

*Sal Wae Sheen is originally from Karen State, Burma (Myanmar).*

### What I Have Done Since I Moved to the US

*Anonymous, Saint Paul*

**S**ince I moved to the US, I have done many things and seen many different things. I have gone to school and studied English. I have also passed my driver's license test, and I have bought a car and driven to many shops. In addition, I have fixed and painted all of the walls in my house with my uncle. I have also visited my relatives in Wisconsin.

### My First Christmas in America

*Yawo Glissou, Saint Louis Park*

**T**here was everything to be joyful that day, but I felt bad. And, for the first time in my life, I really understood this phrase, "There is no better place like home."

I have been living in Minneapolis since October 23, 2008 and Christmas is my birthday. So, to make the past Christmas Day wonderful for me, my uncle took me to one of the Old Country Buffets in Fridley. When we arrived there, the buffet was still closed and we had to wait. I got hungry, so hungry but I couldn't say anything. I said to myself, If only I was in my country, I would go to buy food in the full street.

More than 30 minutes later, we finally went to the Buffet. While I was waiting for the food at my table, my uncle talked to me. "It's self-service! Go and make your choice and remember, you can eat as much as you want."

Although there was a multitude of foods, I couldn't satisfy my appetite. Verily, I felt isolated from my roots. All things bored me!

When finally I decided to eat, my uncle's son, about two years old, started to run about

in the Buffet. At that time, my uncle and his wife were choosing their favorite foods. Twice, one of the employees came to talk to me. But I didn't understand anything. He spoke so quickly. The only thing I could understand was, "the kid." "What did he want?" asked my uncle when he returned to his place at the table. "I don't know but I could imagine that he felt bad because of the running of the kid," I said. So, we left the Buffet without satisfying our appetite. Once at home, we locked ourselves in the apartment because the weather was very cold.

Once again, I remembered my country where, during Christmas day, I had many choices. I could go to a party with my friends or visit my parents in my village located near the River Zio in Ave Prefecture.

I hope in the next years, I will get accustomed to my American new life and I will enjoy myself all the days in Uncle Sam's Country.

*Yawo Glissou is 32 years old and is originally from Lome, Togo.*

## Radio

*Tchuyi Vang, Saint Paul*

The thing I enjoy doing in my free time is to listen to the radio. From Washington D.C., there was a radio station named "Radio free Asia." This radio station announced mostly politics in the world. I liked to listen to it.

One day when I came home from school, I opened my radio to listen to the news in Asia. The Radio Free Asia announced: "Laotian Communist soldiers went to kill the Hmong people in the jungle where the Hmong were living for a longtime."

That same day afternoon, Radio Free Asia declared that the Communist Laotian

troop went to catch six Hmong girls who lived not far from Longtieng C.I.A. military base in Laos during the Vietnam War in 1975. These Laotian Communist soldiers took them to do sexual things that violated them. These Hmong girls were only 12 and 13 years old.

*Tchuyi Vang is 60 years old and is originally from Xieng Khouang, Laos.*

## Moving to the United States

*Dela Doh, Minneapolis*

My first airplane flight was from Togo to the United States of America. It was very far, 12,000 miles. The night of my travel, my family came with me to the airport. They talked about everything and that we will miss each other. After the announcement of the flight, my mother began crying a lot and it was very sad and I began crying too. During my travel I cried. The travel lasted one and a half days. I left home November 12th, 2008 at 12:45 a.m. and made two stops at Casablanca and New York. In Casablanca we waited six hours before we left and in New York, two hours. When we arrived at the airport in Minnesota, some people like my cousin, Ameyo and friends came to take us from the airport to home.

*Dela Doh is originally from Lome, Togo.*

## A Very Special Day

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

There was me, almost three years ago, outside of a room in a hospital in my country Colombia. I was waiting for my new niece. I was so nervous because she was my sister's first baby and she was suffering a lot of pain before the cute baby decided to give us the fortune to have her. Small and sweet, light

eyes and brown hair, her skin was light and bright, her hands were a perfect design and her nose was small and beautiful. I remember that moment as one of the more special days in my life. I was the second person to carry her, and in that moment I gave thanks to God because everything was okay and my sister was tired but happy.

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# *My Home*

*Pa Lee, Minneapolis*

Baby, TV, anything  
food, rice, fried eggs  
children, talking, laughing  
my mouth likes to eat  
cake and rice soup

## Winter Haiku

Michael Harris, Saint Peter

December two-one  
When the snow falls, it is cold  
The wind is blowing

## Lemon Pie Haiku

Patricia Bailey, Saint Peter

Taste of lemon pie  
Yellow with whipped cream, cherry drop  
What a treat to eat

## Slider Haiku

AB Hargrove, Saint Peter

The Slider Burger  
Is so very tasty that  
It melts and goes down smoothly



# Problems, Choices and Decisions

## Using the Computer for the First Time

*Lien Thi Le, Saint Paul*

I didn't like computers because the first time I didn't know how to use the computers. I like computers now because I know how to use the computers a little. I like to learn something on the computers. I like to type on the computers. I really like them because the computers help me learn a lot.

## Tears

*Alex Watanabe, Minneapolis*

I do not want to cry, because I get tears in my eyes. I do not like tears. I would rather laugh and smile. But tears are always with me. Tears bring other tears. I try to erase tears by laughing, but tears overcome it. I try to pick up and save small pieces of happiness to kill tears. But tears still come back to my eyes. I try to wipe the tears but they still run down from my eyes.

There are a lot of tears in the world. We see a lot of tears in the eyes of the people. They

lose their friends, their children, and parents from the war. No one likes war but it is all over the world. Do people like to kill each other to see tears? The answer is, "No." We should not have war for any reasons. Kill tears. Not people. People make mistakes but we learn from them.

The new president of the United States has been appointed to change the world. I hope we can love each other, shake hands and wipe the tears. I hope some day soon we can live with joy without tears.

*Alex Watanabe is originally from Japan.*

## When I Lived on the Lake

*Karen N., Shakopee*

When I lived on Coon Lake, it was a very hard time for me. I started doing drugs and I really thought I had the world in my hands.

Life was really great. I owned my first house, I was in love, and I had three great kids. We all lived on the lake. We had a speedboat and we all loved to fish and ski in our boat. We loved being a family, but the

drugs caught up to my husband and me. We were way out of control. We ended up losing everything!

So if you think you are a happy drug addict and you are in control, I'm sorry to pop your bubble, but you are not. You will lose. The drugs will always win in the end.

## Young and Dumb

*Yessenia, Fairmont*

I was 16 living with a 29-year-old man. I thought he loved me. He introduced me to weed. Then one day he put his hands on me. I forgave him for putting his hands on me, but I forgave him because I was young and dumb.

Months passed by, and he did it again, once again I forgave him because I was young and dumb. It had started with a slap here and there. When I was 17 it got worse. I pushed away from my friends and family. The cops got called one night. He tried to throw me from a four story apartment building. I lied to them about what happened because I was young and dumb.

We eventually got our own house. I was smoking an ounce a day. I would get hit every day. I found out in January that I was pregnant. I didn't know what to do. I thought he would change.

He tried to kill me while I was pregnant. I was full of blood and I ran from him to my parents. The cops were called

again. I refused to talk to them. The only thing that was running through my head was him saying, "If I go back to prison, I will kill you." So I kept my mouth shut, and once again I forgave him because I was young and dumb.

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So I kept my mouth shut,  
and once again I forgave  
him because I was young  
and dumb.

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I will never forget this day, when I was six months pregnant, I got beat really bad. He choked, punched, kicked, and raped me. I thought I would lose the baby. I thank God my son was okay. When I finally said good-bye, I was still young and dumb.

I didn't put him in prison. I did put an order for protection against him. It has been two years and I am happier than I ever have been. I go to therapy, NA (Narcotics Anonymous), GED classes, and am getting my life back. I am doing well with my son, and I have a fiancé. I am young and smart now.

## Don't Give Up!

*Vasili Malets, Anoka*

In life, we meet many problems. It's so much sometimes that we need help. Let me tell you about my experience of how I got over one of my problems.

One day, when I was studying in the university, I got a bad grade. I was disappointed because I never got such a grade before. I called my wife and told her about it. She said to me, "Don't worry, it is not a big problem." But I remained very sad. In an hour I was at home and was surprised. My wife

and my children were glad. I couldn't understand why. Then they showed me a cake. On the cake was written, "Don't give up." I understood that this was true. I was so happy because my family supported me. These words changed me.

Now, if something happens, I don't give up. I try to be better. I want to say to everyone who is going through a hard time, "Don't give up." Everything will change if you want.

*Vasili Malets is 36 years old and is originally from Belarus.*

## My Family's Life in Somalia

*Zabra Abdullah, Saint Paul*

We were in Somalia, a family of 12—six boys and four girls. We lived in a big house. My father was working. My mother was working sometimes, but sometimes she stayed at home. I remember my mom got up every morning at 6:00. She cooked food and dressed us. We went to school.

When I was seven years old, we got civil war in my country. The men with guns came to us. They said to my father “Give us money.” That time we didn’t have any money. They yelled to my father. They said, “We will kill you.” One man who was my neighbor said, “Come to live with our family.” After that we moved but we lost our house. My oldest brother was missing for three years. He was fifteen years old when we lost him. He talked to people who told him how to find our family again. We were happy, very happy.

## The Truth of Life

*Chantha Suong, Saint Louis Park*

My name is Chantha. I was born in Cambodia. I have four brothers and two sisters. I am the oldest daughter. I went to school from first grade to twelfth. Unfortunately, I couldn’t go any more because my family couldn’t support me. I had to leave my family to look for a job in Phnom Penh City. I had a nice friend who had a job there. I stayed with her to look for a job. I walked all over the city, but I couldn’t find a job. In my country it’s not easy to find a job. I looked for two weeks.

One day I saw a schedule on the wall next to the temple. It said that they were hiring people. I was so happy. On Friday morning I went to ask them some questions. They interviewed me right away and I got the job.

I said to myself, I AM SO LUCKY! I started work on Monday.

Two months later, my mom got so sick. She needed money to see the doctor, so I sent her some. After a while she got better. I was so happy. Later, I saved some money and went to English class five nights a week. Four years later I stopped working there because I wanted to learn hairstyling and English. I went to live with my aunt. She helped me find a hairstyling school.

I went there seven days a week. I got better. Two years later I finished. I wanted to open my own hairstyling shop but I didn’t have enough money. I went back to work at my old job for about one year and six months. I got some more money but still not enough. I called my dad’s aunt to ask for help. She sent some money and I bought the equipment. My small business did well. I had friends that came to help because they wanted to get experience too. I had one friend and sister stay with me. My life got better.

The experience I got and everything I did was very interesting and important for my young life. I will always remember it. Thank you God for helping me and thank you mom and dad for giving me life. Everyone please keep working and never give up. Everything will get better in time. Please don’t waste away your life.

## An Unforgettable Story

*Fatuma, Blaine*

I was born in Ethiopia. My family is conservative. My mother is originally from Ethiopia. My father is from Yemen. My parents have 11 children. I am in the middle. I was active as a kid. I liked to play volleyball and table tennis when I was in elementary school, but I didn’t have a chance to go out and play. I didn’t get permission from my parents for

training. I made a case that my friend was sick or I am at a neighbor's house. After a while they asked me questions. I always lied.

One day my brother figured out where I was going to play. He followed me and my friend to school. He hit me in front of my friend. It embarrassed me. From that day all my interesting games were over. My family was more strict and controlling. I felt I was like in jail.

The end of the year, my sister came from Yemen. I tried to tell her what was going on. My sister promised me after my graduation that she would take me there. I couldn't wait until I graduated. After that I thought, "What does Yemen look like?" I just dreamt about it. After few months, I graduated from my school and right away I traveled to Yemen.

How was the new country? I never thought about the bad side of Yemen. From Ethiopia there is a big difference in culture. I was not accepted. They are more conservative. I had another problem. More family men like to be the boss of you. They control you. I really became sick. What to do? I didn't know.

One day, I tried to get information because I wanted to learn Arabic. One of my cousins tried to lock the door on me but I broke the door and ran away. They forced me to do everything the way they liked. I disappeared for two years. I changed myself. I covered my face and tried to go school. After six months, I tried to speak Arabic. I met some friends and I got help.

After that I chose what was best for me. I decided to marry and be free. Thank God I am good, but my sister suffers every day. I feel bad for her. I wish one day she can be free. I pray for her. There are no women's rights. I feel bad for Yemen women.

## Married Life

*Xai C. Yang, Minneapolis*

My life was started in Laos. My husband and I had never met each other. My mother is his father's cousin and he wanted her daughter to marry his son. The Hmong culture was using this way for a long time. My mom didn't want me to marry him. She said, "My daughter is a little girl. She doesn't know anything. She doesn't know how to cook." My mother-in-law said, "That's OK. I can teach her to cook and do everything I want her to do." My mother said, "Let my daughter grow up a little more." But my mother-in-law said, "You move too far away. They have to marry now."

When I married my husband, I was a little girl. My husband had a girlfriend before he married me and I didn't know anything about him. After he married me he missed his girlfriend. His mom yelled at him "You can not do that to your wife. She is a little girl and knows nothing. If she knew you still loved your girlfriend she will run back home. You have to stop today." I knew nothing. I was just sleeping. When I was sleeping he put a blanket over me and ran out. I woke up and no him. But that time I knew nothing because I was little girl. I just missed my mom a lot.

Then his girlfriend came to see me in the house and she believed he was married, so when my husband went to see her, she would not see him. She said, "You lied to me. You are already married."

## An Immigrant Experience

*Rebecca Tam, Roseville*

A middle-aged woman was trying to get off the bus, but the bus was very crowded. She smiled at the people around her and said, "Kiss me, please. Kiss me, please." But people



ignored her, so she squeezed herself to get off the bus.

When she got home, she told her daughter about what happened on the bus. Her daughter laughed really hard and said, “If you were a beautiful and young girl, the passengers wouldn’t mind kissing you. That is touching your cheeks with their lips. But you are an old lady, so who will do it? The right thing to say is ‘Excuse me, please.’”

*Rebecca Tam is originally from Hong Kong.*

## A Life Lesson

*Xiong Nor Bee, Coon Rapids*

**M**y life lessons are like waves. They go up and down. I moved from place to place and camp to camp. Because of the civil war in Laos, on August 8, 1975, my family moved to Thailand. Thai soldiers greeted us and took us to a military camp. We stayed there a few days. They moved us to another one. Four years later, we moved again, again, and again. I was angry and tired of moving.

On November 8, 2004, my family moved from Thailand to the United States. We first lived in Saint Paul. My father talked to me about moving. “If you would agree with me, we would move to California,” he said.

“No, I have had enough of moving. I don’t want to move from place to place like many years ago. I should start my life here. I have a job here. I have school here, and many cousins are staying here. Why would I move to California?” I said.

After that, my dad, my mom and my brother decided to move to California. In September of this year they moved to Alaska—the place where they have wanted to live. Moving is my life lesson.

## My Village

*Chit Toe, Saint Paul*

**T**his is about my very beautiful village. I am 22 years old. I was born in Burma. I went to a Thailand Refugee Camp in 2003. Why did I go to Thailand when I liked to stay in my village? My village had problems from the government and soldiers. They didn’t like Karen people. They didn’t like Karen people staying in the village.

The soldiers beat Karen people. Some people died and some people went to see the doctor. In my village, sometimes Karen people had the war. In my village, soldiers liked the war and they liked to kill people. In my village, all Karen people are frightened of soldiers. During the war, I missed one thing. This was my teacher. My teacher was very beautiful. She was married and she had two daughters. She was a good teacher. She taught in my village two years, but she died in the war. All the students were very sad! But the soldiers said, “They died and they were crazy. We don’t care.”

The soldiers liked to take Karen people in the war for (enslaved) porters. They liked to take Karen people’s animals and rice. The soldiers stole what they didn’t have. A lot of soldiers lived in my village. My village is near the army. The soldiers beat the men and the soldiers raped the women. All the women in my village were frightened of the soldiers.

In my village, many people grew rice and vegetables. One year, the soldiers took half of the rice. The soldiers took it for free. Some people were starving. Some people ran, but the soldiers chased the Karen people. The soldiers put Karen people in the jail and killed others. Many Karen people lived in my village. Their life went from bad to worse. Some Karen people ran to Thailand Refugee Camps. They stayed in the Camp. In 2006, the

US government liked to help the people. The US government took the people to stay in the US. All the Karen people were very happy! And now they have freedom.

## Time Life

*John Taddy, Saint Paul*

I will tell you about my life. I was born in 1986. I am from Burma and of the Karen people. I have two sisters and four brothers. I am the third child. When I was seven years old my mother told me a wonderful thing. I never forgot that she gave birth to me during the time they lived in the jungle. It was a very difficult time. They did not have enough food or medicine. They were not safe.

I was two when we came back to our village. I started school when I was five. In 1992, I left school because Burmese soldiers came to our village and burned the houses. My family and I moved back to the jungle from 1992 to 2002. Then we came back to our village. I asked my parents if I could go to school. They agreed. I studied very hard. I finished middle school.

In 2004 my uncle in the Thai Refugee Camp came to visit. I asked him about education in the camp. He told me school was good and free. I told my parents and I got permission to go to the camp with my uncle. I thought if I did not go to the camp, I could not go to the school, because my parents had so many children and we did not have money. I was 19. In this camp I had no relatives, so my uncle put me and my cousins in an

orphanage. Then he went to India to study.

I lived in the orphanage for three years and finished high school. Life was like a herd of animals living in the barn. We could not go outside because we were refugee people. In 2007 the US government allowed people in Thai camps to come to the US. My cousins and I applied, but because my cousins were

under 18, it took more than one year to come here.

I came on August 14, 2008. When I arrived, I was very happy. I saw my brother and his family, aunts, and uncles, but also, I was very depressed. I was far from my family. I couldn't do anything by myself. But my brother and friends helped me a lot. I have an opportunity to go to school and not worry about violence. I have been studying at Hubbs Center for three months in the Level-4 class.



*Kari Helgren, Rochester*

## Making Choices

*Rachad Bizzell, Bayport*

I am a living experience from beyond these prison walls. Trust me, it's not all that it's cracked up to be. Just when I thought my life began, it really came to an end when I chose to live the lifestyle of a gangsta, hustler, and a criminal. That is when I chose to give up my life.

I learned from someone special that we all have choices. No matter how we may point the finger and blame others for our mistakes, we choose our own path. Even in prison, we have choices. I've chosen righteousness over evil, good over bad. I chose to get my GED

instead of just wasting my time. I chose to turn a negative situation into a positive one.

I ask myself, what is freedom? Is it in spirituality? In body, mind, or soul? Walking this path lets me see that the choices I make affect more than me. I am not the only one that does this time in prison. My kids and my wife suffer from my choices too. It hurts me to know that they are in a prison of their own because of the choices I made. They are trapped at a point in their lives. My kids don't have a father and my wife doesn't have a husband. They suffer more than I do. They don't want to go out and have fun because they say it's not the same without me. Their spirits are dead and they sit at home waiting for me, trapped inside four walls, as limited to their choices as I am to mine in prison.

This is an experience that I will never forget. I've learned that our thoughts control our feelings; our feelings control our actions; our actions control our choices; our choices control our destination, and our destination controls our life.

I never knew I chose to leave my kids, my wife, my friends, and my family. I know it sounds crazy, but it's true. Now, God has chosen to give me another chance and I pray that He will do the same for you. Remember, tomorrow is not promised, and neither is today, so choose wisely because we DO have a choice.

## The Change

*Mai-Anh Nguyen, Woodbury*

I am a tour guide for the Japanese in my country, Vietnam. I love my work because it changed my life. I was a girl, the same as the others in Vietnam. Like any person growing up in a family, I went to college, wanted to get married, have kids and take care of them. That is the common life for a

woman in Vietnam and it is so boring.

My work made me stronger in the mind and the body and gave me a chance to see the world. I met a lot of different people every day and talked to them so that I could learn from them. I was able to save money and travel a lot. I learned how to live better from the lives of people where I visited.

And now, I am 29 years old and here, in the US. All of the people are very nice to me. It is really a special time in my life. I will come back here some day.

## A Dream Come True

*Nhia Lee, Saint Paul*

I was born in a refugee camp in Thailand, and I grew up there. My family had a difficult place for living. Also I didn't know what was going to happen in my life in the future. My family didn't have Thai citizenship. I hoped to have a chance to go to the United States to improve my life. I would go. One day, I read a note from the United Nations. They gave Hmong people who lived in the camp the chance to go to the United States. I hurried to fill out the paperwork so that I could go to America. I did everything step by step. After everything was done, I got a ticket to go to America. That was a dream come true.

## Moving to a Different Temperature

*Noy Becker, Clearwater*

My name is Noy. I came to the United States in December, 1980. It was something new to me, the ground covered with snow and cold. I moved in with my sister's family. When my sister and her husband left home to work, I turned up the heat and sat on the heat hole with a blanket over me. A month later, my sister was upset

about the electric bill. I was smiling, she didn't think it was funny. It took me ten years to get used to cold weather.

## Taking Risks

*Peter Berman, Minneapolis*

**I**n my family which consisted of four boys, I was a risk-taker. Why? Because I was the first to do some dangerous things. For example, I was the first to learn how to swim when it was dangerous to go into the deep water. I was the first to go to the forest at night. I was the first to learn how to fly a plane. And I think a person who can do helpful things and make decisions with some risk must be a leader of the group.

I haven't always been a risk-taker. I was in a camp for children in the suburbs of the city and I got lost in the forest. I spent all night in the forest and only in the morning I found my camp. Since that time I haven't been afraid of the darkness. To be brave and make the right decision in a dangerous situation, even with a reasonable risk, makes people feel proud for what they have done.

When I was young I often asked myself, what does it mean to be brave and to do some outstanding things? And I decided to check for myself. I decided to skydive. The first time I was afraid that the parachute wouldn't open! I have to point out that to defeat fear itself is the greatest victory in ones life. And I did it. I perceived the happiness about this victory.

*Peter Berman is originally from Russia.*

## Past and Present

*Bee Yang, Plymouth*

**M**y life in Laos was very hard. My family and I lived in the jungle for almost two

months. We had no rice to eat. If we were lucky to catch a fish or any animals in the jungle, we didn't have any salt to season it so we ate them without flavor, but we still ate them to survive. If we couldn't find any animals we would eat bamboo shoots and non-poisonous leaves we found in the jungle. To make sure the leaves were safe to eat we would eat a little bit of the leaf.

At the time, I had two small children with me. My son was two and a half years old and my daughter was six months. Because there was no food to eat, it was difficult to nurse her.

In the jungle we used wild banana leaves as sleeping mats and as a robe over our heads. We used logs as pillows. All of us shared only one blanket. We had nothing to protect us from the rain besides the banana leaves. I am glad to live in America because my children do not have to live the life I lived before.

## God's Gift

*Wilson Perry, Elk River*

**D**ear Life, when I look at you, I see perfection. Beauty from Mother Earth is unmatched, in need of no corrections. I said to myself, "What was God thinking about the day He made Life?" He must have awoken from a beautiful dream and decided to make you come true.

Something as special and beautiful as you could only come from out of the heavens, and only God can create Life...it's a known fact.

When I lost you it was like a piece of me died away. The tear drop stains on my pillow attest to my pain, a pain so intense and immense that I truly believe it is a pain no form of physical torture can achieve. The realization that we are to be apart caused what amounts to Armageddon of my heart.

What's left of me can only reminisce and express my pain with my pen.

I continue to long for you and wonder what could have been.

Life...we've been through so much good and bad. Together we'll make it through today, like we made it through yesterday, like we'll make it through tomorrow.

Life...remember that time passes with each day. So I'll be home sooner than you know. It's true that we don't know what we've got until we lose it, but it's also true that we don't know what we've been missing until it arrives.

As you know, God, I am your child. I need you to fix my problems in Life at this time. I want to be somebody. Please, Lord, help me. I really want to make it.

Life...I will always be here for you to the end of time...

## When I Came to America

*Sahro Jama, Minnetonka*

**M**y name is Sahro. I was born in Somalia, specifically, Mogadishu. My family lives in Kenya. They have lived there for a very long time. I have six brothers and two sisters in my family. I am the first born. I love my family. I am a mom of four children. I have a husband. I love my husband and my children and my friends, especially my friend Warsan Bashiir. She is my best friend in the world.

When we were living in Kenya, we were working in a beauty salon. We were always together. When I traveled, she could not sleep until I came back home, because in Kenya there are a lot of gangs and soldiers. Sometimes they catch you and they ask you for your documents. If you don't have them they arrest you. If you have the documents and the money, they take the money and leave you. If you have the documents and you know

their language and English, they leave you alone. It is hard for someone from Somalia to live in Kenya.

But when I came to America I found it is a fair country, and we have a good life, good jobs, and nice people helping us. I can go to school or work. We get honest people and we get a good doctor and good medicine. I am not worried like I was in Kenya. I want to thank all American people, especially doctors and my teacher, Paul, and President Barack Obama.

I say thanks to all American people.

## Getting Lost

*Kaltuma Abumunye, Waite Park*

**O**ne day, my friend called me and asked me if I could come over to her house. She told me that she had asked her older brother if she could borrow his car and told him that I was going to be the driver. I went to my friend's house and we took the car. I was so excited that I was driving to a far place because I just got my license. We drove to Minneapolis.

On our way back home we got lost. We took a different highway and we didn't realize that until we were far from anywhere. We didn't know our way back so we just kept going. We didn't know where we were going so we took an exit and we saw a lot of people who had cowboy hats on. We looked at each other and thought we were in Texas, but we didn't drive that long to get to Texas. My friend was getting scared and thought her family was worried so she called the cops. I was getting scared as well, but I was not showing it. Finally we stopped at a gas station and the lady gave us directions back home.

## A Funny Story

Neng Chang, Saint Paul

There were two good friends, a woman and a man. One day they were invited to their friend's party. While they were there, they ate and drank all night long. They were so tired and the man got a little drunk, so the woman drove them home early in the morning. On their way home, they got pulled over by the police and were told to step out of their car.

The policeman asked, "What are your names?"

The man said, "My name is Her Neng, and her name is Mai Neng."

The policeman thought the man said, "My name is her name and her name is my name," so he got angry and said not to try to trick him or he would take them to jail!

The man and woman didn't understand what the policeman was saying, so they gave the police their I.D.s to look at. Their real names were Her Neng and Mai Neng, so the police released them.

## Loving Feeling and Pain

Cheng Vang, Minneapolis

As I remember, my parents always loved me. A love from mom or dad is the best love and feeling. A hug from my mom or dad just takes away all my worries. You never know how powerful it feels to be loved and cared for.

I have been with my wife for three years and the happiest day was the day I found out that I was going to be a father. It was the most important thing in my life and the biggest change. Having someone that is a part of me, I was so happy. I'm going to be the best dad in the world, just like my father.

A couple of weeks later at Children's Hospital the doctor talked to me. Knowing

that I was going to lose my little girl was the most painful feeling and it hurt so much. I could feel my heart breaking and crying inside but no one knows. The pain is something that never goes away. Having someone you love and losing them is the most painful and heartbreaking feeling a parent can experience.

## Through It All

Rita F. Timberlake, Minneapolis

On August 8, 1995, my whole life changed. I was told I had non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. It is a blood cancer. The first thing I thought was, "Am I going to die?" I cried all day long, and my daughters, who were present, tried to comfort me as much as possible. All I could see was pain and I knew they were hurting too. They were so young at that time.

The next day I called a family meeting to tell the rest of my family my devastating news. After the talk with my family, I refused to take chemotherapy for four long years. Due to the effects it had on my mother, it just brought back too many sad memories. During these years, I still held a job even though I had to be strong for my kids. I had doctor's orders not to work. This was our worst struggle ever, but no matter what it took, we would get through it.

After a little prayer and a lot of talking, I was convinced to do chemotherapy. Now I am considered cancer free! I decided to finish my goals, since God gave me a second chance. Now I have been cancer-free for seven years and I am continuing to finish my goals. I live life to the fullest, which bring me here today.

## A Hard Decision

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

When I was 20 I had to make the hardest decision of my life, which was to leave my family forever in order to give them a better life. In doing so, this also meant risking my own life. My mom has always depended on me to provide for my family. Some of my uncles were going to the United States and I decided to go with them. So I started my journey.

I went to Agua Prieta and with 20 other people—we took a taxi to the farthest hill. From there we started to walk. Three hours into our walk one of the girls got tired and couldn't walk any more so one of my uncles carried her. It was starting to get dark and another girl got tired and her mom didn't know what to do so I carried her. We ran to catch up to the group, rested for a little bit, and then waited for the signal. After the signal we crawled under a wire fence to avoid la migra. We arrived at a safe house with our clothes all torn up.

After our rest some trucks came and picked us up and they divided us into three groups. When the car finally arrived for our group we thought the worst was over. But when we got into the car, we realized that there were no back seats and we would have to lie down on top of each other. And since I was the smallest person I had to lie on the floor in the front seat where people put their feet. We drove for three hours. The car was old and didn't work real well and it was very hot. My body was asleep from my feet to my chest. The car started to have problems so we had to get off the road and go back into the desert. When the car quit we got out and had to push. We pushed for an hour until we reached a ranch where the Chicana owner helped us get to Phoenix. She dropped us off at the hotel.

The next day we went to Las Vegas for two days and then got our plane tickets to Iowa. We took a taxi from Iowa to Minneapolis. He brought us to my uncle's friend's house where we were finally able to rest after a week of traveling.

## My Journey to America

*H. Gail Kpola, Minneapolis*

My name is Gail and I was born in Liberia, West Africa. I am the oldest of ten children. Being the oldest, I helped cook and take care of my sisters and brothers.

From age 12, I was lucky to live with my aunt in Monrovia, where she taught me how to be a lady. She made going to school and getting an education very interesting. She traveled a lot and came home with new fashions and ideas. When my aunt passed, I went back to my parents and that's when my worst nightmare began.

They had already planned my future. This meant marrying a man I did not know and had not seen before. It was their choice and not mine. This made me angry and I left for the city. When I entered Monrovia I had nowhere to go. I met this girl from nowhere. She offered to help me after I explained my being in Monrovia. There were days I had no food to eat. With three dresses, I wore hand-me-down clothes from my friend who knew my story until I met my husband.

I encountered many obstacles, but overcame them by the grace of God, and a friend, through whom I met my husband. Now I have been married for a long time, with three children. Two are in college and one lives and works in Indiana. I am grateful to God to have traveled a few times before settling in the United States. I am also blessed to be a citizen of this great country where you can be anything if you put your mind to it.

I also want to thank God for the teachers at Northside ABE for their time, patience, and love that they put in teaching us old folks. May God continue to bless America.

## The Start of New Life

*Mona Malik, Savage*

I came from Pakistan. I am 28 years old and was married on March 16, 2008. My husband had lived in America for about 15 years. He sponsored me and after five months, I came here in October. At that time, the weather was so nice and pleasant. That was the start of my new and married life. At the start, everything was going well. We lived happily. My husband really loved me, but he had high expectations for me.

I am new in the USA and don't know about the culture, food, weather, and everything. I wanted my husband to give me some time to understand all these things, but he wanted me to do all that stuff in a very short period of time. Then, I was so confused and disappointed. He treated me so rudely and insultingly. He doesn't give me an opportunity to make friends or make my own decisions. I wear what he likes, I meet people he wants me to meet. Then I realized that sometimes he behaves like an inconsiderate man.

When I wanted to discuss with him why he behaves so rudely, he told me he loves me so much and wants to protect me from bad people. My life is going on and on and I hope everything will go well after passing some time. Maybe we need some time to understand each other. I hope...

## A Dark Time

*Andrea Merino, Shakopee*

The day I left my husband, I decided to start a new life, so I began English classes and got a part-time job. Some days, I had to struggle to find care for my kid, but everything worked out. A month later, I realized I was pregnant. That meant I was pregnant when I left my husband. I tried to talk with him to find a solution, but we could not. At that moment I was very confused. I did not know what to do because it would be really hard to do everything, work, study, care for my son and my baby. That seemed impossible, so I thought about an abortion. After talking with my family and friends, they gave me their support and I decided to have the baby.

The next eight months were a really hard part of my life because I was unable to work, I did not have money, I could not care for my son, and I was hospitalized all the time. I remember when I was three months pregnant I was feeling extremely bad and said, "I don't want this baby anymore, take it out right now." I felt like I was dying. Then my friend helped me find therapy because I was depressed and I started to feel better. Then the school year started. My son and I went to school. My family helped me a lot. When I finally had my baby in my arms, the first thing I did was ask forgiveness.

During this part of my life I learned that in bad times you really know who your true friends are and how important family is. I love my kids more than anything. Every time they give me a kiss or learn something new, that rewards the bad times. I thank God that I made the correct decision.



## Letter to the Minnesota Congress

*Nadar Ali, Minneapolis*

Dear Senator Patricia Torres Ray:

**M**y name is Idil Ali. I am a student at the Minnesota Literacy Council Learning Center, Lake Street. I am writing this letter because right now, we have the money we need to have. If we do not have this money we cannot keep the class.

This class is important to me because I am learning how to use the computer. It's important for my future. If I learn computer I will get a good job. Another way the school helps me is that I learn English—how to write and read and also speak. English is my second language and it's important to learn. If I don't learn I can't get a job. The people don't understand me so it's hard to live in this country. That is why this class is important to me. I like the teachers because they are good helpers. I don't have to say better than Thank You.

Sincerely,  
Nadar Ali

*Nadar Ali is originally from Somalia.*

## Educating Hmong Girls

*Ker Vang, Minneapolis*

**L**ong ago, many parents did not let the girls go to school. Only the boys could go to school. The girls would have to stay home and learn how to do chores so that the girls could help the parents. The parents expected the daughters to know how to cook and clean. That's why they could not go to school. The parents believed that it would be better for their future and when they got married. The parents have always thought that the boys

were smarter than the girls. The sons had more advantages than the daughters because the parents believed that the sons could become good leaders.

When the Hmong people started to move to the United States, everyone had the right to go to school and be independent. Once the Hmong people moved to the United States, the girls had the right to go to school. The daughters had choices once they moved to the United States. The daughters could be smart like the sons were and they could



*Ker Vang, Minneapolis*

become leaders. Parents still make their daughters learn how to do chores to help the parents and to help them in the future when they get married.

## My Narrative

*Khaing Aung, Saint Paul*

I was born in a village in Rakhaing State, the west part of Burma. My first school was in my native village. I moved to middle school after I passed primary school. It was in another village about two miles far from my home. I walked to school every day even on weekends. In the monsoon season it was a very hard walk to school because the road was very bad and slippery. I also had to cross a rice field full of water. Sometimes I fell, so my books were wet. Although, I was happy because I had many friends who went to school together.

After I passed middle school I moved to high school in the city. I attended ten grades in Mrauk Oo High School in Mrauk Oo City. If I passed ten grades, I was finished with high school in Burma. I studied two years in ten grades, but I did not pass it. That was in 1988.

In 1988, people and students protested to the government for democracy for the whole country in Burma. They shot many students and people with machine guns. People died on the roads, and many were wounded. Some people were not dead yet, but soldiers picked them up and put them in a trailer mixed with dead people. They caught many people, and sent them to jail.

Many people, including me, escaped to the Thailand–Burma border. We joined ethnic revolution groups and fought the government. The government and people started war. People needed democracy, but the government did not agree. So we fought a long time with the government.

We lived in the jungle. We built huts with bamboo and leaves. We didn't have enough of anything. Many people died by malaria or wounds in the war.

Later the military government occupied ethnic groups' and students' camps. We didn't have places to live, and we didn't have food to eat. We entered into Thailand illegally and we tried to become refugees. We applied to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) as refugees, and we wanted to leave to a third country. Thousands of people were living in different countries in the world from Burma.

We haven't seen our parents, relatives and friends since that time. We will always remember in our mind the people dead on the road during the demonstration, during the war, and in the jungle by malaria. We prayed for them. They went to heaven.

## Comparison

*Asha Ahmed, Minneapolis*

There is a difference between the United States and my country, Somalia. In my country if you don't have a job, you can live with friends or relatives. You can live in any tribe when you have no relatives. They can give you a free place to sleep and free food. Sometimes they may not give you a separate place to sleep, for example, you can sleep with them. Adult men sleep in the same place, boys sleep in the same place, and women and girls sleep in the same place. Also, people share all the food they have. No one eats better than others. Some people believe if they don't help suffering people, Allah may reward them with tragedy and take away what they had before because God provides things and makes a person rich or poor. So that is why people help each other like brothers and sisters in one big family.

However, in the United States, if you become homeless and don't have a job, nobody will help you except the government. Sometimes even the government won't

help you because if you say you don't have children, you don't deserve assistance like cash, Medicare, and food stamps. You are single. You have to get a job or you are a lost person. Then you lose your home, car, and credit. You are becoming a nothing. But in Somalia you never worry about anything like here. You can go to someone else's home and stay.

Here, even if you want to go to someone else's home you have to call even if they are your brothers and sisters. If you go to the home and knock on the door without notice they may call the police and say, "Someone is harassing me, and standing at my front door." Or they may say before they call the police, "Get the hell out of here or I will call the police." Then you suddenly run away. I will say the second person is good because he gives you notice to leave. He doesn't call the police and they handcuff you.

That is the big difference between Somalia and the United States. Anyway mutual sharing is good when it's necessary.

### Assembly Line

*Abdulrahman Moalin, Saint Paul*

**M**y first job was assembly line. It was packaging. I worked with different people from different countries and languages. The only language that was common to all of us was English. Sometimes it was very hard to understand each other because English wasn't the first language for us.

Sometimes the assembly line used to be like as if you were in a show room because it was a lot of fun. Some people couldn't catch the speed of the belt. Then they got mad. Others started complaining and they called the supervisor. When he came, he reduced the speed and our supervisor told us it didn't matter.

If you help each other at the work, the important part of teamwork is asking for help when you need it. A great supervisor will bring the best out of each member of a team. All employees will respect the supervisor and try to understand the work. I have a lot of experience about teamwork. I describe only the most I can tell you.

### Minnesota Winter

*Brenda Saenz, Stillwater*

**I** am from Panama, a country with tropical weather. When I saw the snow falling for the first time, I thought it would be fun, but then, I learned that the snow can be really dangerous if you don't dress up with winter clothes. So, I went to Burlington, one of my favorite stores, and I found some good deals in mittens, socks (thick ones), scarves, and hats. And snow boots, I really look for those, but I found a good deal, too. Well, I was all dressed up and then it was time to drive. Then I realized that you really need to be careful with the speed. After one skid I got the trick. Right now I don't even need a heavy jacket to go out and I am a good driver with snow even in a storm.

### Civil War in My Country

*Soloman, Minneapolis*

**I**n 1996, some soldiers overthrew the elected government. The soldiers immediately ordered curfews. We were forced to stay indoors. The next day the soldiers asked all the civilians to come out and support them. But we refused because we were afraid. They started shooting at our doors and set fire to our homes. A lot of people were killed and many were displaced. When we still refused to support them they started cutting off the hands of the civilians.

My family and I were captured and marked for amputation, but we were saved by the grace of God. Most of our friends and family were either killed or amputated. After the civil war, most of the soldiers were arrested and tried in the court of law. Some were put to death and others are doing jail time. The pain and scars will never be erased from the minds of my people.

My family and I were captured and marked for amputation.

## My Story About My Family

*Tuesday Baw, Saint Paul*

I remember my mother when I was nine years old and my younger sister was one year old. My mother got very sick and after almost two months, she died. So my family had a big problem because my sister was very young. It was difficult for my father and my older sister and brothers because when we lived in my village, my father went to the farm every day. My father went to the farm with my brothers too. We had many problems about food, money, clothes, and other things. Sometimes we stayed at home and didn't have any food. Sometimes the food was enough, but sometimes it was not enough for my family. But I know I'm blessed. Now, I live together with my sisters, brother, and father in Minnesota. So I'm very happy.

*Tuesday Baw is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

## Memories of My Life

*Jee Khang, Saint Paul*

In 1975, the Vietnamese came to take over our country in Laos. We had to leave our things behind. The only things we took with

us were our clothes. In the middle of the night the Vietnamese would come and shoot at us to move on. Because they came, we had to move as fast as we could. Whoever was slow they killed. My parents were shot and killed by the Vietnamese people. I was sad and mad but we couldn't do anything.

When we reached Thailand in 1979, we had a place to live and land to have our own garden. Some of the cousins and family were left behind and couldn't make it to Thailand, so my husband decided to go back in 1998 to visit for a couple of days. I heard people telling me that my husband was locked up over there in Laos. I was depressed, stressed, and I cried a lot. I couldn't do anything but go and visit him.

After 1998 to 2004, we came to the United States and lived here to be safer and have more freedom. Living in the United States, I like it very much because it helps my children to go to school. But the only thing I am stressed out and depressed was that my husband can't make it with us to the United States.

## Seeing the Light at the End of the Tunnel

*Ana J., Inver Grove Heights*

I made the decision to leave my husband of five years after a long journey of hardship for my kids and myself. It was the most difficult decision I had made because it is not easy to take three small kids and move to a shelter. We didn't know what to expect. I never had been to a shelter before. In the beginning it was very difficult to adjust to the changes, but with support and the understanding from the staff, the adjustment was a lot easier than what I thought.

My children and I have learned so much

out of this transition. We have come a long way since then. My kids are more stable and everything keeps falling into place slowly. I know God is in control and I thank all the people who keep encouraging my family and me. Things are going to get better. Now I can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

My children and I are much happier. Our lives have undergone many changes, but thanks to the experience in the shelter, I now know that God has our destiny in His hands. We just need to ask what we need and to learn from life what He wants us to learn and accept all. Although sometimes it is very difficult, I know in the end, God is walking with me every step of the way.

*Ana J. is originally from Mexico City.*

## Thank You All To the Volunteer Teachers

*Blanca Preciado, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is Blanca and I came from Guadalajara, Mexico. I have two daughters. Andrea is 13 years old and America is three years old. I came to the USA in 2000 to Los Angeles, California. I went back to Mexico two times.

I have lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota about four years. I worked in Spring Lake Park at the Stone factory for three years. When I started working in this job, I didn't understand or speak anything, but now I feel happy because I can talk and understand in English. I said thanks to a lot of the teachers for their time, patience, and very nice people. Thank you to the school program for giving opportunity for adult people to learn.

## Love and Respect

*Z., Fridley*

**I** was born in Iraq. My age is 31. I was married in 1996 when I was 18 years old. I love my husband very much. He is my cousin. He has a certificate from the University of Management in Economics. My first child was born in 1997, and my second child was born in 2001. My daughter is the youngest. She is five years old. I have a certificate from the University of Languages. It is beautiful to study other languages. I like it very much.

We suffered a lot in our country. I saw dead people killed by guns without reason. In my district, many gangs killed young men and threw them just like sheep preventing anybody to hold them or to save them. My children cried and feared from the sounds of shooting. Their bodies would shake. I prayed and asked my God to save my family.

We ran away from my country in 2006 to Syria. We had no way or choice to enter any country. We made an introduction in the International Organization of Migration, or IOM. We explained our conditions, the terrorism, fear, torture, and the kidnapping of young people or children for money. They agreed to give us permission to enter as refugees to live in the USA, the country of freedom, peace, education, and democracy.

## Rosa and María

*Jesús Aguirre, Saint Paul*

**T**his is the story of my two cousins, María and Rosa. They both came to the United States in the 1980s. They were in their twenties at that time. They chose the state of Nevada to live because they heard that there were a lot of opportunities.

When they arrived in the city of Las Vegas, they didn't have any problem to find a

job. Both of them started to work in a casino as bartenders or offering drinks to the casino customers. They started to make \$15 an hour. At that time, it was a lot of money for them. They never thought for how long they would be making that amount of money.

The time went by and when they were twenty-five years old their boss told them that he'd give another position to them. He told them that their new position would be helping in the kitchen and that they would be making three dollars less than the money they used to make. They agreed and took the kitchen position job.

After five years later once again their boss told them that he had news for them. They expected that the news will be good for them, but it was worse than the news he had told them five years ago. He told them that he was told from his supervisor to give a lower position to them. The new position was janitor and the pay would be \$10.50 an hour. They felt sad about the new position, but they took the job.

They started to think about why that had happened to them. Also they talked to their friends about their situation. An old lady told them that she had the same problem in her life. Others told them that, unfortunately; that is the way the life is in the United States. Now they advise the new girls who come to this country to be aware of companies that hire their employees only when they are young.

## Winter Experience

*Carine Batey, Minneapolis*

**M**innesota is one of the coldest states in America, with an average temperature of -10 degrees during winter season. When I first came to Minnesota I was not aware of how drastic the temperature might be because I had never lived there before.

The first experience I went through is a bitter one to explain. It was on a Monday morning just as I was ready to go to work. I went down to the parking lot of my building to start the engine of my car. Unfortunately, the car couldn't ignite because of the frigid weather. At this moment I was dumbfounded by the whole scenario.

So, desperate for help, I walked up to one of the residents and asked if he could assist me to get the car started. "Yes! Yes! Yes! All I suggest we can do at this moment is to get the car jump-started," he said. At the scene I held my breath with astonishment because I didn't have any clue what that was all about. But with the help of this Good Samaritan the car could now get ignited and I suddenly left for work.

Another episode that got me crazy was that I didn't know what's known as black ice. This melted snow is quite invisible and could easily land you on the ground. And of course, I was a victim. My head was bobbing as I was lamenting under the pressure of frostbite. On the freeway you find county and city trucks plowing snow, paving way for easy traffic. Cars are being towed because of sudden breakdown caused by heavy snowfall.

As a matter of fact, a weather advisory warns people to put on very warm clothes if they intend to go out. I enjoy the style some kids are dressed up by their parents. These children have fun with their friends on the playgrounds, such as the skiing mountains. Some children love to do sculpture with the snowballs. On the one hand I find it so fascinating how these children can tolerate the enormous frigid temperature.

These experiences have been such that they would never be forgotten. Living in Minnesota during winter is like living in hell.

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# Life in the Jungle

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*W*hen I was young, my father fought with the Communists. After 1975, General Vang Pao left the country. My father took my family and moved to the jungle.

In the jungle, there were no clothes, no food to eat. Every day my friend and I had to search for food. We cut the young bamboo and banana's head for food. We ate that food day-by-day, night-by-night. We cut the banana's leaves to make a house.

When we had a party for a newborn or a wedding, we cut wood to make a fire, and then we danced around the fire. By that time I had learned how to read and write in Hmong. We didn't have paper and pens. We used wood to make a board. We used charcoal to make pens.

At that time I was 11 years old. Every night, I carried a 16 mm gun to protect the village for safety. In 1987, the Lao government troops came in a helicopter to drop chemicals around the mountain and the place we lived. So many people got sick, got diarrhea, and died.

In 1987, we made a decision to leave the country. One night, we went down to the Mekong River. Each person used two bamboo poles to cross the Mekong River to Thailand.

My life in the jungle ended in 1987.

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## Lor

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*Lor Vang is an ESL student at Northside ABE in Minneapolis. He is 44 years old and is originally from Mong Cha, Laos. Lor has lived in the United States for 20 years and now lives in Minneapolis with his wife, Xai and their six children. He works at Saint Jude Medical and enjoys writing Hmong stories.*



## The Journey to My GED

*Amber Millner, Forest Lake*

About three years ago, I had a little boy. I myself was only 16. Having a child so young, I was very scared. I was scared of what I would become and of what my son would become. So I decided to try and give us both a better life and I enrolled myself into a GED program.

I worked very hard for a little while but then gave up. Then about a year later a friend of mine convinced me to join the Family Learning Program, so again I started going to school. But then my grandmother got sick, so I left to help take care of her. In that time I got pregnant with my daughter.

After my grandma passed, I decided to do something with my life, so I re-enrolled in the Family Learning Program and successfully completed my GED in only five months. I am now going to school to hopefully become a Registered Nurse!

## How to Get Along Well with Each Other

*Wenhong Luo, Rochester*

First, grumbling is an unhappy sound. I usually have an idea in my mind that is, "Don't grumble when I do something." Sometimes I hear people whine when they help other people do something. I think if people never heard you gripe it would be fine, but if people hear you complain, then the people will not ask you for help again. For example, people may give you a thank you for what you did, but if a person hears you grumble then it will change the person's mind. One solution for grumbling less is to write in a journal. It is a way to write about good or bad things or complaints. Then you will forget the things that make you unhappy.

and you won't grumble. You will be able to have a good feeling for the rest of the day.

Second, be happy every day. Time goes fast, and no one can stop time, whether you feel happy or unhappy. However, life is short, so why not be happy every day? I always try to be happy, so other people want to be with me and then we get along well together.

Finally, find a common interest between you and another person. I like to shop for sales items and I call other friends who like to shop at sales too and we go to the Medford Mall. Sometimes I like to have dinner with others, so I have a barbeque and invite people to come over and eat. Also, I like to exercise, I get up early in the morning and I look for friends to exercise with.

In conclusion, I get along well with others because I usually write something in my journal to make me less grumpy and feel happy. Then, people around me will be happy too. Finding a common interest with others is another way to get doing well with them.

## How I Got My First Job in the US

*Sara Sakr, Saint Louis Park*

I came to the United States of America with my husband and my three kids. Coming from Lebanon to the United States was a huge step for me, mostly because of weather, cultural background, and of course, the language. Communicating with people was hard at the beginning, being that I am not fluent in English. This meant finding a job was a challenging task to do. I applied for a lot of jobs and sadly no one replied back; not even a phone call.

One day, I was at the shopping mall and accidentally saw a sign at a flower shop saying that they have an immediate opening. I got a call from their department saying that they would like to interview me. Then after



an interview, I got in. I was so happy and exited to start my first day of work. I love my job, and enjoy it a lot, but at the same time it is challenging. I am a support manager now with a lot of responsibilities from managing deliveries, inventory checking, and also selling our products. I have always dreamed to work with flowers, and here I am surrounded by flowers and plants at my work.

### A Man Brought Me Here

*Anonymous, Stillwater*

After studying long and hard in Egypt in the Pharmacy College, I decided to marry the man who I loved and come to the United States and start my new life and leave everything behind. Many of my friends told me that I am insane because I decided to do this and I don't remember anyone in my family or my friends agreeing with me at the time for many reasons. The main reason was that they knew how much I had suffered to finish my college and finally become a pharmacist. Then, I decided to leave my career after three months.

After I came to Minnesota I was so happy because I was with my husband. A month after coming to Minnesota I started to regret my decision. I was stranded in my new home. My husband worked two jobs to support himself and me as well. I didn't work because I didn't know how to drive. Also, I was pregnant six months. Now, I have a completely different kind of life than what I dreamed of.

### The Struggle Without a Social Security Number

*Anonymous, Shakopee*

In the US it is hard to get a job without a Social Security number. When I first came here I never thought it would be difficult to get a job. People's thoughts are to get a job and make money, never realizing they would be asked for a SSN. After I found out I felt sad because the only kind of job I can get is in a fast food restaurant or housekeeping. Another feeling that is inside me is desperation to get any kind of job.

After eight years, I found out it is important to have a Social Security number because this helps to find a job in another field and also higher wages.

### Making a Decision

*Neri Morazan, Eagan*

It was April 9, 2000. It was a very difficult day for me. I was at the Miami

International Airport and had one ticket to travel to Minnesota. I was debating whether to go to Minnesota or go back to my country, Honduras. At that moment, I wanted to go back to my teenaged kids and my family, but in Minnesota my husband was waiting for me.

My home was closer to Miami, only two hours and 15 minutes by plane, and Minnesota was four hours away. I decided to go to Minnesota because there were no jobs in Honduras, but a new job was waiting for me in Minnesota. We needed to help our kids by sending them money every two weeks.



*Ricardo Torres, Hopkins*

In the beginning it was hard. I had lived in Miami for 15 months and the weather there is similar to my country. The temperature is between 79 and 87 degrees all the time. My trip was exciting and when I arrived in Minnesota, my husband and one friend were waiting for me in the airport. That night my husband and I had dinner to celebrate our 24th wedding anniversary. We were very happy because we had been separated for ten weeks. Every day he called me by phone and sang me a song.

Right now we have lived in the United States for ten years. Every day I give thanks to God for keeping us working so we can help our family. Clearly, it would be better if all the family lived together. I always miss my kids, friends, and relatives. We appreciate the people of Minnesota. We are truly grateful for your support and every one of the blessings received in this wonderful place. I love Minnesota.

## You Can Do It!

*Lucía Ledesma, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Lucía and I am from México. I came to the United States on a fiancé visa with my husband, and we were married last June. Since I am an only child, it was so hard to leave my parents because I have always been with them. My husband's family lives here and they have supported me the whole time.

After first arriving here, it was so difficult because I had to depend on my husband because people could not understand me very well—even to buy a coffee in the coffee shop. I have studied English before, which has helped me a little bit, but I decided to study English again to improve my skills, to survive on my own and succeed in life—this is when I found the Community Education classes.

The classes have really worked well. Being with people from all around the world is so interesting and important because you learn from each other and you appreciate their lives. It is not easy to leave your country and begin a new life in a different one. It is challenging to get everything done in a short time because you have to work very hard to achieve your goals, but it is not impossible.

I am really grateful that my parents trust me in following my own heart and always give the support that I need. I am also grateful for my husband's family for helping me to keep going with my life here and of course to my husband, who is the person who has always told me "you can do it." He is always by my side.

At the same time, I am grateful for the Community Education Program and my excellent teacher Jeanne. Thanks to them, I am more confident with my English skills and even have a job—a great job! I am proud to be part of the Community Education staff as a Program Assistant. As they have helped me, I can now help others like me, who have a lot to learn and who want to make their dreams come true. If I can do it, you can do it too.

*Lucía Ledesma is 24 years old and is originally from Guadalajara, Mexico.*

## My Childhood

*Rajinder Kaur, Woodbury*

**M**y Name is Rajni and I was born in a small town of India. My father was a teacher and my mother was a nursing sister. We are three sisters and one brother and I am the youngest of all the sisters and elder to my brother. Before my birth, my parents had two girls so they always prayed to God for a baby boy so that he could continue the family name and take care of the parents when they get too

old to work. Despite being fully educated, my parents always hoped for a son instead of girls. Opposite of my parents wishes, unfortunately, I was born in their home.

After my birth when the nurse handed me to my mother, she threw me on the floor and she cried and asked the doctor to take me away from her eyes. "I don't want to see her." But one of my uncles took me and cared for me for some time. After some time, he returned me to my parents. They accepted me unwillingly and they handed me over to a maid so that she could take care of me. I always thought that the servant was my mother because she always took care of me.

After a few years, when I was five years old, God gifted a boy to my parents. My parents were so happy on his birth and always took care and gave him gifts and toys. I always asked a question to God, "Is it my fault if I am girl? Why don't they like me?"

I spent my 22 years in my parent's home with a wish that some day I would also get some love from someone. Now I am happy with my husband and my daughter. I left my job after the birth of my daughter and I have been taking care of her since her birth. Now I am living with my husband and my daughter and enjoying all the time and having fun. I missed in my childhood and wish that in my culture all parents like girls.

## Curse of Weapons

*Aneela Saquib, Plymouth*

Nowadays all the world is victimized by terrorism. The victims now protect themselves by using weapons like atomic bombs, missiles, hydrogen bombs, rockets, machine guns, etc. But people don't realize the destruction it's causing our generation.

In 1945 Hiroshima and Nagasaki were attacked by nuclear bombs. Everything was ruined there. Their agriculture has suffered greatly and children are born even now with disabilities. Even now in this current generation. Who are the people that invented these weapons?

When scientists invented these bombs, initially people were shocked and they objected. At the time they said that they made them only to defend ourselves. Later on it would become a business. Defense contractors make and sell weapons to other countries and are rolling in the money. Other countries used these weapons and spread terrorism in the world. All countries are affected by these weapons, but third world countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Bosnia, and Serbia are affected the hardest. The people in these countries don't have

enough food to survive, but they have plenty of weapons.

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Your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy.

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The abundance of weapons in these countries turns small disputes into deadly wars. I think these weapons develop terrorism.

Until now, there have been so many wars such as World War I, World War II, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Russia, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, etc. There are no benefits from these wars because the common people suffer badly. All the people of the world are head over heels for peace. Thousands of people are killed daily by explosions in different countries. Countries are spending more money in security, wars, and defense related activities, but neglecting the needs of health and education. That's why the economy is going downhill all over the world. Everybody is afraid about what will happen in the future. How will we solve this crisis? Because of these wars, people who have

different beliefs are all upset. What can they do to gain mental peace?

In my point of view, if there are no weapons then there will be no terrorism in the world. So, stop making the weapons and think about humanity and how to save the world. Remember these words:

*Your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy.*  
—Barack Obama

*Aneela Saquib is originally from Pakistan.*

## How To Make Friends

*Miguelito Méndez, Minneapolis*

The most important thing to remember when you meet people is follow their custom and be smart. That means never talk too much, be patient and listen to others, calm down, and wait for the time to talk. It also means create in your mind the beautiful image of communicating with other people and what you can learn from others.

## The Hidden Manifesto Unfolded

*Hassan A. Abdi, Minneapolis*

For about a decade, my life overseas had been deteriorating. The reason I and many of my fellow countrymen, are struggling to find a place where we can stay for a long time is because our lives are affected by endless war. The country we come from has no centralized or stabilized government. Therefore, we struggle. The future lies in a world where there are no boundaries, where you don't have the dilemma of choosing where to stay.

In every person's ideology the tenacity to demand being treated fairly is necessary for success. Something to bear in mind is that

your accomplishments are the result of your efforts and you deserve respect.

We need to agree on principles that can be the basis of international recognition of our sovereignty over ourselves. The collective mind of all our people is the missing object to ensure the lives of our people and our future.

## Babel Tower

*Natasha Muzyro, Alexandria*

Many years ago people from all over the world spoke only one language. They could understand each other without any barriers. As international unity, people decided to build a Babel tower. They tried to construct a tower in height up to heavens. When God recognized that, he became angry—he thought if they could build a tower as high as heavens there is nothing impossible for them. So, he had mixed all languages in order to stop people from understanding each other so they couldn't build a tower.

So, it was a legend about the Babel tower. And in reality just imagine how many languages we have: English, German, Swedish, Danish, French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Ukrainian...and that is not all of them! There are many dead languages like Latin. Nobody speaks Latin today but people keep learning Latin because there are a lot of terminologies in Latin, especially medical.

Talking and understanding is easy when you speak your native language, but it is always hard to learn something different. Sometimes, for people it is hard to pronounce some sounds the way they should be pronounced. For example, the Russian language doesn't have a sound like "th". That is why for Russian people who just start learning English say it is so hard to pronounce words like Thursday, thought,

thousand, etc. It is hard to get used to putting your tongue right between your teeth in order to make sound “th” just because you never talked this way before. When you speak your native language you don’t need to think about where you should put your tongue in your mouth before say something, but if you speak a different language you should.

Another example, in Russia we don’t pronounce sounds “p,” “t,” or “k” with aspiration. But even if you are working hard and already speak very well you will never stop learning language because there is lots of slang. Sometimes you think that you understand exactly what somebody means, but he means something exactly different.

I don’t know if that story about the Babel tower that I told you at the beginning is true or it is only a legend, but I think that it is wonderful that we have so many different languages to learn. And I’m thinking to learn something else besides English.

*Natasha Muzyro is originally from Tomsk, Russia.*

## My Parents’ Vacation in Italy

*Tiessa I. Simoes, Minnetonka*

Two years ago my parents went to Italy with my oldest brother to spend their vacation. It was summer time and my brother was going to participate in a short distance world track competition and my parents were anxious to watch him. The competition was scheduled to begin at 9:00 a.m. but my brother went earlier to warm up a little bit before the competition started. My parents planned to take a bus to the gymnasium at 8:30 a.m. as instructed by my brother.

My parents woke up, had breakfast and got the bus on time. They were happy and paying attention to the houses and streets during the trip. After five minutes traveling

they realized that they didn’t have the gymnasium address and decided to get some information from a French guy inside the bus. They asked where they could find the running meet and the French guy, who was so polite, said that he was also going to run in the same meet and told them to follow him.

However, my parents spoke English so badly they had misunderstood him. When they left the bus with the French guy they realized that coincidentally there was a marathon going on and they were in the middle of it. Since everybody was running, they didn’t have a choice and started to run! My parents were more than 60 years old and they were not able to see the French guy anymore because the guy ran so fast and there were many athletes participating. My mother got nervous because they didn’t have any idea where the gymnasium was and they didn’t know how to get back to the hotel.

After ten minutes running and running, they fortunately saw a big gymnasium and finally they could find my brother with a gold medal. The competition had already finished.

*Tiessa I. Simoes is 27 years old and is originally from Brazil.*

## Taking Care of the Environment

*Dawa Tsering, Stillwater*

Taking care of the environment is a 21st Century first priority. All the politicians, religious leaders, activists and citizens of the world community need to raise their voice, and shout to be heard. Teachers should teach right from the kindergarten, how important it is to protect our environment. When they come home, parents should explain how important it is and tell them it is their responsibility now to be immersed in community service to clean up the streets,

lakes and rivers. We as citizens must take an initiative to protect our environment. We leave our legacy behind with the pride and dignity so that generations after us can have a better place to live. There is a benefit we can get, the fresh air we breathe and in the land we can grow food, not to be spoiled. The water we drink is clean and furthermore, our health is well balanced.

*Dawa Tsering is originally from Tibet.*

## Letter to the Minnesota Congress

*Martín Canas, Minneapolis*

Dear Senator Ray:

I am a student in the Minnesota Literacy Learning Center. I am learning English and computer. English is very difficult, but I love it because it helps me to communicate with others and it also makes my job much easier. I am very happy because I have the opportunity to learn new things. The teacher and volunteers are helpful and very dedicated working with students to make sure our work is done.

I am grateful because you are the one who makes these programs possible. Please continue supporting these programs at the community. Thank you very much for helping the people continue with education.

Sincerely,  
Martín Canas Perdomo

*Martín Canas is originally from El Salvador.*

## Surviving Sudan

*Mohamed Ibrahim, Rochester*

I am a Sudanese from the Nuba Mountains from the Shawya tribe, one of the tribes

that falls in the Hieban districts. I was born in the year 1982. I suffered mistreatment and torture until my escape to Egypt in 2003.

My problem with the ruling regime started in the year 1998 when the government military forces fueled by the militias attacked our village. I managed to escape and reach Habilla. There, the government used us as laborers on their agricultural scheme till we managed to escape through the help of one of our relatives who was working there when he saw that we were really mistreated. We arrived in Khartoum on October 1st, 1999. There we stayed at Jabarouna in a displaced camp.

In the year 2002, I worked at an engineering shop to take care of my family's financial affairs, especially after the disappearance of my elder brother from Sudan. During that time the government of the NIF proclaimed its policy of El Jihad among the Sudanese youth by training young to join war fields in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

On July 15, 2002 I was arrested by the security people who took me to their office. I was interrogated there and asked the reason why I shouldn't join the Jihad and popular defense forces. During the interrogation I was accused of being against the ruling regime and a rebel. I was badly mistreated and tortured in order to confess, so I was kept in the detention for a period of nine days. I experienced very terrible days of my life, but I kept saying my words, so finally I was released under the following conditions on July 24, 2002: first, to report every day to the security office; second, not to leave the city for whatever reason may be without their permission; third, to keep secret what happened to me at the detention; and fourth, the failure to keep the above mentioned conditions would be my death.

After I was forced to sign that I would fulfill the above mentioned conditions, I felt

that my life was very risky in Sudan. So I decided to escape to Mayo where I hid myself at the house of one of my friends. I asked him if he could help me with the traveling document until I managed to leave my home country of Sudan. I managed to leave my home on January 15, 2003 through the Wadd Halfa Part and arrived in Egypt in 2003.



*Richard Brown Sr., Minneapolis*

# Marriage Haiku

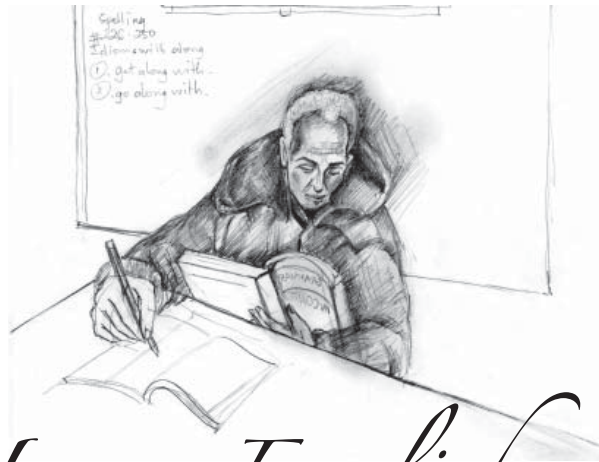
Sandra Geer, Saint Peter

I never married  
I threw my love in the sea  
That diamond was flawed

# Bad Day

David Renz, Saint Peter

My sheets warm and waiting,  
Beckoning me in their forgetting hug,  
Telling me to dream a lost world,  
Instead of face the breaking day.  
Hit the snooze.  
Turn off the alarm.  
I'm done.



Hoang Nguyen, Minneapolis

# I Need to Learn English

Idil Ali, Minneapolis

I need to learn English like the earth needs rain.  
I need to learn English like children need a mother to feed them.  
I need to learn English like a thirsty person needs water.  
I need to learn English like a fish needs water.  
I need to learn English like a hungry person needs food.  
I need to learn English like a family needs to be together.

*Idil Ali is 20 years old and is originally from Somalia.*



# Renaissance

Natasha Ballestena Orozco, Minneapolis

I suffer the solitude of the petrified gargoyle,  
The cold of the inert rock.  
Lost in the desert's immensity,  
Silence embraces me.

Dimmed voice, cloudy glance, a leafless grey tree.  
Solitary wind, erases my steps,  
Memory daggers across my being.  
Fetid, the death, contaminates the air's density.

Left of Love, Resentment, Inspiration.  
I cross the border between two worlds.  
Rumors of hope tranquilizing my heart,  
And I return to be born, once again.

Nobody follows my steps this time,  
Only my shadow behind, dark and ominous.  
It's always going to be there...forever.

# Shattered

Shanita C., Shakopee

I want to feel whole. I want to feel life.  
I am sitting here behind these cold walls, staring into space,  
thinking of what I have allowed to take place.  
Searching for answers to all of my questions.

Shattered is what I feel along with a lot of fears,  
seeing my family shed so many tears.  
Taking in what I know now,  
living life the only way I know how.

Living shattered is part of the past,  
because now I have what it takes to make life last.  
Moving away from the glass  
leaving shattered pieces in the grass  
and living life with a lot more class.

*Oh*

*John Baublitz, Proctor*

*Oh!*

Oh, for the war is inside me  
Yielding the past from ripping me apart

Oh, I want to leave my heart  
History of pain brings heartache from yesterday  
To empty thoughts confusing my mind

Oh, I want to leave it all behind  
Searching justice from my soul  
Oh, I could feel so whole

OHH!

*Please Stop*

*Kathie Overlid, Buffalo*

*Please* stop with all the sweet talk,  
We all know you are just going to walk.

Please stop with saying what you don't believe,  
Someday I hope that heartbreak you will receive.

Please stop thinking you are someone's hero.  
You know at the end of the day you'll always be back to being a zero.

Please stop telling me one thing and doing something else.  
I won't let you bring me down when everyone else fails.

Please stop telling others how I have failed in your eyes.  
Not everyone likes to see a man hide behind a disguise.

# *I Am a Survivor*

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*Ojulu Omot, Bayport*

*I* am Ojulu Agwa Omot.

I am from the Anuak Tribe of Sudan.

I am from Okadhi, my original village, in the Pochala District

I am one of five siblings: three are girls and two are boys.

Each from the same mother and father.

I am a survivor of many things.

I am a survivor of two distinct and horrific civil wars.

I am a survivor of lack of healthy care.

I am a survivor of starvation.

I am a survivor of hunger.

I am a survivor of lack of clean water.

I am a survivor of primitive hunting and fishing.

I am a survivor of an ant attack.

I am a survivor of both bee and mosquito stings.

I am a survivor of dark night and hot sun.

I am a survivor of summer thick hot dust and winter lucid mud.

I am a survivor of hot desert acidic wind.

I am a survivor of lack of clothes and shoes.

I am a survivor of savageness of the gold range.

I am a survivor of thick, cold, wet and dark forest.

I am a survivor of swimming through rivers of hippos and crocodiles.

I am a survivor of primitive hand hoe farms.

I am a survivor of refugee life.

I am a survivor of immigrant life.

I am a survivor of a serious car accident.

I am a survivor of surgery.

I believe I will be a survivor of prison.

I have a sentence of life.

This ends a sad struggle of my life story.

*Ojulu Omot is originally from Sudan.*

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# *Black Velvet Coat*

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*Phat Nguyen, Elk River*

## *Black Velvet Coat*

The blackness surrounds me  
It flows over me, this black velvet coat  
I can feel it all around me  
It protects me and keeps me warm,  
Like a child in the womb

This black velvet coat is never perfect though  
It's always too hot once it's on  
Too cold once it's gone  
But soon you will love this coat like no other  
The moment you put your arm through this black velvet coat,  
You can start to feel its warm love embracing

Your mind and body like all love,  
The more you give, the more it takes,  
Until it consumes you and can give no more  
The love becomes jaded  
The black velvet coat becomes cold and distant  
With every effort to win it back

You realize this coat isn't worth it,  
But you've learned you can't live without it  
Discarding the coat only makes you fantasize about it,  
Coursing up your arms and into your soul  
It feels like there's a piece of you missing when it's not around  
You try to replace the coat, but there is no substitute

In the end, the black velvet coat will always win if you let it.

## My Life in North America

*Manuel Tigre, Hopkins*

**T**o: The Minnesotans,

I was 23 year old when I decided to come to the USA. There were some moments that I was just about giving up when thinking about leaving my parents, my brothers, my friends, etc., my entire family. But here I'm living alone and working hard so I can help them, hoping some day my dreams will come true. After almost six years, I still miss my family, but I'm happy because I've learned so many things such as English and a new culture. I want to thank my teachers and someone special in my life, my girlfriend, LeeAnn Swift who encourages me to get my GED.

With LOVE, from Manuel Tigre.

*Manuel Tigre is 28 years old and is originally from Azuay, Ecuador.*

## Afraid of the Snow

*Selina, Columbia Heights*

**M**y first day in the United States was a Monday. I stopped in New York. Many things were difficult for me. For example, understanding directions to a friend's house. I didn't know how to take a bus and I walked to a bus stop. I asked a woman how I can go inside the bus. My first day to see snow I was scared to walk in it. One day I went to work. After work there was snow. I was at the bust stop for one hour. I was freezing. This is my story.

*Selina is originally from Ghana.*

## My First Winter

*Nadifo, Minneapolis*

**W**hen I came to Minnesota it was summer time, but after two months it snowed. This is my first winter in Minnesota. At first, I saw too much snow outside, but I wondered, what is this? I asked my family, they said this is wintertime, but I went outside. I felt cold. I couldn't walk the streets because I did not know how to dress in winter, but now I know how to dress for the weather.

Just last week, my sister went outside. She fell down, slipped in the snow, and broke her arm in three places. She was with my brother and he called my sister. At 7:45 AM my other sister answered the phone.

He told her, "Fadumo listen, her arm is broke and she is crying."

I woke up. I said, "What happened?" She told me the problem. I felt bad because she has children and she can't do something for her kids. That's why I felt bad.

## Life in a New Country

*Xia Vang, Minneapolis*

**I** have been in the United States of America for four years. The first place I lived was in Saint Paul. The first people I met were the people who worked with me. The most important thing I had to learn was English and my job. It isn't easy to learn English. It was hard to learn a new job because I didn't know how to speak English or how to talk to the people. I could not ask questions. Now I have gone to school for two years and I can speak English to people and I can ask questions to many people. And I know how to go to the store. I now know how to talk to teachers. I now know how to ask questions to a teacher. And know how to go to work and

speak English at work and ask questions at work.

*Xia Vang is originally from Thailand.*

## My Life

*Kay Thwae Myint, Saint Paul*

This is about my life. Eight years ago, I moved away from my family. I did not get an education. My parents could not send me to school because they were poor. They lived in a small village. Then my parents went to another country and went to work. After three years, they called me to come back to work together with them. I stayed in Thailand about four years.

In 2007, I came to the United States. Now, I work in a Thai restaurant and I send money to my parents. When I send money I feel so happy and excited. When they get the money, I heard they are so happy. I feel the same happiness. This is what I write about my life.

## My Life Then and Now

*Diana Saidu, Minneapolis*

In Africa, I was a business woman. Everything was going great for me and my family. We lived in our own house and we had our own car. Every day we cooked and ate fresh food. I had a best friend that I loved very much. But then war broke out in my country. I lost everything I had. I haven't seen my friends since we fled to the United States.

When I moved to the USA everything was different. Now I have to work every day. Sometimes I have to cook two days of food because of how much I work and go to school. I like the United States because I have peace of mind, again. I don't have to worry about

rebels anymore.

## Don't Point Your Finger at the Moon

*Bai Yang, Minneapolis*

Everybody points at the moon at night, but don't point your finger at the moon. When your baby points at the moon at night, then the moon comes to your house and he cuts her ear. When I pointed my finger at the moon, someone cut my ear. My ears got cut maybe four or five times. In Thailand my sister has one cut ear.

*Bai Yang is originally from Laos.*

## When I Arrived in the US

*Maria Andrade, Minneapolis*

When I arrived for the first time in the United States, I was in Florida in the little town of Fellsmere. I worked in the orange groves for three months with my two best girlfriends and my sister.

One day it was raining. My friends and I were getting wet and very filthy. My friends said to me, "Oh my God!" In my country we never worked when it rained. If the people look at us then, they were laughing and they spoke to us. I said to not be worried about that; maybe we'll have one more better opportunity.

Now, we are married with kids. I am happy for my friends because they speak English and have a better job. I'm so happy.

## Coming to America

*Long Phan, Apple Valley*

My family has four people: my wife, me, and two children, a girl and a boy. My daughter was born in 1987. Her name is Thy Phan. She is studying in college. My son was

born in 1994. His name is Duy Phan.

On October 12, 2005, we came from Vietnam to America. When we came to America, we stayed at my parents' house in Liberal, Kansas for two months. I was looking for a job. Some people said, "There are not jobs here." So we had to move to my sister's house in Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, I had a job at Stouffer's, but my wife had no job. We stayed there for one year. After that, we moved again to Apple Valley, Minnesota. I have a good job. My wife does nails. My children go to school. We bought a townhouse in Apple Valley. That's okay!

*Long Phan is originally from Vietnam.*

## Starting Over

*Eang Say, Saint Louis Park*

**H**i, my name is Eang Say. I came from Siem Reap, Cambodia. I moved to Minnesota two years ago. I live with my uncle's family.

Right now, I think I am a baby because I had to start over with everything, even how to talk, to read, to write, to walk... I don't know how to speak English either. Sometimes I feel so sad to myself. Anyway, I still keep going to school two times every week at night after work. After one year I know how to speak some English.

I still remember when I was at school in first grade in Cambodia. It is hard to learn my language, but this time, English is harder than when I learned my language. I hope when my English is better I will get a good job.

I miss my family, my friends, and my country. I hope I will visit them some time.

*Eang Say is 26 years old and is originally from Siem Reap, Cambodia.*

## Now I Know

*Halimo Osman, Minneapolis*

**I** came to America on December 26, 2006. When I came to America I was afraid because this country has weather problems. I didn't know about the cold weather or snow, so I didn't know which clothes to wear. Now I know all about the weather and which clothes to use, so it is no problem. Now I'm happy. I have work and a house. I have one son. He is in high school. Everything will be okay.

*Halimo Osman is originally from Mogadishu, Somalia.*

## Surprises for a New Immigrant

*Gui Ping Yu, Maplewood*

**M**y name is Ping. I'm from China. I lived in Guang Zhou. I never saw snow in that place. I immigrated to the USA in 2001. I remember the first time I saw snow in Minnesota. I looked out the window. The snow flying in the sky was beautiful. I like America. The roads are wider than in China and the air is fresher.

I used to take the bus to work. I usually followed the people when I got out of the bus until one day there wasn't anyone getting off the bus. I went to the door but it didn't open. Someone said something but I didn't understand what she said. I didn't even know how to get off the bus. Finally, I figured out I need to push the door to open it; not the same as China.

I rented a house to share with another family in my first year as an immigrant. After a year I still wasn't able to be independent. I didn't have a credit history for the landlord. Thank God someone sponsored me. The manager of the apartment said we had to rent a two-room apartment because we had

three people. I couldn't believe that. The law allowed this to happen. In the end I had to rent two bedrooms.

Now my English is better. I don't take the bus anymore. I have a car and a house. I enjoy my life.

*Gui Ping Yu is originally from China.*

## Untitled

*Marilu Pérez Ramírez, Saint Paul*

When I came to the United States of America I had problems with my family. My father looked at me and told me I had to go because my life was very sad and he couldn't give me what he wanted for me. So he told me, "Go, my child, and be happy and buy everything I can't buy for you." So I came here and had to work. They paid me \$3.25 an hour, but I was very sad. I missed my family, and more my father. But I sent money to them for my brothers and I raised myself. I had a boyfriend and started a life. I had a baby very young. But later I met somebody and got married. I had my daughter and we came to Minnesota. I started a new life because I was a single mother. But my daughter made me so strong and until today, when I see my children, they make me more strong to continue my life. I like to live here in Minnesota.

## I Don't Like Winter

*Chi Vang, Saint Paul*

I don't like the winter because it is too cold and snow coming is very dangerous. Sometimes I like to take my family to go shopping together, but it is too cold. I think it is not easy to go together because I have a little child. I don't like to take him outside. When the snow comes, I'm afraid because

I am not a good driver. Sometimes snow comes a lot. I saw on the television many car accidents. I'm very scared. I don't like to drive when snow comes a lot.

If the snow comes a lot, I want to stay at home and play with my children or I like to watch on television a Hmong movie.

## My Life in America

*Leonardo Rodríguez, Saint Paul*

In 1997, my dad and brother immigrated to the United States. When I spoke with them on the phone they always said their life here was very easy. They asked me, "When are you coming?" My answer was, "I will never go there." But when time was passing, life in Mexico was very difficult. It was very hard to live like that. There were no jobs.

So in 1999, I decided to come here to the United States. By the time I got here I realized that it was not easy at all, like my father told me. It was totally different, especially the language. It was very difficult for me to communicate with other people. I felt very bad and very sad. I wanted to go back to my country.

Life was very difficult for me, but as time passed I got used to this kind of life. I wanted to take English classes, but I also wanted to earn some money. I asked myself this question, "Do I want to work hard, or do I want to go to school?"

I decided to work. I got two jobs without knowing that I was making a bad decision. I know now that English is very important. Now I'm studying English in a very nice school with a very excellent teacher. His name is John.

I've also been learning that if I want to do something, I can do it. Right now, I'm



working and studying at the same time, and I think everybody can do it with some effort. Thank you for reading my story.

## Untitled

*Nyanhial Puoch, Saint Cloud*

I started school in Sudan. I was eight years old at the time. My dream is to finish high school and go to college.

In 1998 I left Sudan and went to Egypt with my family. In Egypt I didn't get back to school because it was expensive and I couldn't pay. In 2002 I went to Australia with my family, and there I went back to school. I didn't speak English, not even a little bit. I found that it was so hard to learn another language. But I hope that I will get better. I know that with lots of help, nothing is impossible.

Now, I'm working very hard because I want to go to college and have a good education in the future. Every day I ask God to help me with this because I want to be a good mom to my kids. I believe if you have hope and faith, everything will be fine for you. I am thankful for the chance to get an education and I am not going to lose my chance again.

## Homesick

*Martha García, Eagan*

When I came to the United States of America my family was sad. When I lived in Mexico, we spent all of our time together. Now, on holidays, I am sad. The only people around me are my husband and my children. I miss the rest of my family. I want to go back to Mexico.

*Martha García is originally from Mexico.*

## My Story

*Larisa, Inver Grove Heights*

In 2002, my family came to the US, my husband, our two children (seven years old and three months old), and myself. My husband found a job in a construction company. I was staying home with the kids. I didn't have a car. I was waiting for my husband to go grocery shopping or out. Then my husband bought a car for me and I found out about ESL classes. I met my teacher, Karen Zimmerman. I was so happy to meet new people and just get out of our house. Karen gave me lots of advice about parenting and how to deal with my kids. After going to ESL classes, I improved my English. My kids learned a lot from family-school teachers. My husband and I are so happy to be a part of our community and to have a good start and future in this country.

*Larisa is originally from Ukraine.*

## Different From Home

*Aracely Olivas, Eagan*

I want to say thanks for everything. First, I thank God, because now I have many things that I didn't have in Mexico. When I was living in my country, my dream was to one day come to the USA to work and have money to buy good things for me and my parents. When I got my green card, I was happy, excited, and thought, "Now my dreams can start to come true." But my husband didn't have his green card and one day we returned to Mexico and he couldn't come back to the USA.

I was sad because we had to stay in Mexico for five years. When my husband could return to the USA again I was happy. We came back to the USA, so now I again

have new opportunities. I was interested in studying English and learning to speak that language, but now we have two children and it is more difficult to study and work.

For me, in this country, the most difficult thing is the language. But I'm trying to learn. I miss my country's language. Sometimes I miss my family, but they also live in the USA and I call them and feel better. When I arrived to the USA I was happy again but was feeling sad because I was living with my sister-in-law, staying inside, and I didn't know anyone. Now I have friends and know people in my school. I feel good. I want to say, "Thank you, God, for everything."

*Aracely Olivas is originally from Chihuahua, Mexico*

### **My Story When I Left My Country**

*Xai Vang, Minneapolis*

**W**hen I came to the USA with my husband and seven children and one brother, I left three sisters, four brothers, my mom, and my dad in Thailand. When I came to the United States it was very hard to live here because my family didn't know how to speak English. Sometimes I went to the store and I didn't know how to ask questions to people. I didn't know how to speak English. After that I went to school a lot. Now, it is better than before. I like to go to school a lot; sometimes I like to write a story about myself.

### **Dear Kristen**

*Deshay Matthews, Brooklyn Center*

**D**ear Kristin,

My turning point was getting back in school. That is my transition. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's easy. Coming is important to

me. I am here getting my GED even though I know it is going to be anxiety-producing. Getting my GED deviates me from trouble.

Love,  
Deshay Matthews

### **My Name is Jorge**

*Jorge Romero, Saint Louis Park*

**I** come from Mexico City. I'm married and I have seven children. I came to the USA in 1995 and stayed with my sister-in-law on my first day. My sister-in-law helped me to apply for work. On the second day I started to work in the Hotel Sofitel. On my first day I went to work very scared because I did not speak English and never worked in housekeeping. I now cleaned rooms in the hotel. It was too hard.

In the second week I got another job in Old Country Buffet restaurant. In my first two years it was very difficult for me because my life changed 100 percent with everything. The first problem was not speaking English. I worked too hard. The second was a different culture. I brought my family one year later. I'm writing this letter on January 27, 2009. I started to study English six weeks ago. I want to speak English very well. I'd like to change my life. I want to live with my family here. I live now in Saint Louis Park, Minnesota with my wife and my children.

### **My First Winter**

*Mai Yia Yang, Minneapolis*

**H**i, my name is Mai Yia Yang. I came from Thailand. I have been in Minnesota three years. I came from Thailand to Minnesota on June 19, 2005.

The first year I never knew the weather in Minnesota is very cold in the winter. Because

I had never been very cold in my country, I felt worried about the winter here. But every year I passed the cold of the winter in Minnesota.

Sometimes I drove the car on the roads. I saw a lot of snow on the roads. But I was careful when the roads were very slippery. I thought it is hard to drive for everyone. But it is very important for everybody to understand how to drive the car when it was slippery. Some days they have a lot of traffic on the roads. They also are slippery and dangerous too. Because when too much snow falls they did not have the trail on the roads. I thought everything was difficult.

## My Life in the USA

*Naree Moua, Saint Paul*

The first time I came to the USA, I did not know English when I went to the store. I did not go shopping because I was nervous I'd get lost at the store. I did not know to find the road to come back home. I took care of my daughter for two months. After that, I needed to find daycare to help care for my daughter when my husband and I went to school. The first time we were going to study English, it was difficult for me to learn. But right now I know a little English, not too much English. Sometimes I went to the MLF and I had to have a translator for me because I did not understand what they said to me when I went shopping. Right now is better than the first time.

## A Perfect Dinner

*Rita Klan, Rochester*

There's nothing better than a good dinner. It doesn't matter where you are; you can be at home, at a restaurant, on a boat, on an airplane, or in front of a beautiful beach.

What really matters is if you have good company and of course, good food.

The beverage is also important because it can improve the food's taste. For example, white wine is a perfect combination for fish.

The atmosphere is important too. If you are able to listen to good music, like blues music, and able to have an enjoyable conversation about something light, it will make your dinner more pleasant. The reason is simple. Food and stress don't match each other. Also, a good dessert is essential for a perfect ending.

With all of these tips, I guarantee that you will have a perfect dinner.

## Life Is Full of Changes

*Carmen Canari, Woodbury*

I decided to come to the United States because I finally got the opportunity that I was waiting for many years. I applied for a lottery visa to be a resident here, so I got it and I had the luck that a family would be able to support me and give me work at the same time. A friend of mine told me that my life would change once I got inside the plane. That was true. My life has changed a lot during these last two years.

I met a special man who has changed my life and way of thinking. I was thinking of maybe going back to my country because I miss my family a lot, but now I am thinking of staying. This special man is my boyfriend. He is very kind, smart, and handsome. He means a lot in my life, and he adores me. I am so happy with him.

I have many goals here. I would like to go to college to study a career that will help me to my future. I could be a medical assistant or a translator and an interpreter because I know how to live here. You have to work hard because the life is not easy as many think, but

I know that with perseverance, I will achieve my dreams and my goals. Also, I would like to help my parents to visit me too because they are the reason to go ahead. I want them to feel proud of me.

*Carmen Canari is originally from Peru.*

## The Beginning of 2009

*Feng E Deng, Saint Paul*

From the end of last year to the beginning of 2009 was a holiday season in the US. Some people were happy to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. It's the same every year at the holiday season. Since I came here in 2001, I've worked in the Millennium Hotel. Whenever we had the holiday season coming, we had many parties in the hotel. It seemed very ceremonious. The hotel's employees got busier and were working very hard.

That's how it was for a few years before, but this year the financial crisis is harmful to many people. Many companies were closed, and a lot of people got a lay off. They are losing jobs, losing houses, and it's very difficult to live. We must confront the situation. It's really hard to change the condition. It isn't only for America. It is for the whole world. Every country the same. We need to work together to make a good solution. We hope soon it will be better.

*Feng E. Deng is originally from China.*

## Culture Shock

*Jorge Arellano Tepetla, Minneapolis*

At first, when I got here in the USA, it was very nice to be here. Everything was new for me. The idea about making a lot of money was exciting. Helping my parents by sending

them some money was the main idea. And, of course, I'd have a better life too.

I did not have any idea how to speak English. It was the first reason that made it hard to be here. The happiness about being in a new place did not last too long, especially because of the winter. After a few weeks, I found a job that paid a very low salary. Six dollars an hour was not enough for myself or to help my parents. After several months, I started to miss my parents and to feel sad because I couldn't follow the plans I'd had. Even though, I'm still working at how to get a better life for my family and myself.

## I Miss My Country

*Hai CG, Minneapolis*

If I can turn the time of the world, I would turn it and go back to my country. In my country we have time to meet together and sometimes we have time to play soccer or any sport for fun. At midnight we go to meet girls and talk together to become friends. Now I lost my best friends and I don't have time to go to meet them like in my country because this is the United States. It's difficult to meet my friends. Thank you.

*Hai CG is 23 years old and is originally from Thailand.*

## Life Goes Fast

*Argimiro Romero D., Minneapolis*

In December 1988, my best friend came back from Minnesota to Mexico. He told me about the good experiences and the good job he had in Minnesota. He also talked about the weather and his friends. Then he asked me, "Why don't you come to Minnesota with me? There are many opportunities," he told me. I was curious and I started to think to come

to Minnesota, so in the last week of January I left my little town thinking that I will go back in two years.

In those days one of my sisters was living in Pasadena, California. I decided to visit her before coming to Minnesota. It was a very nice experience to see her again. I stayed with her a whole month. The last night of February, 1989, I took an airplane to Minnesota.

The first weeks here were very hard. I missed everything. I felt like I was on another planet. Fortunately, I got a job the very next day after I arrived here. Some years passed and I was getting used to life in Minnesota, always working a lot of hours and thinking to go back to my town. In twenty years many things happened. I have a family and a small house and I have not much to do in my country, so I realized that going back to my little town is only a dream.

## My Life in America

*Anonymous, Owatonna*

I came from Somalia in 2004. There was a terrible war and many people died. In my family seven people died. When I noticed that nothing was getting solved, and the country wasn't getting better I left to come to America. In America I found peace and a place to live.

I think about my kids I left behind and my sisters, my brothers, and my mother. I miss them, and my country that I grew up in. I would like to thank the American government for teachers who teach my children, and for giving me a chance to learn and understand the English Language. The country has helped us in many ways.

## Comparisons

*Mireya Alonso, Shakopee*

In my opinion, my life was more interesting in Mexico because I could work in the area I studied. Here it is difficult because if I want to work, I have to speak English and that is important. A reason to be here is for my daughter, Litzy, because she was born in this country. I believe it is important that she learns two languages, Spanish and English. I think here she has more opportunity to study and also, I think here the education is better for her and now for me too, because I can learn English.

I think my life here is a little boring because in Mexico I was free. I could enjoy my friends, visit many places all the time. Here I can only enjoy summer because in winter it is more difficult. It is cold and I can't drive and also I need to have a driver's license.

As far as money is concerned, here is better because in my country we don't have good work and we don't have a good salary. Here we have more opportunities for our children. We can have a better life.

Now I have to think about my son, two-year-old Max. He needs to have the same opportunities as my daughter, Litzy. I think they have a better life here, and also they can go to Mexico to visit grandparents whenever they want.

## Letter to the Minnesota Congress

*Hussen Kedir, Minneapolis*

Dear Senator Torres Ray,

My name is Hussen Kedir. I am now enrolled in free Adult Basic Education in order to change my life around. In future life as all of us know, we can't make any difference without having at least some basic education

which will help us to get a better life and a better job in our future. For sure every one of us would be agree that education is a key for everything in our daily life. Without having that key we can't get anywhere. One of my goals is to get that key.

I am writing you this letter to inform you how much my free English class and computer class mean to me. Since I have joined this class I have learned so many things. For example I have improved my typing skills and communication skills. Thank you very much for all your support.

Sincerely,  
Hussen Kedir

*Hussen Kedir is originally from Ethiopia.*

## Present Moment

*Brian Bernatz, Minneapolis*

**I**n the present moment there is no future and no past. I am very much at peace here. Then I start thinking of rent, health insurance, my GED, a place to live, and employment. I am concerned about the time that I have with my daughter, what I am going to do for a job, and all the things that are going on in my life.

I find myself feeling that I would like to get rid of all things and just live on a park bench. But I love my daughter and I want to be a part of her life, and that is what it is to surrender to the moment and to let go of the things that are unchangeable. Ultimately the present moment is now. So next time you may feel stressed or overwhelmed, sit down in a comfortable position and still your mind, be present in the moment.

*Brian Bernatz is 35 years old and is originally from Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

## When I Came to Minnesota...

*Aisatu Jalloh, Minneapolis*

**W**hen I first came to Minnesota, I started ESL in an ABE program. The teachers and students were very welcoming. I was very happy there with everything. I was surprised at all the help and the encouragement they gave me without any cost. I learned a lot about Americans in a few months as well as about the weather, the food, and more. With their support, English was easy for me.

At that time, there were four levels of ESL classes there. They tested you at the beginning to place you in the right class, but they didn't test you at the end of each semester. Everyone got a certificate after each semester, whether you improved or not. After I spent a semester at the last level, I registered for the TOEFL. It was very hard, and I didn't pass the class. Nobody tested me or told me I wasn't ready for a higher class, or that I could go to another ESL school.

*Aisatu Jalloh is originally from Guinea.*

## A Mighty God

*Miriam Olan, Minneapolis*

**W**e were created for a purpose, we were created for His exaltation, and we were created for a Lord, God Almighty for He chose us in Him before the creation of the world. The scripture said that he knew us since we were in our mothers' wombs. He said that with his own fingers He formed every part of our body. He had to decide the color of our skin and our eye color; we are His best creation.

Have you ever thought why you are here? Or with what purpose you were born? Great! There is only one reason: we were created to praise and glorify His name. Jesus

said, “I’m the way, I’m the truth, I’m the life; no one goes to the father except by me.” He cares about you because He loves you. He is offering salvation to every man who believes in Him. You don’t have to do anything! Just believe in the Son of God, who made the greatest sacrifice dying on a cross and rising on the third day, defeating death, the devil, and all principalities. When I became His child He changed my life, he filled the emptiness that was in my earth. Now for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I live, I live for Him and if I die I go with Him.

If you think that there is no hope for you, and your life is destroyed and you aren’t worthy of anything, I have good news for you. He wants to bless you no matter what color you are, how poor or rich. Maybe everybody left you when you were in need, and you are thinking that you aren’t good for anything. Let me tell you that in your loneliness, in your weakness, He is still waiting for you to show you His fidelity and how much He loves you. He, Jesus Christ, paid our debt on the cross with His precious blood. That’s why I can announce today that everything is possible for those who believe in His word and open the door of their hearts and receive it.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,

So that everyone who believes in Him may not die,

But have eternal life.

John 3:16

## The Immigration

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

I came to the United States almost nine years ago. To come here was a big experience because I learned by looking and by living a lot of things. Also, I learned the English language by going to school. The

weather here has four seasons—each with different weather. Also, I learned about Americans’ culture and many other things about the social community—and differences. The disadvantages of coming here illegally are enormous. First, you can’t work without getting legal papers. Then you pay all the taxes and you do not have access to any government benefits. The health care is very expensive. We don’t make enough money for our expenses. We hope the new President Obama gives us legal residence.

## Untitled

*Joaquín Maldonado, Minneapolis*

Hi, my name is Joaquín Maldonado. I came from the beautiful land called Mexico. This is my story. I was born on May 28, 1968 in a small town. I have four brothers and three sisters from my family. I am the youngest. I came from a poor family and we were farmers. I remember when I was twelve years old, I helped my brother to work on field. Day by day I helped grow corn and took care of the animals. I helped my older brothers to work, because we didn’t have a father with us because my parents got a divorce. So my mother would take care of us.

I lived with my mother from 1968 to 1987. During this time I was in school up to the sixth grade.

When I was 19 years old I made a decision to come to the United States. The reason I went there was to find a new opportunity to work, because my dream was to support my mother in Mexico. We were living in a bad situation. When I moved from Mexico to the USA in 1988 the first place I went to was Santa Ana, California. I was hoping to help my mother live a better life and have less work for her and to her rest more at home.

So now I miss my family and friends,

the greens fields, the wet trees, the fresh air and even the animals too. In 1989, I got married in California to my wife Guadalupe Penaloza. We lived in California for ten years. Now I made my own family and we have three beautiful daughters. Later on we moved to Minneapolis. We decided to move to Minnesota for more work opportunities and starting a new life with more family members around us. So we are here now we love Minnesota! I say “Thank you,” to God for giving me my family and for letting me keep my spirits high. I contemplate every day for everything you did for us and I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

### America the Foreign

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

America the foreign is different from home. The first time I came to the United States was February 3, 2008. I was happy because of my mom first and my family, but I faced a very different problem. I broke my leg before I came to the United States. My brother gave me pressure to come soon to here without treating. Then I passed the interview of my visa. I told him, “I can’t travel now because I need a doctor or a hospital,” but he refused and got angry. After that, I accepted his idea or order to start my trip.

Anyway, the trip was too long because I was in Africa especially in Kenya, and I didn’t have even a painkiller tablet. Because I didn’t take it, it was painning my leg. Anyhow, I was thinking and said to myself, “It doesn’t matter I will be getting a doctor,” but when I came to the United States, I didn’t get healthcare for a reason. If someone comes to the United States by visa the law doesn’t allow getting healthcare, a home, food stamps, and welfare from the government. So according to the law, I didn’t get all those.

I wrote for my story until now. One day I tried to go to the hospital but people told me that, if I didn’t have an insurance card the hospital would charge me like \$10,000—so I stopped going to the hospital without having insurance. I also faced another problem about living at home with my mom because my mom is an old woman and gets money from the government. They also pay home rent, that’s why the company will not allow me to live with my mom in her house. I thought, “What can I do?” Some people told me that I have to go to a shelter and I asked them what does a shelter mean? When I understood, I said, “I can’t.”

It’s a long story but I don’t have time to write this story! Thank you Volunteers of America staff and all the teachers!

### The Importance of English in My Life

*Antonia Muñoz, Saint Louis Park*

When I came to the USA, I was excited because it was the first time that changed everything, but I wanted to learn English too. My first day here, I didn’t understand anything. My husband and I went to the Mall of America. We went shopping. When we went to pay, the cashier asked me if we wanted to open a credit card. I said “yes” to all the questions, but didn’t understand anything.

So in these times, I understand that I need to learn English because of change in the country. Life is a new opportunity for me, so I need to learn the language of this country and learn about the culture. Another experience was when I went to work at Bunny’s. I asked a work partner if he could tell my boss that I had an appointment with the doctor. The answer was he couldn’t because nobody had time. So, I made the



decision to take English classes.

Now, thanks to my teachers Julie, Sofia, and Steve, I can speak, read, and write. I need to learn more, but I depend less on others and more on me—no need for interpreters for talk with my boss. And, I have American friends. I love the USA because it is a country with many opportunities. I'm very happy to live in Minnesota. One more time: Thanks so much to my ESL teachers.

*Antonia Muñoz is 32 years old and is originally from Mexico City.*

## A Refugee Story

*Xee Lee, Minneapolis*

I am very happy to come to live in the United States of America. Why? There was a secret war in my country between 1961 and 1975. The Lao communists came to control the country in those years. The Lao government said we could kill the Hmong people because General Vang Pao and his soldiers helped the American CIA soldiers. We didn't believe it, but in 1979 the Lao Communist Party caught the King and sent him to jail. They also caught Mr. Tou Beely Fong who was the King's Prime Minister and the men who were the leaders of soldiers and sent them to jail, too. Then my father decided to move to the jungle.

In 1979 the Lao Government used their soldiers to fight very hard in the jungle and they were controlling everywhere. That year we couldn't bring the food to eat. They flew helicopters to bomb us in the jungle with chemical poison.

In 1981 my father decided to move to Thailand by walking from Phou Bia to the Mekong River about one month and cross it to NongKhai, Thailand. When we walked on the hill of jungle and crossed the Mekong

River the Lao communist soldiers fought and made more Hmong people die in the hills and Mekong River.

My life story was very dangerous and it is lucky to have life and to come to the United States of America.

*Xee Lee is originally from Laos.*

## Difficult to Leave My Country

*Anonymous, Austin*

When I made the decision to come to this country it was difficult because I had to leave my family, my girlfriend, my customs and traditions, so my friends, and the times I went trotting and galloping with our horses on the nights when there was a full moon. We rode in the streets and sometimes went to the mountains. So now only I see the full moon and I remember those moments.

Also I remember the moments with my family and great moments with my girlfriend. But in this country I am learning things for my life, something that can help me make decisions in the future.

## Finding Myself in a Different Country

*Jamal Mohamed, Hopkins*

My name is Jamal Mohamed. I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1975. I started my first grade at age five in 1980 and graduated from high school in 1991 at age 16. I was the youngest in my class. When I finished high school, the civil war started in 1991 and we fled our sweet home and went to Kenya.

We arrived in Kenya in 1991 at the capital city of Nairobi. The life in Nairobi was so difficult for us because we had a different culture, religion, and language. First, Kenyan's speak Kiswahili and I didn't know

any. Secondly, the culture is so different than ours because Somalis were 100 percent Muslim and Kenyan's are not. Also I missed calling Muslim prayer which happens when prayer starts and that is only in Muslim countries.

In 1998, I left Kenya and I came to United States of America. The first day I arrived was wintertime and I couldn't imagine how people could live in this place because in Somalia there is no winter. We only have two seasons, summer and spring, but Minnesota has four seasons, summer, winter, fall and spring. I enjoy living in America and I hope to continue my education.

## Letter to the Minnesota Congress

*Martin Avila, Minneapolis*

**D**ear Senator Torres Ray:

It is a pleasure writing to you this letter to express a great salute, full of the honest wishes of success and overcoming in your clever performance.

I'm a student of the Adult Education Center, a place where I take so much benefit for learning English and about computer. These are two very important things that are priorities for survival in this big country. Now I'm so worried because I did hear a bad news on the TV about the cutting in the budget of this area. I solicit to you for please to look in other resources and give cover in this area. Without education we'll collapse as one big group of this society.

For the good attention and positive answer that you will gave at this present, I express my pure gratefulness.

Sincerely,  
Milton Avila.

*Martin Avila is originally from Ecuador.*

## Hard Decision

*María Eugenia Rosales, Saint Paul*

**M**y husband has studied at the University of Minnesota since January, 2006. In September of 2007, my two children and I traveled to accompany him. It was one difficult decision because the rest of my family (mother, father, sister, nephew, grandfather...) live in my country. I abandoned my job too. When I came to Minnesota I felt that I lived hardly all my life in Chile. Now I find that Minnesota is one opportunity for my and my family.

*María Eugenia Rosales is originally from Chile.*

## True Story about Myself

*Aminat, Minneapolis*

**I** came to the United States of America from Ethiopia on the 28th of February, 2004. It was a new beginning and experience in my life. I had never been out of my country before, although my husband had already been here in the USA when I arrived. Leaving behind the rest of my immediate family was not easy because I came to a different way of life, a different culture, and a different standard of living unlike the one I was used to. As days went by, my husband helped me to get re-started here with everything. Now I have a four-year-old baby girl and in the mean time, I go to language school. I have a part-time job too.

*Aminat is originally from Ethiopia.*

# *The Demons in My Closet*

*David Meger, Cloquet*

I'm sick of the Demons  
The demons in my closet  
It's like a monkey  
A monkey on my back  
I need help  
But it seems no one can help me  
The only one who can help me is me  
No more whiskey, no more sticks and stems  
No more dob sacks  
Chuck it! No more  
I don't need all of that

Now is the time; better now than never  
Now is the time; more then ever  
Now is a good time  
To let the past be in the past  
Life seems to pass you by much too fast  
Never dwell on what was said or done  
Forget who was right or wrong  
Remember what's done is done  
No more skipping from one extreme to  
another

I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired  
Stuck in denial and covered with shame and  
sorrow  
Now I pray  
I pray for a better tomorrow  
Today I pray to help forget all my painful  
regrets  
I think I'm crazy, but this is the way God  
made me  
Full of rage  
I need to break free of these chains  
My heart aches with pain  
It helps remind me that I need to change

*David Meger is 25 years old and is originally from  
Cloquet.*

# *Words of Wisdom*

*Kelly Pierce, Thief River Falls*

Words of Wisdom  
Word of Wise  
The beauty is where  
Truth lies.

My belief is pure  
My relief is near  
I have no fear

'Cuz to live with no secrets  
Words of Wisdom  
Word of Wise.

Live 'n' let live for  
The answers in here  
Never lie!

Live as you must.  
The beauty is trust.  
I believe we'll succeed.  
Wisdom is here!

Words of Wisdom,  
Word of Wise.

Loneliness Flying Free  
Jeffrey Jepson, Maplewood

Winter is gone  
Spring has sprung  
Summer is taking too long  
But the days will soon be warm and long.  
Then why am I still so cold at night?

That bed is too big for me alone.  
I miss the warmth and sharing of souls in this  
cold space ...  
I miss my Love.

Not much longer will I be alone.  
For now all I have are dreams of  
warmer nights and not being alone.

Grey hair and wrinkles  
Why can't times go slow?  
Missing my Love

Why can't time go fast?  
Time doesn't listen to us,  
Time goes as always.

Don't feel badly for me  
I'm just letting loneliness fly free!!!

The Wrongfulness of Time  
Scott Dunfee, Monticello

My stay here could be considered a living hell,  
If I survive it, only time will tell.  
There's always a little somethin' somethin'  
bothering me,  
I'd just love to throw it all to the sea.  
Yet I am stuck with it my mind, anyway.  
Oh how I wish to God that I could get away.

This jail time is weighing upon my heart,  
It won't surprise me if I fall a part.  
I am trying to hold myself together.  
I sure hope that somehow things will get  
better.  
Totally missing my kids and loved ones.  
Empty soul and bitter grief, my mind runs.

But I refuse to think that this is all there is  
for me,  
Being caught up in the System for as far as I  
can see.  
Can't emphasize enough how passionately I  
feel about all of this.  
So, to all of my babies, most of all, it is you  
that I miss!

## *Heavenly Symphony*

*Carl Anderson/Duluth*

There is no mercy or justice in times of war  
The children are dying of hunger  
The bodies and blood fill the streets  
Plugging the gutters  
Where is the peace promised by our  
government?  
Instead of peace, pain, evil, and suffering  
prevail

The protestors are on the other side of the  
world  
Where is God and his Army of Angels?  
In the clouds floating on their wings  
With their halos glowing about their heads  
Where is mercy and justice to be found?  
Certainly not upon the fields of war

Why must we let the children suffer?  
Do we really need more bloody bodies  
To fill the text in our history books?  
Does no one ever learn from our ancestors?  
"Violence begets Violence"  
Simple as that

War only creates evil murderers and rapists  
Do we need more?  
Is there a shortage that I have not heard of?  
Am I missing something that I should know?

I propose a thought—an instinct rather  
Listen very closely, very hard  
I think that you may hear  
A song, a Heavenly Symphony  
Singing of love, peace, for our children  
It says, it instructs, it begs, it pleads  
"Hunger for peace to become common,  
Hunger for justice for our children  
Hunger for no more murder."

Can you hear it?  
It is The Song, The Heavenly Symphony  
It is God and his Army of Angels  
Begging, pleading, telling you  
“Hunger for peace to become common,  
Hunger for justice for our children  
Hunger for no more murder.”  
If you listen closely, it surrounds you  
If you cannot, I beg of you  
Please try a little longer....

*Life Is a Riddle*  
Jeffrey Lee Herendeen, Jr., Hermantown

Common histories between father and son  
Different generations from the same mistakes  
run  
Mercy and forgiveness never part of the plan  
Till you look in the mirror and don't  
recognize the man

Solitude you find while sitting alone  
Taking a shower or when nobody's home  
Hunger for something other than food  
Love that you lost or love that is new

Ecstasy's found while asleep in a dream  
When history's repeated from your past in a  
scene  
Memories of loved ones; some angels now gone  
Grandparents, friends, or your childhood dog

Peace follows it like the calm waters of a lake  
Try to reach for it but there's nothing to take  
Everything happens for a reason they say  
Life is a riddle and with love there is pain

Jeffrey Lee Herendeen, Jr. is 27 years old and is

originally from Minnesota.

Untitled  
Mohamed Warsame, Minneapolis

History was written in this country before  
me.

I declare here what my heart is missing.  
If I imagine and mention how I feel,  
This is how I feel.  
Too much snow and cold is part of America.  
Too much writing and hassle.  
Too much noise and dizziness.

God brought me here to America.  
I didn't expect this life.  
Bush messed up America and derailed its  
Way of life.  
America was rich and strong.  
When he took power a big mess took place  
and the treasury is empty.  
Too much warfare.  
He spent all the treasury and Al Qaeda was  
his reason  
When he wasted all the money.  
And people were laughing and trusting him.

The people didn't know the truth behind it.  
People realized all the mistakes too late.  
All the jobs were gone and companies left and  
moved to other countries.  
All employees lost their housing.  
Obama was one option for help and to save the  
country.  
This is my heart and my conclusion.

*Mohamed Warsame is originally from Somalia.*





# Fiction

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## When Dragons Attack

*Mark Buskovich, Rochester*

The cold wind caressed the walls of the entrance to the cave, yet it was warm to the touch. It was a large cave, twisting deep into the largest mountain in the Mountains of Mist. The cave was dark and silent, save for the wind. But this cave was not empty.

Veeshan woke from her slumber. As she began to stir, she noticed one of the large, shimmering eggs she was brooding had shifted slightly. As she adjusted them, so they were all safe and warm beneath her, she felt the hunger in her belly. She had not eaten in three days. The mountains had been scarce of food in the last few months due to the cold of winter. This would not be the first time she would have to feed off the human's livestock in the southern farmlands. She knew the people were becoming fearful and restless.

As she descended from the sky in slow, lazy circles, her strong wings left no sound as they sliced through the air in the starless night. The lazy arcs gave her the vantage point she needed to scan the countryside for the most promising farm to strike without

drawing undue attention to herself. She did not fear humans because she had no need to. She was concerned with the safety of her brood and lair which she had inhabited for the past 400 years. Veeshan was a dragon.

## Why People Can Ride the Big Elephant

*Por Yang, Minneapolis*

A long time ago, people and animals could talk to each other. Then one day, a Hmong man walked in the jungle. A big elephant just walked up to him.

He said to the Hmong man, "How are you man?"

The Hmong man answered, "I'm just fine."

The elephant continued, "Hey man, I feel lucky to meet you today."

The Hmong man replied, "Me too."

The big elephant wanted to challenge the man. "I want to know who will have more power and who will be the most powerful in the world."

So the elephant asked the man to fight with him. If the Hmong man won, the



elephant would do anything for the man. But the Hmong man said that he didn't bring his idea and materials with him today. So the man said to the elephant that they should meet each other tomorrow afternoon.

The next day the Hmong man brought a long rope with him to the same place that they met each other the day before. He waited until the elephant came.

The Hmong man asked the elephant, "Can you let me go first because you are bigger than me?"

The elephant answered, "No problem."

The Hmong man said, "Alright, now give me your legs and close your eyes until I say you can open them."

The elephant said, "Okay!"

Then the Hmong man started to tie the elephant's legs around a big tree. He said, "Mr. Elephant, now you can open your eyes and stand up to fight with me!"

The big elephant couldn't stand up because the Hmong man already tied the elephant's legs together around the big tree.

Finally the big elephant said, "Oh my God, you had a good idea. Please let me go and I will do anything for you now."

The Hmong man said, "Are you sure if I let you go you will do anything for me?"

The big elephant said, "Yes, yes."

So the Hmong man let the elephant go free. Now the big elephant had to be the Hmong man's slave. He rode on the back of the big elephant and went home. This is why big elephants let people ride on their backs.

### A Story

*Eistarlin Sugal, Minneapolis*

I read a story about a wealthy family. They had two boys. The older one was a lazy boy and the younger one was a perfect boy. They were born in India and they lived in India until they graduated from high school. After they finished high school the young one got a scholarship.

He told his father, "I want to go to the University of Malaysia. That is a good idea."

His father said, "What about your brother?"

He said, "My brother did not get a scholarship because he is a lazy boy."

The father said, "I know he didn't get a scholarship, but I want to send both of you there."

The young one said, "Daddy, are you going to pay for him?"

The father said, "Yes, why not, he is my first child so I have to help him."

The young one said, "Daddy, you don't



have to send him there because this guy is my brother so I know him more than you know him. If you send him there, you will see what will happen.”

The older one said, “Daddy, my young brother doesn’t like me. We are always enemies. So, please don’t listen to him.”

After that the father sent them to the University of Malaysia. They started the programs. After a couple of weeks the lazy boy didn’t go to the university every day.

They told him, “If you don’t come to class we will fire you.” He didn’t care about that so they fired him. The young one finished his program and got his degree. Their father was very disappointed in his older son and regretted sending him there.

The young one told his father, “That is what I told you, Daddy.”

*Eistarlin Sugul is originally from Somalia.*

## The Reason Women Should Not Be King

*Hue Her, Minneapolis*

A long time ago when the world had just 12 major countries, each country was ruled by a constitutional absolute monarchy system. One of the kings was getting old, and he had only one daughter. She was married to a general. When the time came for the princess to take over the throne, the king was not sure she should become king in the land. If she failed, her husband would be the next king. The princess did not agree.

The king asked for ten men to visit the castle. The men were told within the next three days the king wanted them to kill their wives and bring back the heads. The king would reward them by appointing them governors. After three days, the men came back with no heads. The king asked why they

did not bring their wives’ heads. The men said they were not able to kill their wives because they loved their wives and children. The king sent them home.

The next day the princess asked for ten women to visit the castle. She told them to kill their husbands, and then bring back the husbands’ heads in the next three days. Each woman would be rewarded by being appointed governor. The ten women were sent home. The women came back after two days with their husbands’ heads.

The king declared that women were cruel and inconsiderate. The princess was unhappy. She ordered the women to pierce their ears as a symbol that women were unsuitable to be king.

## Lovers Leap

*M. Thomas, Minneapolis*

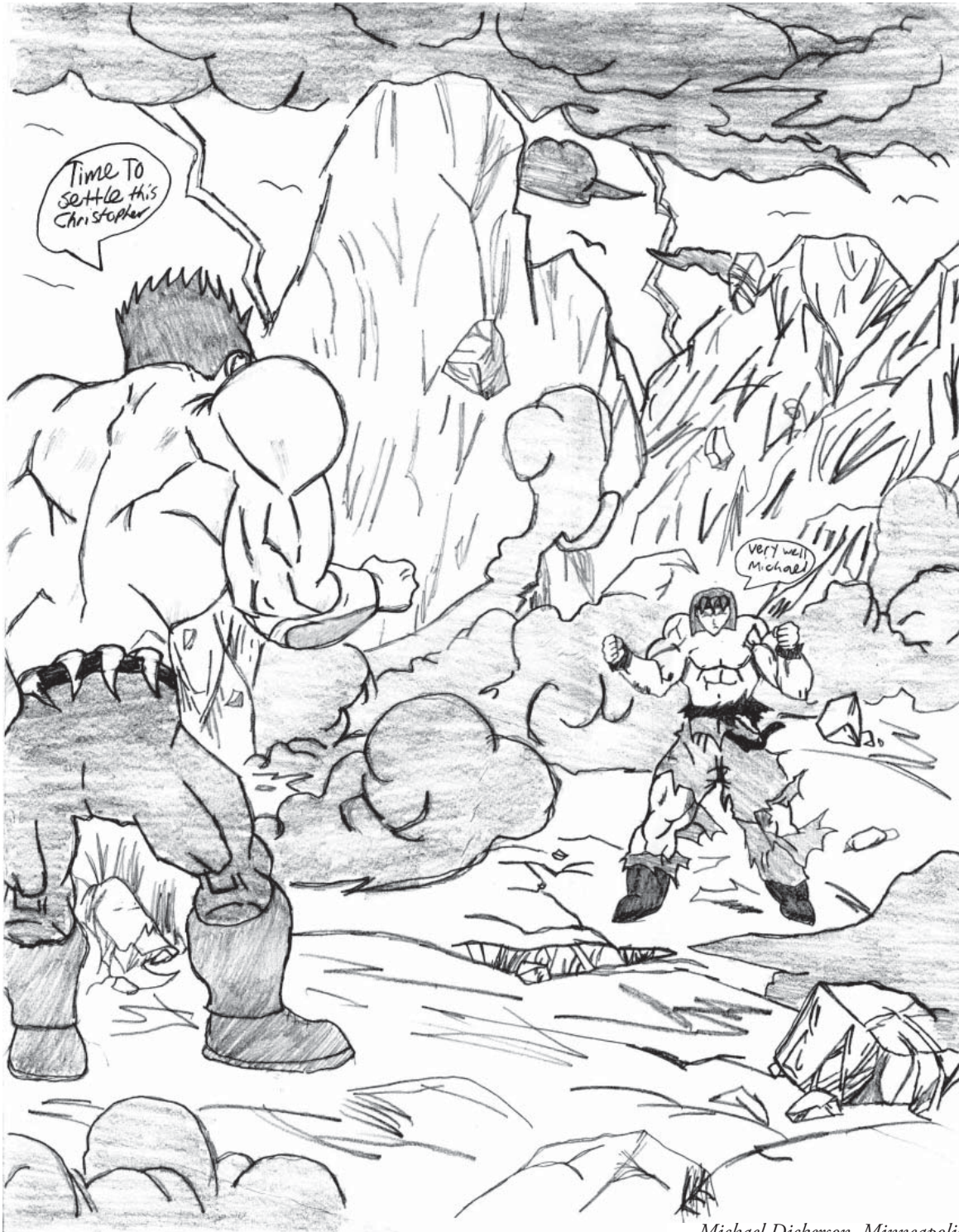
In the parish of Saint Elizabeth, Jamaica, there is a place by the name of Lovers’ Leap. Many years ago, a plantation owner fell in love with this slave girl that worked for him, but this girl did not love him—she was in love with someone else. So they were secretly meeting on the plantation.

The girl’s brother did not like it, so he told the plantation owner. The plantation owner got upset and went looking for them. He found them at the top of the hill, which is near the sea.

They got into an argument that ended up in a fight. The plantation owner knocked the girl’s lover to the ground unconscious and then threw him into the sea.

When the girl saw what happened to her lover she threw herself over the cliff. They both drowned and were never seen again.

So this was how the place got its name Lovers’ Leap.



*Michael Dickerson, Minneapolis*

# The Battle for Freedom

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Tuesday, September 27, 1988, I remember like it was yesterday. It was a time when I was at war. I can sometimes still hear the screaming of men and women in my nightmares. It was the worst battle I have ever been in. It was only after that battle that the taste of war left my mouth forever.

My adversary was Christopher Spencer, a madman hellbent on taking over the world. I, Michael D. Calvin, Sergeant Major of Squad 7, led my warriors to certain doom, yet somehow, some way, we came out victorious.

My superiors would say that it was a glorious battle, but I say it was a massacre. Many soldiers on both sides lost their lives for a ludicrous dream. In the end, it was I, a few of my men, and Spencer. I couldn't bear the thought of losing any more of my squad, so I ordered them to fall back to the landing zone.

"CHRISTOPHER!!!!" I shouted as I ran towards him.

With a smirk on his face, he said, "What's wrong Michael? Don't you miss your old comrade?"

Suddenly there was a bright flash, and then there was darkness.

Where am I? I thought to myself. Then I could hear kids laughing and playing together. That looks like me when I was young, my thought continued, and I realized I was seeing myself and Christopher when we first met.

"How is this possible, time travel does not exist?" I shouted at them, but they couldn't hear. "What the hell is happening to me?" I asked. Why was I seeing my past? Why is it being shown to me? Is there something that I needed to see? I was confused.

Another flash—Chris and I are now out of college. What did this mean? Chris and I had been through so much. It was he who convinced me to join the military. Together we were an unbeatable team, but then he began to change. He grew jealous of me and my abilities. And then things turned for the worse. He took a super soldier vaccine; it made him stronger, faster, and wiser. He attacked the base and then took off to the middle seas.

So here I am. "Forgive me my friend." I ended up killing Christopher and ending the war. I didn't feel glory; I felt pain for the loss of my comrade.



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## Michael

*Michael Dickerson recently completed his GED at Northside ABE. He lives in Minneapolis and is now applying to colleges.*

## The Cart

*Xai Thao, Minneapolis*

A long time ago, there was a family and they lived together, all four people—a young man, 25 years old, with his wife, his son, and his father. His father was about 80 years old. He was very old, so he couldn't walk, couldn't see well, and he couldn't hear well. The young man and his wife didn't want to take care of his father any more. They planned to take the old man far, far away and drop him off in the forest.

Finally, he decided to take his father to the forest, but his father couldn't walk. Then the man built a cart for his father. They left for the forest—the man, his son, and his father.

When they arrived in the forest, the man said, "You stay here father. After four or five days we will come to visit you. We put some food here if you get hungry."

After that the father started to break the cart so he could throw it away, but his son said, "Stop father, don't break it!"

The old man said, "Why not?"

The son answered, "Because I will use that cart for you when you are old."

After that the young man felt very sad and guilty. He apologized to his father. He then took his father and they went home. After that he threw a little party for his father to apologize to him.



*Xai Thao, Minneapolis*

## The Ghost and the Power Stick

*Kao Vang (A), Brooklyn Park*

A million years ago on the mountain, two groups live together. One family has a girl and one family has a boy. The boy and the girl grow up. They stay home every day and they don't do anything. The girl and boy's mothers and fathers go to the farm every day to find everything to support their families.

One day the boy tells his father and mother, "I want to get married with the girl."

The boy's mother and father say, "Who's the girl?"

The boy says, "That girl."

The mother and father say, "No, she's very lazy and you too. We can't let you marry her because you both never do anything."

After one month the boy and the girl go to cut wood in the forest to build a house. After the boy and the girl come to live in the house they work early in the morning every day. After seven years the boy and the girl now have every thing they need, unfortunately the boy dies. After nine months the girl has a baby son.

After the son grows up to be 18 years old, he asks his mother "Where is my father?"

The mother tells the son, "Your father died while I was pregnant with you."

The mother and son are a poor family and don't have anything to eat. They eat leaves and something in the soil for food. One day they go to find leaves for food. When the mother and son come back home at night, the mother follows the son. A ghost catches the mother. The son goes back to catch the ghost. After the son catches the ghost, the ghost bites the mother. She dies at that time.

The son catches the ghost the son says to the ghost. "If you can't wake up my mother, you get to die too."

The ghost says. "Yes, I can do it, because I have a better power stick."

After that the ghost and the son go to the ghost's house. The ghost gives the power stick to the son. The power stick's one side says, "Wake up!" And other side says, "Die." So the son takes the power stick to wake up his mother and father and all people who died wake up. After that the people were very happy. They vote the son to be president in the country.

*Kao Vang (A) is originally from Laos.*

## The Time Machine

*Rebeca Robles, Fridley*

The Time Machine is the dreams of all people. It is marvelous because you have the opportunity to come back to the past. This machine makes it easy, only a new car is necessary, and water from Lake Calhoun—this is the fuel—and a one small computer.

This marvelous machine is simple to use. It is necessary to push the button in the year in the computer when you desire to go and immediately you go to the past. The machine has only 24 hours in the past, then it is necessary to return to the present, because maybe you will not return alive.

The cost is one million dollars. Please go to the office in the Empire State in New York City, because maybe in ten years, you get the machine.





# Hopes, Dreams and Future

## I Would Like

*Anonymous, Blaine*

I would like to live for a long time because I have to go to my country. I will help children who don't have mothers or fathers. I would like to buy a house. I would like to open a school. I would like to visit my brothers. I would like to be married and I would like to have four children. I would like to see my grandmother because she is too old. I would like to have a happy family.

## My Dream

*Abdullahi Osman, Owatonna*

I came from Somalia in East Africa. I am going to tell you about my history. My dream is to learn English very well. I came to Owatonna to live. I like Owatonna because it's a beautiful city and my family is very happy, so that's good. I am going every day to ESL classes. I like my teachers because they help me. I will try to get my GED one day, and after that I will go to college. I believe my dream will come true.

## Believing

*Charla Hutton, Saint Cloud*

My life has not always been good. I did a lot of crying and went through a lot of rejection, but I still held on to my dream. My dream is my hope and dreams do come true if you believe in them.

## Learning English Is Hard

*Carmen Velasco, Saint Paul*

When I started to learn English I came to the school to study so I thought I was losing my time. I came again and again but I felt like I didn't learn anything. I quit and came back many times. I got frustrated and unhappy. But I told myself, "Come on, keep going," but it was hard again. I turned sad and impatient and then I tried again and again.

Now I continue to study English. I'm not what I really want to be, but my hope doesn't die. I still want to learn English and hopefully one day in the future I'm going to be able to talk, understand, write and read

how I want. That is my goal and I'm going to reach my goal. I don't know when, but I'm going to do that.

*Carmen Velasco is originally from Mexico.*

## Fishing

*Eric Davis, Elk River*



*Luan Vu, Waite Park*

**F**ishing is an activity that is full of fun, suspense, and it's relaxing. You also learn to have patience while waiting on that first bite of the day.

It happens! A fish bites your bait; you're excited. You can't wait to see what's on your hook.

You know it's got to be a big one, but only too soon, you find out that it's a small fish fighting to stay free. So you smile at the little fighter and do the honorable thing. Set the little guy free.

See, people at one point in life failed; they went for the bait, hook, line and sinker. We played games with our lives, freedom, and other people's freedom as well. Until that day, your freedom is on the other end of that hook. You begin to think that your freedom is important, too. You fight.

A lesson well learned: freedom is very important to everyone.

## My Family and My Teachers

*Thu Van Phan-Nguyen, Minneapolis*

**E**veryone is the same. I was born and grew up in South Vietnam. I had a brother who died on the field of honor. I came to the USA in 2007. I lived under Socialist Republic of Vietnam for a long time.

I know there is nobody who loves children as much as their parents, especially a mother. My mother taught me to cook, make cake, and sew. For me, she was a wonderful mother. She was everything. I thank you, mother.

In the US, I met a difficult language because I don't know how to listen to or how to speak English. My older brother lives here. He registered me at Northside ABE School. He takes me to school every day. Now I speak a little English and I listen to a little English. I thank you, my older brother.

I thank you, my dear teachers, Miss Chris Cinque, Miss Gina Jarvi, Miss Nancy Sengoz, and Miss Carolyn Sayers, who taught me to read, listen, write, talk and use computers. My dear teachers have been thoughtful, helpful and happy to me for a long time, so I will write my impressions of them.

I love Minnesota where it is snowing, freezing, and cold. Our teacher and students are warm. Even when it is snowing our teacher and the students are still happy. How beautiful, warm, and happy! So much cold outside, though.

I wish that my dear teachers are happy and get younger forever and forever. I sincerely thank you again, my dear teachers for helping students who come from different countries like me.

*Thu Van Phan-Nguyen is 55 years old and is originally from South Vietnam.*



## Living Well

*José Sánchez, Minneapolis*

**M**y name is José. I am 30 years old. I went to the doctor for a regular check up. The doctor asked me what I thought about my weight. I told him that I was okay but he said that I am overweight. He suggested to me to lose weight; that will avoid illness in my body.

The best way to lose weight is eating lots of vegetables, drinking a lot of water, and exercising. It has not been so easy for me. I can eat all the vegetables, drink lots of water, but doing exercise, it has been hard for me. Sometimes I do not have time and sometimes I feel so tired, but I am trying to do my best to lose weight and I hope to lose weight and be healthy.

## My Dream

*Larisa Notebaart, Woodbury*

**M**y dream includes belief, hope and love. My name is Larisa. I am from Ukraine. I came here four years ago and I have two sons. They are teenagers. When I was a young girl, I liked to read the fairy tale about Cinderella. I used to pretend that I was her and waiting for my prince. To my surprise after many years my dreams came true.

I met my husband through the internet and it turned my life upside-down. When we first met, I didn't speak English and he didn't speak any Russian, so we used the dictionary. Now I am very happy that I can speak English and communicate with my husband well.

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When I was a young girl, I liked to read the fairy tale about Cinderella. I used to pretend that I was waiting for my prince.

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I have an interesting life in America. I enjoy going to my English class, going to the library. And recently I had a very important event in my life. I passed my US citizenship test. I greatly appreciate all the help I received from my ESL teacher, Janet, and my volunteer citizenship teacher, Carol. I want to tell you, my friends, to always believe that your dreams can come true. I wish everyone the best and hope you use the chance that you have. Good luck.

## Goals of My Future

*Ubah Farah, Rochester*

**I** have goals that I have to achieve for my future. One of the goals that I have for my life is to be a nurse. The reason I want to be a nurse is because I like to help the people and I am a very helpful person. The first thing I need is to get my diploma. After that I will have to go to college and take nursing courses. When I do all these things, I will move to the United Arab Emirates and work there as a nurse and make money. Getting a diploma, being a nurse, and moving to the United Arab Emirates are my future goals.

*Ubah Farah is originally from Mogadisho, Somalia.*

## Visit My Country

*Lian, Savage*

**I** have been missing my country, Cambodia for a long time. I will go back to see my country and then to visit my cousin. We will look around the countryside at how the country has changed since I last saw it.

## Me and Mine

*Susmitha Ande, Eagan*

**M**y hope is to be a good person and a helping hand to others. I always dreamed of getting into a job and becoming a helping hand to my husband. But six years back when I came to the US, I didn't have a work permit so I just stayed home. Even though I completed my Bachelors in Science in my country, I always feel like I don't know anything because I am not utilizing my knowledge.

The greatest responsibility now is that I am taking care of my family—that is the first dream. I want them to be good people and good individuals as they grow. I want to do whatever I can for them. My husband always says taking care of kids is the first and foremost job. That is very true.

I want my children to have a good education and good life. As a mother, I want them to have everything they want in their lives. I am thankful to God for giving us a good life.

*Susmitha Ande is 30 years old and is originally from India.*

## Wrestling

*Keith Norling, Alexandria*

**S**chool wrestling is my favorite sport because it was up to me to make the team,

it was up to me to make points for the team, and it was up to me to make weight. Down the road it was wrestling that taught me to never give up in life. But even though I disciplined myself, I can be with others. I had coaching for wrestling and now I have coaching for reading. Someday I hope I can be a coach for that.

## This Is My Idea

*Amina Mahamud, Saint Cloud*

**M**y name is Amina and my native language is Somali. I am a 25-year-old woman and I have a dream concerning the

conflict in my home country, Somalia. I remember when I was six years old and the civil war of Somalia and it was so sad. I want to tell all my brothers and sisters to stop fighting and live in peace. We must stop killing our children—our most important people. They are

our future engineers, doctors, teachers, and pilots. The children will develop our country and let us live in peace. Life without peace is nothing. Let us think about our problems.

I hope we will solve our problems. Then, we can go back to our country, because the fighting and killing are the reasons we left. My dream is that we have peace one day.



*Anonymous, Coon Rapids*

# Childhood Dream

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## Delayed By War

*B*efore I came to America my childhood dream was to become a doctor. In Somalia, my homeland, there is still a war going on which interfered with my dream of a good education. We were in a refugee camp for four years. There was no food, clean water, and no school clothes so I could not go to school. I had a secret marriage. I was 17.

Then in 1995 I had a great opportunity. My aunt's family in Buffalo, New York sponsored me along with my other aunt and her children. I had to leave my husband in Kenya. Buffalo was a small town and gave me no opportunity to improve my English skills. I could not find a job. I had relatives in Minneapolis so I went there. In Minnesota you could find a lot of jobs at that time, but you couldn't work without a car. Even education is hard without a car. I went with some friends to a meat packing plant in Harley, Iowa where I could work. I learned English from my co-workers. They were good people. There was no school in the town but after four years I had money to buy a car. I passed my driver's test because I could read Somali.

My husband joined me in 2000 and we moved back to the Twin Cities. My husband, who speaks English fluently, supported me in my dream of learning English and going to school, but my schooling was interrupted by four children. When my children started school, I saw them with their backpacks going off to the opportunity I never had. In 2006 I took time to go after my dream again. I started ESL/GED classes in Eagan. My daughter started Head Start in South Saint Paul in 2008. Because I had to drive her, I switched to the South Suburban Adult Basic Education Program in South Saint Paul where I'm still taking classes. I am thankful for the way the program has helped me with my English skills. Carolyn, who works with me every day, is kind and helpful. I also appreciate the tutors who give up their time to help in following my dream.

Now I say my childhood dream has been delayed. Maybe I'm not a doctor yet, but along the way I learned many other things. I am a US citizen and I am still learning.

*Amina*

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*Amina is an ESL student in the South Suburban Adult Basic Education Program. She is 32 years old and lives in Eagan with her husband and four children. She is an active member of the YMCA, attends a number of exercise classes, and enjoys playing with the children, swimming, and shopping.*

## My Goals

*Alfonso Castillo, Minneapolis*

**H**i, my name is Alfonso Castillo. I am from southeast Chiapas, Mexico. I came here a few years ago. I am so happy to be here because I can do many things. I can help my mother and most of all support my brother and sister. Now I feel so happy and proud of my brother because he graduated from the university last December and he became an architect in April. Now, I am still going to school for ESL class and have learned a lot. I have planned to go to school to realize my dreams to be an engineer in the future, which is not far away, but I have to say I miss a lot of my traditions and my country.

## Childhood Dreams

*Margaret Polyakova, Coon Rapids*

**I**would like to tell you what I wanted to be when I was a child. When I was growing up I wanted to be a librarian, a music school teacher or an accountant. Let me tell you about each of my wishes.

First, I wanted to be a librarian. There are a lot of libraries everywhere in my country, Russia. Every city and school has a library. Pupils and other people went to the library and took books on different subjects. I loved the large clean room with big windows in it. There were a lot of shelves full of books. I loved to go to the library to read a book, and also saw how the librarians worked. I imagined myself as a librarian.

Then, as I was growing, I wanted to be a teacher at a music school because I, myself, studied in the local music school. There were a lot of different musical instruments. I loved to see the work of teachers and wanted to be an accordion teacher like my teacher, Alexandr Horunjy.

Finally, I wanted to be an accountant. My main reason for this was that I loved to fill out forms, to write the digits to accounts, and I liked to work with papers.

I did not become any of those people. All my plans failed. I became a dental technician. I worked in the dental office. I had my own table with a lot of different instruments. The content of my job was preparation of crowns and dentures for people. I have worked with wonderful doctors, people, and of course children who made their moms proud.

## A Dream of Freedom

*A.G., Saint Cloud*

**I**have a dream and I wish that one day it will be realized. My dream is that one day, not too far in the future, I will be free in this country. I wish to work wherever I want, and drive without fear that a police officer will stop me just because of my skin color. I wish that when my children grow up, they will have college opportunities and get a good profession without discrimination. I think that this wish is one many of us have. We just want to be free in this country.

## What Life Is

*Judy Yen, Eagan*

**L**ife is a time of expectations and waiting. In different times and situations we get a variety of expectations. Kids like to play and learn and hope to receive applause and gifts. Young girls wish for the appearance of "Prince Charming." Separated couples long for the reunion of marriage. Seniors expect to be healthy and have company. Victims of a hurricane or earthquake disaster yearn to be rescued.

Expectations are the goal of life. Students study hard to get good grade point average

scores and prizes in order to become a doctor, a lawyer, etc. A music major wishes to become a composer, a pianist, a violinist some day. Christians wish for the coming of eternal life. However, we must do our best to achieve the goal. The journey is bitter, but the fruit is sweet.

Expectations and waiting make life meaningful. They are like a lighthouse that helps the ships sailing on the sea arrive at the port safely. Expectations guide life to the destinations. We know what should be done. Don't waste time on doing uncertain matters.

When we get old and look back at the things we went through, life is like taking a train passing the mountain, the river, the suburbs and the cities. We enjoyed the changes of the sights. Finally, we have to get off the train. Anyway, we should live a hopeful, joyful and optimistic life.

*Judy Yen is originally from Taiwan.*

## Part of My Life

*Manuel Cumes C., Columbia Heights*

**H**i. I'm trying to learn more about how to write better and work with my verbs, because always when I'm in a conversation, I say everything in present tense. The same thing happens when I'm on the keyboard. I have to go to my little dictionary, but this is cheap and not complete.

I wish to be more focused on my thoughts, but I feel my mind is concentrated on my house, bills, and family. Today I'm in class thinking about how I did my first step to the school and working on this paragraph. I'm thinking maybe I'm wasting my time for the last 16 years, because my life was go to work, check on kids, and work, work, work, but today I'm free. My kids are grown up, married, and now they have their kids.

I read in a book, "It never is too late to start new goals." I see an old man (he is 89 years old) take a class for computer to be in an IT program. I hope that I have the vision to complete this class and continue with something also.

## How Old I Would Like To Be

*Kamella, Blaine*

**I**would like to live to be 80 years old because I don't want my kids and my husband to be sad. I wish they will always be happy. I hope to keep them happy and I want to see their lips always laughing. I wish my kids will one day marry, see them as husband and wife, and see my grandchildren. I don't want to die before I can see my kids' wedding and their children. I also don't want to leave my husband alone because we don't have any of our family here. That's why I can't live without my husband and he can't live without me.

*Kamella is originally from Afghanistan.*

## Minnesota Adult Education

*Luta (Ruth)Tshihamba, Saint Louis Park*

**A**dult Basic Education is the key that has helped me along the way to break into the academic world. I remember how I used to rely on others to help me with most everything, including filling out forms in the hospital. When I came to school, I couldn't read or write in English. I was uncomfortable in class at first. My educators pushed me and encouraged me to study. I made a commitment to myself that the only way I would achieve my goal was to put my mind to study everything my teachers taught me.

My teachers told me that reading and writing both go together. I made my efforts to

study English because my goal was to be an author and become a United States citizen. I went to a citizenship class and passed the test. I was very happy to vote for the first time.

I have written a 230-page memoir. My teacher is helping me to edit it and we hope to send it to a publisher soon. I have learned how to use the computer, so I can type and send revisions through email. This has been very helpful.

For a 66 year-old, it is an achievement that school has made me who I have become. I know that I still have a long way to go and much studying to do. This is why it is important to support Adult Basic Education programs that help people who are not capable of paying for their studies. I'm lucky that I was given a free education and the best teachers. Otherwise, I would never be the proud woman I am today.

*Luta (Ruth) Tshihamba is originally from Kananga City, Kasai, Congo.*

## Childhood Dreams

*Hugo Ortiz, Anoka*

When I was growing up I wanted to be a teacher or a doctor, and I wanted to visit the archeological zones in my country.

When I was a child I went to school and I liked to see how the teachers worked. In my house I played with my little sister and we played that I was a teacher and she was a student. We played very happily.

When I watched television, I saw the archeological zones of Mexico. I dreamed that I liked to visit these zones. I thought that to go to visit these zones would be very fantastic. When I studied at the university, my teacher, my friends, and I went to visit Teotihuacan, Chichen Itza and Tulun. These archeological zones are very beautiful.

My other dream was to be a doctor, because my mother works in the hospital and I liked to go to the hospital with her. In the hospital, I liked to play in the area where my mother works and thought that this work was very nice.

I like to remember my dreams, because I think that is very important to have dreams. I studied tourism and I am very happy to do my dream.

## Street Children of Mexico

*Ana K. Sifuentes, Rochester*

If I had one million dollars, I would start a foundation to help the children who live in the streets of Mexico. If you drive through the streets of Mexico, you will see them. They can clean windshields, make a funny show, wash your car, everything you want just to get some coins or something to eat. They are dying in the streets and nobody cares. The society rejects them, and in the newspaper it says that they are "the bad image." The reality is sad that nobody does anything.

The first step to help these kids is to provide food and shelter. We can start getting a building with enough space to provide shelter for the kids. We must divide the shelter to make a cafeteria and bedrooms. The staff will be sure to provide comfort and security, something similar to home because home is the true need of these children.

The second thing these children need is education. The majority of these kids can't go to school because they are hungry, dirty, and ill. So the most important thing here is to get school and give them hope. If they eat healthy, they can get good scores and find potential inside.

The third step is to provide free medical assistance to the kids. Diseases such as anemia are common in these kids because of

the malnutrition. Another large part of them suffer from venereal disease or at the worst HIV. Medical assistance for these children is so important to survive this hard life.

The fourth step is to provide legal assistance. This is essential because they live in the streets and have

a long history of robbery and crime. Many others have been arrested with adults and have become victims of assault or abuse. It is important also to find a way to be adopted and provide hope for a better life.

This is a very sad problem, but every day more and more kids are sleeping on sidewalks, in abandoned houses, and under the bridges. To help the street's kids is my dream because they are the future of my beautiful Mexico.

## My Dreams

*Mary Kileo, Woodbury*

**M**y name is Mary Kileo. I am a registered nurse from Tanzania. I am currently in the United States. I have a one-year visa. My purpose for coming here is to build relationships with people in the United States who can help realize my dream of building a medical clinic and later on a school of nursing in Tanzania.

I have saved my money for the past 12 years and purchased an acre of land for clinic in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, East Africa. I have been approved by the Tanzanian government to break ground for the clinic. I have worked as a nurse in Tanzania since 1986 in many capacities, but most recently for six years with people who have HIV/AIDS. Many of them are young mothers.

I care for many people with incredible

health struggles. For example, recently I cared for a 60 year-old woman with HIV, tuberculosis, leprosy, and tetanus.

Unfortunately, there are many people that I care for who have multiple health problems that require much care. I need both financial and prayerful support to realize this dream so I can help the people in my country improve their health quality of life.

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Diseases such as anemia are common in these kids because of the malnutrition.

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## Hear My Thoughts, Mr. President

*Jermaine Miles, New Hope*

**I**t is ironic how certain patterns in life evoke memories or emulate others. I remember as a child living care free without a worry in the world about the predicament our nation was undergoing. Too young to realize the reality of the crisis that fellow Americans and I were subjected to, I was not wise enough to understand the effect it played in my life. My life seemed to be a million miles away from the problems our nation was facing.

At the time, my worries were a call home from the principal or not making it home before the street lights came on, while my elders worried about the worldly issues such as war and the debt our nation was facing. I have now evolved from the young carefree boy into a grown man who understands and worries about the current state of our country and what the future holds for my children and the kids across the world.

Two important chapters of my life were faced with the same worldly problems, which played a significant role in the way I used to view the leaders of our nation. It seems as if déjà vu is happening due to the fact that two thirds of my life have been lived throughout Iraq wars. As a child at the age of ten, I was absorbing and learning things, if they were good or bad. Today as an adult, I see these

wars as poor decision making by our nation's leaders. The leaders are so involved with the problems of the world that they tend to look past the major issues that our country is faced with.

People often tend to wonder why my generation and the generations following may have violent, corrupt, and/or negative demeanors. They wonder why we are constantly at war with each other day after day. We resort to violence because we have been lead to believe that misunderstandings or any altercation with our adversaries may result in war! This message is delivered through our media and our government. I personally feel as though the leaders of the United States should lead by a better example to our youth and deal with our problems or issues first and foremost. An analogy would be a parent who gives their child little or no attention, may result in having a rebellious child.

## The Bridge

*Wilson Caballero, Woodbury*

A bridge is a structure built to span gorges, valleys, valley roads, railroad tracks, rivers, bodies of water, or any other physical obstacle, for the purpose of providing passage over the obstacle. Designs of bridges will vary depending on the function of the bridge and the nature of the terrain where the bridge is to be constructed, but my goal is not to tell you what a bridge is or how it is made. My goal is to share with you a little bit of my experience during my stay here in the United States to become a "bridge" between Colombia and this country.

I am a foreign language student and I am going to be a teacher for little kids. For this reason I came here to improve my English language. Therefore, I will be able to

teach English in a correct and meaningful way, because I want my little students to be excellent in this language. In addition, this experience makes me grow as a person and a future professional. In fact, I am learning a lot of things about the kids here to apply to my future job, and it is my objective to become a bridge to know culture and behaviors and didactics and more. I want to use this knowledge that I am acquiring in the US to complete my task of being a bridge.

I think that it is important for me to become a bridge because there are many things that people misunderstand about my country, Colombia. There are things that the media doesn't ever mention during its broadcastings, for example, every event in my country is a big party with a lot of good people where you can dance, eat, and drink without any problem. It has beautiful landscapes, a lot of beaches, a lot of passion for life and the country, but it is very hard to explain because we have everything that you want in a small place. So if you decide to visit a good place around the world, please visit Colombia. It is probably going to be your best decision in your life.

Finally, I thank people and ESL teachers for helping me to improve and have a great time in this community because I have met people of different cultures and I have had fun in every place that I have been.

*Wilson Caballero is originally from Tunja, Boyaca, Colombia.*



# Powerful

*Fahmo Ibrahim, Minneapolis*

I feel powerful when I speak English.  
My goal is to get my high school diploma.  
English skills will help me go to college.  
It's a benefit to me.  
I feel powerful when I speak English.

# Happiness. Hope.

*Liliana, Lake Elmo*

As life goes away, life begins.  
As the sun rises on the horizon today,  
it will go down on the horizon tomorrow

Day, night. Night, day.  
I feel the wind going through my frozen thoughts  
that say nothing but sadness.

Day, night. Today, tomorrow.  
Sky and earth, and then, us.  
These rare beings trapped between them.

Trying to find freedom, a freedom  
that could not possibly exist, but only

in the air, in the flowers, in the woods, in thoughts.  
The enlightened darkness, where I always find you.

Happiness.  
And I see you surrounded by flowers  
And I see you rising up with the sun, brightly.  
Hope.

# *How Wonderful it Will Be*

*Anonymous, Hopkins*

*H*ow wonderful it will be  
to live in harmony with every creature in the world.

How wonderful it will be  
to be a friend for all of them.

How wonderful it will be  
to see them marching one by one and passing by  
without fear and one smile.

How wonderful it will be  
to understand what they are talking about.

How wonderful it will be  
to share the whole world and even more.

How wonderful it will be  
swimming in the ocean, flying in the sky,

Traveling across the land and saying to them  
how wonderful you are.



*Luan Vu, Waite Park*

# Roxanne

Brad Crowder, Elk River

*i* dream of bright blue skies like bright blue eyes,  
dabbed with weightless cottonpuff sketchpads for the imagination,  
of rolling green mattresses that make you  
itch all over when you lie on them just so you know  
they weren't made for you.  
it's important to know none of it  
was made for you.

or cosmic dreams of  
black construction paper flecked with countless glittering points,  
shimmering blue and white and red so faintly  
that you probably aren't seeing them properly.  
but if you stare deeply  
into the blackness,

through it,  
all the way to the end of it,  
don't worry because  
as that overwhelming sense of smallness washes over you,  
insignificance envelopes you in its inescapable embrace.

let your breath escape  
with a heaviness that  
carries the weight of your burdens because if you don't matter,  
none of it matters.  
if none of it matters,  
everything will be okay.  
no matter what.

these dreams bear the fruit of Christmas-morning happiness.  
dreams of undulating light gently lapping at wet toes,  
held in earnest conversation with the wind in the trees.  
it's very good conversation because the wind never shouts.  
it just murmurs its points quietly and moves on.

soon enough, dawn-crack morning light will burn up these gossamer dreams.  
i'll be able to wake up to her bright blue eyes,  
the bright blue skies, and philosophizing trees,  
with these flat grey walls fading away instead.

# *My Wish*

*Luis Santos, Minneapolis*

If I had one wish  
If one desire could be true  
If I had one wish  
My wish would be you

If I could choose  
I would stay in your arms forever  
Our hearts would fuse  
And our love would become an endeavor

I would wish for you to stay with me  
For you to be my love  
You would be my heart's key  
Forever my angel, my dove

I would ask of this  
Only with your permission  
Lost in a kiss  
Our love is my ambition

Forever is a long time  
To require in a single command  
I will write out love in a rhyme  
For it would be my demand

So I wished upon the star  
The star that reminded me most of you  
My action seemed bizarre  
But this wish I had to pursue

If I had one wish  
My wish would be you  
And since I made that wish  
My wish has come true

*Luis Santos is 25 years old and is originally from Ecuador.*

## Letter to the Minnesota Congress

*Said Ennahiri, Minneapolis*

**D**ear Senator Torres Ray:

I would like to deeply thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to have free English lessons. It is helping me so much. When I first came here I did not know much English. Now all the people say I am doing very well. Thanks to you and all the dedicated teachers who have worked hard for that. The teachers are helping many people. We are learning, we feel we are becoming a part of the community, we are becoming friends, and we are learning about each other's cultures. This program has helped me and many people that can not pay for an education. Please continue to support adult learning program, it is very important.

Sincerely  
Said Ennahiri

*Said Ennahiri is originally from Morocco.*

## My Goals for School

*Yo Shue, Saint Paul*

**I**am from Thailand, but I was born in Burma. I moved to Thailand when I was 14 years old. Right now I study English at MLC in Arlington Hills. I have been there for about two years. I am in the intermediate level ESL class. I learn many kinds of things.

I have a job. I work second shift. In the morning I come to school. I don't want to stop my English class. I want to continue to go to school. If my English gets better, I want to get a GED. If I get my GED, it will be easier for me to find a job and support my family. If I get a better job I will work first shift and I

will continue to go to school second shift. In the future I want to be a nurse's assistant.

*Yo Shue is originally from Karen State, Burma.*

## Untitled

*Rukia Ayanle, Saint Cloud*

**I**have a dream for my country that it will have peace all around it. Also, my people will be friends. I hope there won't be crime anymore and everyone will hold hands together. I also hope the people will choose a good government. Then they will keep their lives and their hopes.

## Fishing

*Eric Davis, Elk River*

**F**ishing is an activity that is full of fun, suspense, and it's relaxing. You also learn to have patience while waiting on that first bite of the day.

It happens! A fish bites your bait; you're excited. You can't wait to see what's on your hook. You know it's got to be a big one, but only too soon, you find out that it's a small fish fighting to stay free. So you smile at the little fighter and do the honorable thing. Set the little guy free.

See, people at one point in life failed; they went for the bait, hook, line and sinker. We played games with our lives, freedom, and other people's freedom as well. Until that day, your freedom is on the other end of that hook. You begin to think that your freedom is important, too. You fight.

A lesson well learned: freedom is very important to everyone.

## Rough Times

*Omega J., Shakopee*

**W**e all have our ups and downs, the rough times seem to hit hard and make us frown. We just have to be strong no matter what the situation is. It will take a lot of courage and innovation.

We have to stand tall through it all and look up to the sky and thank God we're alive. We may slip, we may fall along our journey to find success, or even fail when we are trying our best, but at least we put ourselves to the test.

So always strive to do what's in your heart and may God lead you in the right direction no matter where you are. There will be bumps in the road and storms, but you'll survive. Let love lead the way, I promise you'll see a surprise.

It's just a matter of time before we're back on our feet. This is only temporary, that you will see. Just don't be afraid of what's to come. Stay away from the culprits who will get in the way. Stick with the winners and you'll see the results in every way. So get ready for a beautiful life and be a strong survivor through these rough times. PEACE.

## My Goal

*Anonymous, Woodbury*

**M**y name is Apolonia. I live in Woodbury. I am married. I have three children. My dream is to put much desire in this country and so it is necessary for me to learn English. It is important and I like to study. I would like to go to Mexico but it is difficult. I'm from there and someday I will go back and I will understand English.

## A New Life

*Rithy Teak, Rosemount*

**I**'m from Cambodia. I lived in my country so long. I just arrived here on December 2, 2008. The USA is a beautiful country. I like it, but it is very difficult for me. I'm trying to learn English and culture. I got married. My wife helps me with everything. She is a beautiful Khmer girl. I think that I will find a good job, but I don't have experience. I want to save a lot of money for my family. Now I have happiness every day.

*Rithy Teak is originally from Cambodia.*

## My New Year's Resolution

*Fatoumata Jallow, Saint Paul*

**T**his year I have an important goal I would like to achieve. I would like to finish my Language Arts 3 class and start the GED program. I need to be organized about my goal and come to school every day. I will study a lot to achieve this goal.

*Fatoumata Jallow is originally from The Gambia.*

## My Story

*Fadumo Aden, Saint Paul*

**I** came from Somalia. I have five sisters and two brothers. One sister, one brother and my mother have passed away. My mother passed away when I was six years old. My father, stepmother, and all my sisters and brothers live in Somalia. I miss them so much. I live alone in the United States. I hope one day to see my family again.

*Fadumo Aden is originally from Somalia.*

## My Dream

*Beatriz Velázquez, South Saint Paul*

**M**y Name is Beatriz Velázquez and I'm 29 years old. I'm married to Alejandro Velázquez. I have three children. My son is Oscar Velázquez and my two daughters are Alexa and Xochitl Velázquez. We are from Mexico. My dream is to travel around the world and talk about Jesus so everybody can know about Jesus. Today is the 29th of January. I take care of my daughter, Xochitl. She is in the hospital. I want to write another thing, but today I will write about how much God takes care of us. Last October 31, my husband fell from a roof. He survived because God saved him. God's mercy is so big for everyone. Never give up. Do you know about this?

## After Coming

*Jay Omat, Cottage Grove*

**B**efore coming to the United States, I didn't know how to speak English. I do understand some words now and even write a little. In Sudan, I did not drive. Now I have a driver's license and have a job so I can take care of my family of a wife and six sons. I own a house and one of my sons is in college at Mankato State.

My goal is to get my GED and go to college too. We are looking forward because we know education is the key to a better life. America is the best country to do whatever you want. This is a country for freedom.

## Tolerance

*Nyanchev T. Donis, Coon Rapids*

**P**eople are different. They have different beliefs behaviors and ideas. Everybody's not alike. We have to treat people with

respect even if they are different. We have to be understanding and sympathetic. We have to accept our differences. Rachel is tolerant because she didn't treat me different. She likes me and teaches me English. She understands me. I am able to tolerate my daughter, Silver. She listens to me and respects me. She is nine years old and is in fourth grade. My son and daughter help me with my English. They are all very good kids.

## Plans for the Future

*Anonymous, Austin*

**I** have a lot of dreams for the future, but first I should learn to speak English. After this I want to get a better job and rent a house because I want to get married. Then I want to go to Mexico and start my own business. I want to build a house too and live forever in my country.

## Saving Money

*Frank González, Owatonna*

**T**hese are hard times, because the economy is down and jobs are limited. We need to look after our jobs, and not spend too much money on things that we do not need. All Americans have a lot of hope in the new president, but we need to help ourselves. I think we can do this in three ways:

First, we need to be more optimistic and realistic. Second, we need to see more than just our own interests, but we need to look out for others. Third, we need to look for new opportunities.

I know that by working hard we can reach our goals in the future.

*Frank González is originally from El Salvador.*

## Preparing for College

*Sabaha Sharif, Minneapolis*

I am a mother who works and goes to school to take care of my children. I must work and go to school at the same time. I know that is hard for me. But, one day I will reach my goal in preparation for college, which involves focus, determination, and a career goal.

English is my second language, and I am prioritizing on my learning process.

I have to read, write and speak a lot to achieve my dreams. I go to the Franklin Learning Center six days a week. To improve on my skills, I also go to Lehmann School for reading, writing, and math. I love my teachers because they care about their students. Lehmann School is a great place to study. I have a book at home that I read every night to practice my English skills. I am trying to build my vocabulary to improve my speaking, reading, and writing skills and that is why I want to study at home because I have a quiet place to learn. Last week I started going to a new school at Lehmann Center. So far I like the school. I take an English class and math class. My teacher is a kind person who teaches English class and helps me when I don't understand. When she answers my questions, it's so gratifying and rewarding to have such a wonderful teacher. Going to school is not easy. I will continue to go to school and to work hard.

I want to study for my dream to be a nursing assistant. Some of the students work hard and have gone through college. That seems rewarding. For example, a young Chinese immigrant who came here with no English enrolled in English as a Second Language classes and has finally achieved his dreams by graduating from college. I will also have to read books that have medical information to prepare for a nursing program.

I want to know and will learn about the human body. I will need to know how to help people in the nursing home. I will have to know how to feed them, give them medicines, and make sure they are okay as they sleep and provide them good care. In conclusion, I will work hard to achieve my goals, and continue go to school to get a career that I want in my future.

## Why I Came to the USA

*Leticia Macias, Austin*

I came from Mexico 12 years ago. It was very hard for me because I love my country, but my family is the most important for me. I thought about my kids' education, safety, and a better life than I had when I was a child. In Mexico many people leave school because they don't have enough money to pay for school supplies, uniforms, and registration to start the school. People are also scared because too many people are kidnapped every day, too many people are killed every day, and the young people are using drugs at an early age. It's why I came to this country.

Now I'm sure I made the best decision coming to the USA with my family, and I'm not worried because my kids have education and safety and a better life.

*Leticia Macias is 36 years old and is originally from Mexico.*

## My Goal is to Express the Reason I Was Born

*Phyllis Suggs, Minneapolis*

I was born to complete God's plan. I'm one of his creations that he had in mind to carry out his plans, to be an inspiration to humanity, to share what God has created in me, and to help someone along the way.



He wants me to speak positive things into someone's life, make it happen, and not giving up when times get rough.

There are times when the storms come. We have to be determined to stand still, exhale and inhale, which brings in a refreshing start to continue the course. For me this gives me strength. I can press on my way until I complete each course.

## Inauguration Day Thoughts

*María Santiago, Forest Lake*

Today I was just thinking about what's happening during these days in this country that I love. The people still are losing their jobs and houses, the schools are cutting their budgets, and the soldiers are still in Iraq. It is really hard to see all these things and not be worried about the future for our kids. I think everybody should be together. It doesn't matter where you are from. The important thing is we are living here and we have to leave our kids a successful, free, and beautiful country. Let's not lose our hopes—IN GOD WE TRUST—and He is never going to leave us alone.

*María Santiago is 33 years old and is originally from Puerto Rico.*

## My Children

*Faduma Ali Ahmed, Saint Paul*

I have a dream that one day my children will achieve their dream. Since I was a young girl, I wanted to be an educated person and therefore I want my children to have a bright future. Back then in Africa, I did not have a good opportunity to enroll in school and finish my education; therefore I couldn't go to college. Now I am in the US. Because of this reason, I want my children to finish their

education, enroll in college and succeed in their lives.

## My Hobbies

*Anonymous, Richfield*

My name is Ying. I came from Hong Kong some 20 years ago. I have many hobbies including cooking, listening to classical music, and exercising. I want to talk about exercising. It is my wish to enhance my life for 15 to 20 years on top of my original life with less health complications while reducing the troubles of chronic diseases. There are many things we can do to keep ourselves healthy: eat right, get enough sleep, clean up our external and inner body and brain, and exercising right. I will only talk about exercising here.

In the morning, I drink two cups of warm water. This is important to clean our internal organs and dilute our blood. Then I go out to walk for 10 to 15 minutes, deep breathing fresh air and moving my limbs. We need fresh air to reduce the risk of having cancer. Nowadays, it's astounding to hear that one person out of two suffers from cancer (10 years ago only one out of four persons had cancer). After lunch, I take another walk for 10 to 15 minutes. After dinner I do the same thing. On top of the walking, I do Tai Chi and meditation twice a day. Tai Chi is a kind of very soft, light and slow exercise with a history in China of around 200 years. It is a kind of gentleman's exercise that is conducive to calming down our brain and improving our blood circulation. We can go to a school or community center to learn it. Meditation is a kind of old exercise imported from India and China. This calls for total calming down of our body and brain, thus entering a meditation state.

This will let our own system to nurture

our own body. In the short run (one to two years) this can recover our body from fatigue and relax our nervous system, thus releasing us from pressure. In the long run (two years and up) this can enhance our immune system, rejuvenate our appearance, and fight some kinds of chronic diseases such as hypertension, headache, gout, and even cancer. However, this is a long-term process and how much it can do depends on your persistence and your luck. We can learn this from library books or from a teacher (Yoga, Chi Gong, etc.)

My objective is to achieve good health and longer life without spending a significant amount of money. Nothing is more important than your health. Do something now before you are getting old and before it is too late. On the other hand, I never smoke, never drink booze, and never eat too much meat, and never eat more than 80% of my stomach capacity.

## Letter to the Minnesota Congress

*Safiya Ali, Minneapolis*

**D**ear Senator Torres Ray:

I am one of the students of the Minnesota Literacy Council. I am writing this letter to you to thank you for giving us the funding for Basic Education. I am sure your support can help me to continue my education. Then I can get more opportunity for jobs and how to communicate with other people. After that, life will be better.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,  
Safiya Ali

*Safiya Ali is originally from Somalia.*

## Something to Remember

*Alejandro Castaneda, Richfield*

**H**i everybody, my name is Alejandro and I am from Guadalajara, Mexico. I had the opportunity to get to know the US a few times before now, mostly for vacation. Now I came to study English and to see what a wonderful country this is. I came not only for the beauty of the states but for its history and its different cultures. Now that I live here I can meet people from many different parts of the world. I'd like to learn how other people live, work, eat, and play. They say, "The US is the land of the opportunity," and I would like to find that out myself. The other thing that you can see is how this country brings hands from many people when you want or need help. It doesn't matter your race, religion, and economic status, whenever you need it.

I see a very important time for the US and for all the world too. The first African-American president elected to the United States is Barack Obama. I think the US was ready for this important change. This is significant because wherever you come from you can do everything in the US. Only just think about what you want to do. This important change will be remembered in the history, and will be written in books. Now I have this memory in my mind, and I'm sure I will say to my children proudly that I saw this moment with my own eyes in the US.

Thanks United States for giving me a chance to live a good life here, and to open the doors of your home and your heart for me.

## Find Yourself

*Carla T., Shakopee*

**T**ake a good look in the mirror and ask yourself if you like what you see. Why long to be somebody and something other

than yourself? Nobody wants a phony, so brush your shoulders off, lift your head up high, let your hair down, and say, "I love being me." No one has your identity nor characteristics or uniqueness. You are the one and only one, the original, the first and last, so envelop yourself with love and remember there is no one else on Earth like you. Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has made everything beautiful in its time."

### Letter to Minnesota Congress

*Anonymous, Minneapolis*

**D**ear Senator Torres Ray:

I'm a student in the Minnesota Literacy Council. Thank you so much for helping us and giving us the chance to learn how to use the computer and English language. We hope we will have this opportunity until we succeed. Even though it is a very difficult language, I love to learn, because learning English helps me to get a job, to read signs, to understand people, shopping, and to become educated person.

Thank you. Please keep helping the people who speak English as a second language.

Sincerely,  
Anonymous

### Untitled

*Amino Ali, Saint Cloud*

**S**ome people who have motivated me to get an education are my children because they want to see their mother get an education. Then, I will have opportunities like a good job, understanding people, and sometimes helping my grandchildren.

### Myself

*Somphiene Manivanh, Waite Park*

**O**ne thing that motivated me to get an education was my children, because they want to see their mother get an education. Then I will have opportunities like a good job, understanding people, and sometimes helping my grandchildren.

### Family Value

*Chai Khang, Saint Paul*

**M**y name is Chai Khang. I'm from Laos, but I grew up in a Thailand Refugee Camp. My children and my husband are very important to me. If they are not home, the house feels empty and cold. If they are all home, the house feels warm and has more value for me.

In the future, I don't want my children to move out of my house or move to another country. I need them to help my husband and me when we get old. If my family feels happy, I feel stronger with them. We are able to care for our disabled son.

We are not rich people, but I hope my family will still love each other forever. I'm happy to bring my children over here to the US to change their future and make a good life for them.

*Chai Khang is originally from Laos (Hmong).*

---

*My Lovely Bird*

*Mai Lee, Minneapolis*

*New Year / Resolution*  
*Joe Maynard, Iron Range*

New Year

*T*he snow fell soft to cover the lakes  
Now it's a brisk New Year Day  
Thinking back on 2008  
I may have made a few mistakes  
Now time to change before too late

Resolution

Direction toward heaven within  
Positive thoughts equal an equal reaction  
Fill my body with nutrition  
Exercise is my mission to be in a great  
position  
To carry out my resolution

*E*arly morning in the summer  
The sun comes up in the sky.  
It is a warm wind abroad in all the streets.

So many birds go on a trip all together in the woods.  
They have broad wings that help them float on the wind.  
The lovely birds were traveling to the mountains.  
Some lovely birds were traveling together.  
They sing the sound with the wind.  
They have fun and sing the lovely sound.  
They have clear voices and have fun with the air.

When the lovely birds are hungry  
They will kill small animals and drink from all the  
sweet flowers.  
Birds don't hurt each other. They live in peace.  
The lovely birds have beautiful dreams too.

So sometimes I would like to be a bird and have broad  
wings.  
If I had broad wings  
I could travel to find a lovely bird.  
I could fly to all the mountains in the whole wide world.



*Break Through*  
*Coty Marie Martinez, Buffalo*

*T*here are long, tough days  
that have approached me in the last year.  
I have shed many pleasantly painful tears.

Though emptiness avails this hollow place;  
I am reaching out toward a different pull  
of a Powerful Force of a Spirit that has left me  
full.

Standing firm in God's plan,  
untouched by the force of gravity gliding here  
and about;  
shoving itself unconsciously in no particular  
route.

He plants me firm on solid ground,  
reaching out a helping Hand,  
He brings me to His Promised Land.

*The Life*  
*Horacio, Minneapolis*

# *New Year 2009*

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*Yeng Yang Lor, Saint Paul*

*N*ew Year came to last year gone  
I hope everybody gets good things  
And good luck in the New Year.

Something's not good; wrong, broken heart,  
Sick, fail, and didn't have a lover.  
Don't be sad and worry,  
Let them go with last year.  
Because a person is not perfect  
And successful in everything.

So, life of the people is like the sky  
And temperatures go up, down, cloudy and clear.  
When we have success it's like the sky's clear  
And temperature goes up;  
When we fail it's like the sky's cloudy  
And temperature goes down.

When we miss and fail we will have to be patient  
And admit to it—don't worry too much.

Important thing in New Year I ask and need  
Is not to have war in the world—  
All countries be peaceful  
Have friendship with each other.  
If one has problem or doesn't understand  
Solve with ideas and peacefulness,  
Not with weapons and army.  
Thank you.

*Yeng Yang Lor is originally from Laos (Hmong).*



# *Index of Authors*

## **A**

- H.A. 80  
M. A. 151  
Johar Omar Abdella 107  
Amina Abdi 71  
Fadumo Abdi 39  
Hassan A. Abdi 206  
Jamila Abdi 59  
Ubah Abdi 58  
Aabia Abdulahi 42  
Zahra Abdullah 185  
Keyria Abduzez 162  
Yusuf Abow 130  
Beidemariam Abreha 69  
Hawo Ali Abshir 175  
Abshiro 37  
Kaltuma Abumunye 191  
Khadija Adan 55  
Fadumo Aden 256  
Krishna Adhikari 111  
Immaculee Adjamah 146  
Roselyne Admettre 7  
Adriana 38  
Komi Afoutou 177  
Isse Afrah 68  
Claudia Lorena Agudelo 108  
Jesús Aguirre 199  
Raad A. Ahmad 50  
Asha Ahmed 196  
Ayan Ahmed 26  
Derartu Ahmed 103  
Faduma Ali Ahmed 259  
Maryan Ahmed 81  
Ruqia Ahmed 39  
Fadhil Albo 89  
Yvette Suzanne Albrecht 137  
Jesús Alcantar 41  
Noe Alejo 54  
Amino Ali 261  
Ardo Ali 46  
Dhuuh Ali 177  
Halimo Ali 107  
Haredo Ali 166  
Idil Ali 210  
Nadar Ali 195  
Naima Ali 32  
Safiya Ali 260  
Afrah Alkhulaidi 110  
Reena Alle 11  
Mireya Alonso 223  
Juvenal Amador 178  
Sabah Amin 131  
Aminat 228  
Lamiae Andaloussi 47  
Susmitha Ande 244  
Carl Anderson 230  
Brandie Anderton 121  
María Andrade 216  
Ekaterina Androsova 98  
Riffat Anis 171  
Anna 16  
Anonymous 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 19, 42, 46, 48, 62,  
67, 72, 74, 86, 97, 103, 106, 117, 130, 131,  
133, 134, 147, 153, 154, 158, 159, 171,  
178, 179, 180, 193, 203, 223, 225, 226,  
227, 241, 244, 252, 256, 257, 259, 261  
Viviane Argolo 90  
Suad Arouni 91  
Yordanos Asfeha 44  
Khaing Aung 196  
María E. Ávalos 104  
Martin Avila 228  
Gloria Ávila 66  
Rukia Ayanle 255  
Rahel Aynalem 42

**B**

Brenda B. 120  
H.B. 73  
Eric Balboa 74  
Diane Moss Baptiste 101  
S. Barnes 17  
José Barragan 106  
Ivan Barrera 40  
Mónica Barrera 65  
Ludmila Bas 93  
Mikhail Bas 144  
Carine Batey 200  
John Baublitz 212  
Eloisa Bautista Prazk 38  
María Elena Bautista González 41  
Miguel Ángel Bautista 158  
Htoo Baw 45  
Say Hae Baw 38  
Tuesday Baw 198  
Noy Becker 189  
Xiong Nor Bee 187  
Werdi Beker 98  
Michelle Bergstrom 77  
Arabu Nuru Berhe 65  
Abera Berja 90  
Peter Berman 190  
Brian Bernatz 224  
Safaa Bernoussi 84  
Betty 134  
Rachad Bizzell 188  
Luz Adriana Blomster 23  
Bekele Bogale 118  
Kennth Bohlman 103, 118, 164  
José Borja 95  
Jonathan Boswell 72  
Susana Brochado 99  
Richard Brown Sr. iv, 209  
Dennis Ray Bruce, Jr. 125  
Paw Nay Bu 155  
Lynn Bui 132  
Mohamed Burka 50  
Mark Buskovick 233  
María Ramona Bustillos 64

**C**

Shanita C. 211  
Wilson Caballero 250  
Santiago Camposeco 62  
Carmen Canari 221  
Martín Canas 208  
Patricia Lorena Cando 116  
Estéban Carachuri 71  
Carvajal 28  
Alejandro Castaneda 260  
Luz Castaneda 176  
Alfonso Castillo 246  
Hadavbelia Castillo 88  
Natividad Castillo 152  
Carlos Cayetano 158  
Hai CG 222  
Neng Chang 192  
Jintana Chanthavilay 12  
Anita Chatterjee 6  
Ana Chávez 110  
Joyce Chen 15  
Sokly Chhay 97  
Christian 52  
Chrit 172  
Daopeth Cida 67  
Claudia 152  
Raúl Cobos 45  
Marco Contreras 50  
Livia M. Cordon 57  
Teresa Córdova 132  
Pablo Crespo 72  
Jehovah Cross 75  
Brad Crowder 253  
Delfina Cruz 61  
Manuel Cumes C. 247

**D**

Paw Dah 54  
Jeff Daig i  
Daiwei 91  
Daniel 53  
Mohamed Daud 55  
Rocio Davila Acevedo 27



Eric Davis 242, 255  
Hussein Dawid 63  
Thoo Thoo Moo Day 44  
Priscilla De La Cerda 34  
Feng E Deng 222  
María N. Díaz 21  
Martha E. Díaz 60  
Michael Dickerson 236, 237  
Vinh Dinh 94  
Dela Doh 180  
Tammy Domeier 112  
Maria Doree 131

## E

Jamad Egal 102  
Wah Eh 63  
Enit 95  
Said Ennahiri 255  
Bernardino Enríquez 45  
Maria Espana 94  
Mario Estrada 160  
Walter Estrada 64

## F

Adriana Marcela Alfonso Fagua 149  
Anab Farah 175  
Farhan Farah 80  
Kiin Farah 177  
Rahmo Mohamud Farah 109  
Ubah Farah 243  
Janaly Farias 4  
Fatuma 185  
Faustino 49  
Starlin Fernández 47  
Florencia 118  
Jean French 36

## G

Elsa G. 26  
A.G. 246  
Mohamed Gaabane 168  
Elizabeth Galanay 151  
Galina 154  
Claudia García 116

Crispina García 70  
Martha García 219  
Pao Ge 178  
Abezie Gebeyehu 55  
Sandra Geer 210  
Yawo Glissou 179  
Erika Godinez 104  
Antonio González 16  
Arturo González 176  
Frank González 257  
José H González 111  
Monique Gool 171  
Roberto Grande 97  
Paulette Griffin 110  
Gustavo 1  
Antonia Gutiérrez 81  
Gaby Guzmán 168  
Lizbeth Guzmán Jiménez 113

## H

A.H. 122  
Marian Hadi 38  
Nezha Harrison 96  
Qali Hasan 84  
Aniso Hassan 94  
Asha Ahmed Hassan 156  
Safia Hassan 129  
Elizabeth Haugen 76  
Christopher Hazelton 14  
Kari Helgren 188  
Hue Her 235  
Toua Her 60  
Jeffry Lee Herendeen, Jr. 231  
Patrick Herman 127  
Tin Hlaing 42  
Horacio 263  
Pa Houa 64  
Chit Htoo 19  
Junita Htoo 129  
Lei Htoo 40  
Tha Htoo 44  
Shailesh Humagai 96  
Aglan Hussein 165  
Charla Hutton 241

**I**

I. 93  
Fahmo Ibrahim 251  
Mohamed Ibrahim 208  
Safio Ismail 145

**J**

Omega J. 256  
Ana J. 198  
Angel Jara 158  
Aisatu Jalloh 224  
Fatoumata Jallow 256  
Amina Jama 25  
Guled Jama 66  
Sahro Jama 191  
Kinga Janosz 20  
Kristin Jenkins 70  
Sherry Jensen 101  
Jerome 156

**K**

Bethany K. 148  
Ammar Kadhum 3  
Kamella 247  
Vasyliy Kaploukhyl 27  
Karina 85  
Rajinder Kaur 204  
Hussen Kadir 223  
Dirk Kemper 32  
Kev-O 173  
Paw Mu Kha 171  
Chai Khang 261  
Jee Khang 198  
Ka Khang 49  
Kee Khang 144  
Nhialue Khang 51  
Anatoliy Khmel'nitskiy 155  
Khou 57  
Mary Kileo 249  
Sarah King 138  
Rita Klan 221  
Vladimir Kochergin 81

Nataliya Kochergina 163  
Galina Koltun 87  
Annette Kossow 143  
H. Gail Kpola 193  
Htoo Ku 39  
Sopheap Kuong 26  
Doo Kway 39

**L**

Janice L. 126  
Mu Ree La 173  
Greg LaCroix 33  
Larisa 219  
Svetlana Larson 156  
Ngae Lay 129  
Lien Thi Le 183  
Tuan Le 102  
Lucía Ledesma 204  
Mai Lee 262  
Nhia Lee 189  
Pa Lee 182  
Toua Lee 167  
Xee Lee 227  
Chemeda Lemessa 117  
Tatyana Levina 98  
Lian 243  
Liban 15  
Lilia 52  
Liliana 251  
Kanika Lim 109  
José Luis López Méndez 33  
Luis López 101  
Yuliana López 44  
Yeng Yang Lor 264  
Lorenzo 98  
Jason LuBecke 75  
Wenhong Luo 202

**M**

Halimo Abdi M 25  
B.M. 79  
Coty M. 109

Paz Maceda 51  
Astrude Maceno 13  
Leticia Macias 258  
Amina Mahamud 244  
Sreedevi Mahawadi 24  
Ha Mai 29  
Lilia Makarevich 176  
Joaquín Maldonado 225  
Iryna Malets 51  
Vasili Malets 184  
Mona Malik 194  
Somphiene Manivanh 261  
Maoly 40  
Javier Marines 63  
Coty Marie Martinez 263  
Abel Martínez 16  
Deshay Matthews 220  
Tamika Matthews 130  
Rob Mauro 103  
Joe Maynard 262  
Teklu K. Mazengia 114  
David Meger 229  
Megumi 120  
Amarech Mekengo 69  
Miguelito Méndez 206  
María Mendoza 114  
Rosalba Mendoza 67  
Ana Lilia Mercado Chávez 12  
Manuel Merchan 86  
Andrea Merino 194  
Genet Meteku 94  
Natividad Meza 61  
Elizabeth Mihailidis 147  
Jermaine Miles 249  
Amber Millner 202  
Daniel Missgna 79  
Gregory Mnushkin 136  
Abdulrahman Moalin 197  
Lerida Moco 86  
Alfred Moen 138  
Amal Mohamed 19  
Deqa Mohamed 129  
Farhia Mohamed 31  
Jamal Mohamed 227

Mohamed 93  
Mohamed Mohamed 78  
Roda Dahir Mohamed 163  
Angela Momanyi 35  
Fabio Iván Monroy Ramírez 71  
Hsa Moo 17  
La Moo 61  
May Moo 102  
Luz Divina Morales 72  
Neri Morazan 203  
Mayra Moreno 41  
Rafael Moreno 65  
Naree Moua 221  
Qamar Mudey 18  
Amina Mudhir 94  
Antonia Muñoz 226  
Felicitas Muñoz 43  
Saïdo Muse 11  
Natasha Muzyro 206  
Kay Thwae Myint 216  
Myriam 60

## N

Karen N. 183  
Nadifo 215  
Nurun (Muna) Nahar 66  
Elvia Narvaez 40  
Lidia Nava-Hernández 73  
Ka Naw 105  
Nedelka 117  
Sang Net 166  
Blaise Ngandjui 20  
Dien Nguyen 43  
Diep Nguyen 114  
Dong Nguyen 107  
Hoang Kim Phan Nguyen 66  
Hoang Nguyen 83, 92, 210  
Mai-Anh Nguyen 189  
Phat Nguyen 214  
Phuoc Nguyen 81  
Tuong Vi Nguyen 170  
Keith Norling 244  
Larisa Notebaart 243  
Aneudy Nuñez 172

## O

Be O. 54  
Miriam Olan 224  
Olga 84  
Aracely Olivas 219  
Maryan Omar 112  
Osman Omar 13  
Jay Omot 257  
Ojulu Omot 213  
Natasha Ballestena Orozco 211  
Hugo Ortiz 46, 248  
Abdullahi Osman 241  
Halimo Osman 217  
Fidencia Othaniel 168  
Kathie Overlid 212  
Román Ovillo 149  
Maria Leonor Oyarzabal 129

## P

Klara Paley 28  
Alex Pallazhco 39  
Miguel Palmas 159  
Katie Pattison 128  
Paty 119  
Ku Paw 48  
Ma Nay Paw 157  
Taw Naw Paw 43  
Merlynn Paxton 99  
Angélica Pedreguera 53  
Aurora Pedroza 57  
Carolina Peña 133  
Guillermina Pérez 58  
Lucina Pérez 96  
Marilu Pérez Ramírez 218  
Ofelia Pérez 68  
Wilson Perry 190  
Kyong Persinger 70  
Long Phan 216  
Thu Van Phan-Nguyen 242  
Philip 23  
Phouangrath Phrommathed 65  
Kelly Pierce 229  
Wayland Pierson 8

Ángel Romero Piña 30  
Imelda Piñones 132  
Jessica Platt 139  
Christopher Podvin 21  
Margaret Polyakova 246  
Malgosia Poplawska-Keefe 135  
Manuel Popoca 41  
Somaly Prak 115  
Blanca Preciado 199  
Nyanhial Puoch 219

## Q

René Quintanilla 157  
Margarita Quiroz 142  
Adan Quiterio 96  
Mayra Quiterio 2  
Jeaneth Quito 83  
Pablo Quizhpi 143

## R

Rachelika 29  
Irene Ramírez 17  
María Ramos 49  
JuliAnn Randall 58  
Lilian Rapalo 119  
David Renz 210  
Victor Reyes 3  
María Reynoso 161  
Randy Ringo 9  
Victoria Rios 82  
Ana Rivera 27, 126  
Edith Rivera 50  
Hilda Rivera 97  
Miriam Rivera 133  
Roberto 63  
Candy Rodríguez Colón 106  
Eloisa Rodríguez 55  
Leonardo Rodríguez 218  
Susana Rodríguez 37  
Teresa F. Rodríguez 87  
Verónica Rodríguez 38  
Sophy Roeun 164  
Angel Romero 30

Argimiro Romero D. 222  
Irma Romero 59  
Jorge Romero 220  
María Eugenia Rosales 228  
Angélica Ruiz 59  
Bozel Rulford 77  
Phillip Ruwan 10

## S

Eduard S. 42  
Sergey S. 144  
Tabukum Sabina 65  
Brenda Saenz 197  
Halimo Said 72  
Diana Saidu 216  
Sara Sakr 202  
Amina Salad 245  
Adriana Saldívar Hernández 170  
Samy 113  
Dionisio Sánchez 159  
Gisela Sánchez 129  
José Sánchez 243  
Ruth Sandy 134  
María Santiago 259  
Santio 163  
Luis Santos 254  
Aneela Saquib 205  
Megumi Sato 83  
Eang Say 217  
Wah Wah Say 133  
Cassandra Schlottman 124  
Schmidt 71  
M. Magali Segura 90  
Selina 215  
Orthai (Wai) Sereekhunakhun 73  
Juan Serrato 69  
Sintayhu Setegne 44  
Paw Sha 18  
Sabaha Sharif 258  
Sal Wae Sheen 179  
Mohamed Sheikh 178  
Faisa Shire 41  
Zainab Shire 101

Yo Shue 255  
Saytuun Shuuriye 79  
Richard Shwe 64  
Dinora Sierra 153  
Ana K. Sifuentes 248  
Tiessa I. Simoes 207  
Sisu 88  
Manolak Sivongsay 145  
Soloman 197  
Srey Soumaly 5  
Warunyaporn Standal 22  
Isabel Suazo 104  
Sulaiman A. Subhan 82  
Claudia Suenaga 70  
Eistarlin Sugal 234  
Phyllis Suggs 258  
Benjiang Sun 53  
Chantha Suong 185  
Sveta 30  
Svetlana 176  
Christelle Sylvestre 89

## T

Carla T. 260  
John Taddy 188  
Maria de las Mercedes Tajbakhsh 31  
Rebecca Tam 186  
Sophal Tan 68  
Efrain Tapia Burgos 47  
Kathy Taylor 25  
Rithy Teak 256  
Mersy Carrion Tejada 68  
Jorge Arellano Tepetla 222  
Chue Thao 174  
Long Thao 175  
Soua Thao 62  
Wa Thao 57  
Xai Thao 238  
Youa Thao 12  
Thiem 37  
Sain Thin 58  
M. Thomas 235  
Manuel Tigre 215

Rita F. Timberlake 192  
Chit Toe 187  
Cynthia Torres 163  
Ricardo Torres 203  
Tram Tran 43  
James Trettel 76  
Dawa Tsering 207  
Luta (Ruth)Tshihamba 247

## U

Damina Umar 175  
Shahlo Umarova 115

## V

Amy Vang 45  
Bao Vang 56  
Bla Vang 42  
Cheng Vang 192  
Cher Vang 154  
Chi Vang 218  
Ger Vang 136  
Kao Vang 239  
Ker Vang 195  
Lor Vang 201  
Mai Chao Vang 116, 135  
Neng Vang 162  
Pang Vang vi  
Tchuyi Vang 172, 180  
Xai Vang 220  
Xia Vang 215  
Vannasone 130  
Silvia Vargas 37  
Carmen Velasco 241, 242  
Beatriz Velázquez 257  
Asya Viner 92  
Luan Vu 6, 16, 115, 148, 242, 252  
MaLee Vue 145

## W

Samson Elijah Waddell 65  
Gechang Wangsher 161  
Safiyo Warsame 9  
Alex Watanabe 183

Elronza Williams 140  
RN Wimala 17  
Nigisti Woldensilassie 93  
Kyin Sein Wong 153

## X

Cha X 56  
Chong Xie 132  
Chue Xiong 13  
See Xiong 49  
Tria Xiong 82  
Valee Xiong 176  
Yee Xiong 112  
Yeng Xiong 59  
Xue 103

## Y

Nikolay Yakovlev 135  
Bai Yang 216  
Bee Yang 157, 190  
Chanh Thone Yang 21  
Ei Yang 146  
Houa Yang 1, 48  
Khou Yang 131  
Mai See Yang 69  
Mai Yang 167  
Mai Yia Yang 36, 220  
Mee Yang 178  
PaoChua Yang 169  
Pasoua Yang 47  
Por Yang 233, 234  
Xai C. Yang 186  
Yia Yang 95, 175  
Ubah Yare 152  
Yasmin 156  
Judy Yen 246  
Yessenia 184  
Gonul Yildirim 52  
Gui Ping Yu 217  
Shun Xing Yu 20  
Balos Yusuf 94  
Mohamed Yusuf 159

## **Z**

Z. 199

Zahra 12

Khadiga Kon Zail 154

Zambrano 45

Russell Zastrow 133

María Zesati 15

Chi Zhao 5

Qingyu Zhou 86