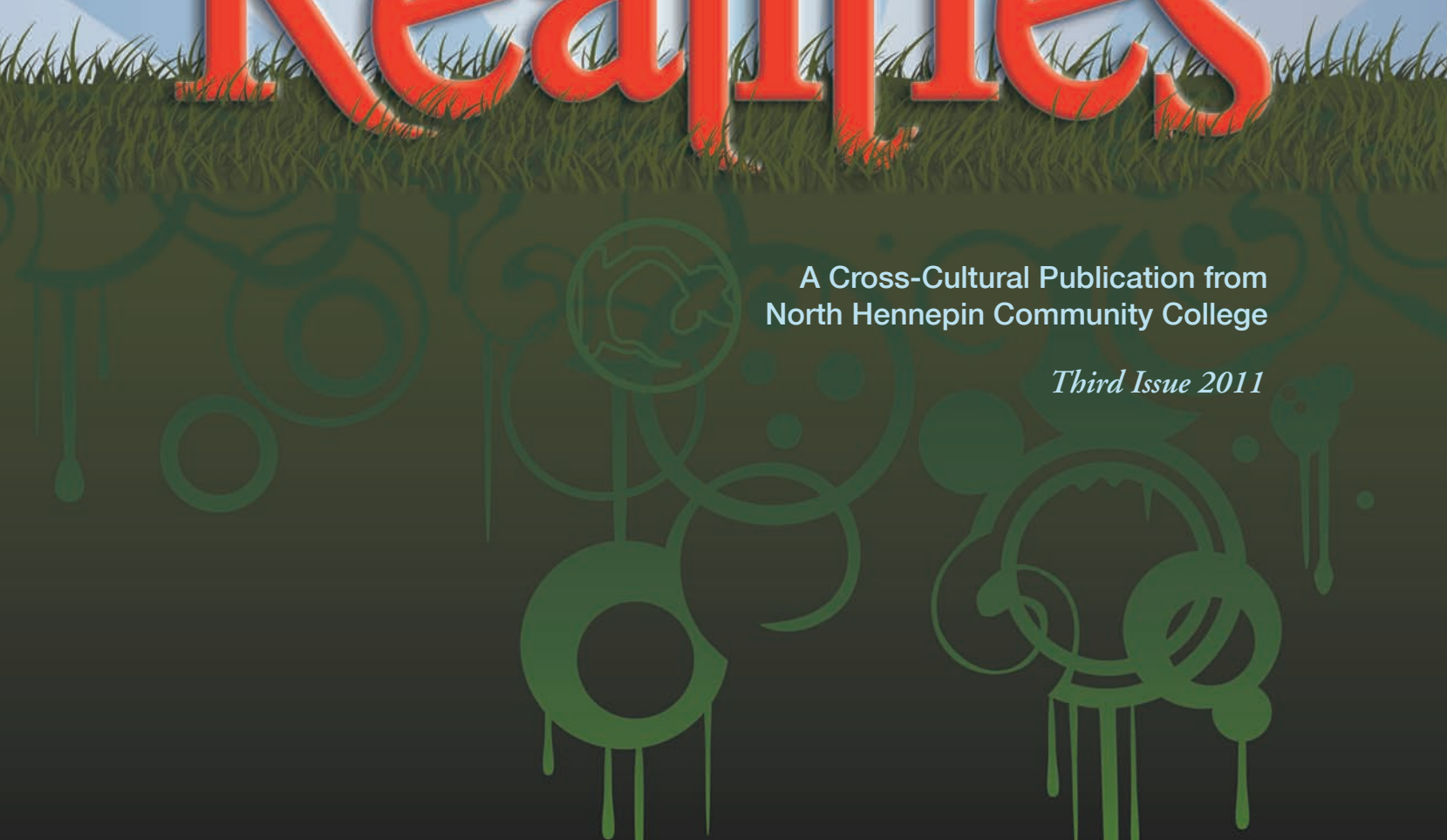


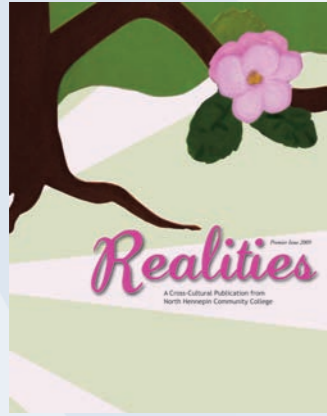


Realities

A Cross-Cultural Publication from
North Hennepin Community College

Third Issue 2011





Premier Issue 2009



Second Issue 2010

Realities

*A North Hennepin Community College Publication
of Student Writings for Sharing of Cross-Cultural Experiences*

Third Issue, Academic Year 2011–2012

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Realities is dedicated to all people who have had the courage to cross over their boundaries, thereby enriching their lives by seeing how other lives are lived.

Note from the editors:

To preserve the authenticity and character of the writings, they have been minimally edited.

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Introduction

Most of us have created a scheme to plot our travel through our daily activities, a sort of GPS that guides us along our way points. The scheme provides the base beat that keeps our melodies in sync with our expectations and obligations. With the beat we are efficient, counting ourselves on time for study, work, and play, but, because of the beat, we often lack efficacy, the ability to see that what does not fit our efficiency scheme is actually an opportunity that keeps our melodies from drifting into a dirge mumbled by a quarry slave scourged to his dungeon: Imagination so dulled by the probable, some forget, and might not have even known, how to open the doors and windows of their lives and let newness enter. And so, to paraphrase the warning of ee cummings in his poem, *Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town*, some learn to say their nevers and sleep their dream, losing themselves in the white noise of time, pulled more by the drone of scheduled certainty than pushed by their own curiosity over what to make of the seemingly oddly different.

But some people do learn to let the light into their lives. They may do so consciously and, with deliberate action by venturing off the map to take on the chances of the territory, they find as yet unheard melodies. For others, the light may come upon them altogether by surprise as one who stubs a toe on a familiar path and, with sudden recognition, searches out another path. In either case, these people acquire an identity more inclusive of others as an outcome of a mind more nimble in creating meaning that melds between-ness from differences.

The stories that follow are the stories from these kinds of people, people who realize the oddly different offers them challenge to grow and to find new options for themselves that, as Einstein so well understood, energize an understanding that the problems they face cannot be solved with the same logic that created them. And so they rise beyond the same-old same-old. Indeed, as William Blake, British poet of the Romantic Age, proclaimed, “The tigers of desire are wiser than the horses of instruction.”

However small or large their struggle, these people are heroes who have crossed over the boundaries of their everyday lives to include the unfamiliar and create their lives anew. They walk among us. In this issue of *Realities* are some of their stories. Turn into the pages of this issue; share in these authors’ adventures. May they encourage you to incorporate the anomalous into your narrative of life and lead you to write of your own adventure.

Sincerely,
*Mark L. Larson
Don Wendel*





Remembering When I Was Little

By Masha Kolonytska

Every day the city government turned off electricity in the whole city from six to eight pm during the winter time.

I remember when I was little- I could spend a lot of time with my family and friends. I lived in Ukraine, in the ninth floor building and our apartment was on the ninth floor. The building had an elevator, but it was always broken and so we used the stairs to go up and down. The building had four apartments on each floor. People who lived there for many years knew each other and their kids played together. I had many friends who lived in our building. We went to school together and played during the summer, fall, winter, and spring breaks. We played outside a lot and no one worried about us because our neighborhood was very friendly. However, every day the city government turned off electricity in the whole city from six to eight pm during the winter time. Therefore, everybody stayed at home with lit candles and spent that time together with families. I have a big family and I was very happy to be there with my parents and all my brothers and sisters. Our mom told us interesting stories; we played different games with words, and laughed when someone did something funny during the day. It was very noisy because everybody tried to tell something to mom and dad and they had enough time to listen to everybody and to give good advice. Sometimes our neighbors came in and we had some tea with tasty donuts or had a dinner together. It was a great time being together.

Masha Kolonytska was born in Ukraine and lived there for 19 years. Then she married and moved to Belarus. After ten months there, she and her husband moved to America, where she has lived for the past four years. Her husband and she have two beautiful boys, Daniel and Kevin.

An Experience that Changed My Life

By Rita Zaytsev

I am an ordinary girl that has a background of experiences. One of my major experiences in life was in 1998 when my grandma found out that she had intestinal cancer. She struggled with it for three years. I was only eight years old, but even then I knew that the disease could not be cured.

The next two years I spent helping my grandma with basic needs. Every morning I made sure that she would get enough to eat. Then I would walk with her outside, and she would tell me to look at the sky and enjoy it because it is the smallest things that we have to appreciate in life. At that moment I realized that I never took the chance to just look at the sky. A lot of the time my grandma would have nausea and a bad headache. That is when I just laid with her on her bed and put a cold towel on her head. During those times, I learned how to be patient. These experiences were the beginning of realizing how I had lived my life without loving every minute of it.

The third year got harder because my grandma was feeling worse and her cancer spread everywhere inside of her. I will never forget that when she was hurting the most she never complained. I always told her to tell me if anything hurt or if she needed anything. She only said that she had everything and that she was thankful to have help like me. I felt very special and grateful to be able to help not just my grandma but also my friend. My grandma was my first true friend that I could talk to about any subject.

During those three years, I learned how to be patient with people. I also learned how to have appreciation for the small things in my life – like a blue sky or waking up in the morning knowing that I am healthy. I am very happy that I got that opportunity in my early life to help my grandma and to carry inside of me those special moments that we had. I think that this experience made me more considerate, patient and understanding toward people, and that is why I want to become a nurse. My experience in those years made me who I am today, and I am proud of it.

No biography was submitted for Rita Zaytsev.

These experiences were the beginning of realizing how I had lived my life without loving every minute of it.



Embrace The Good Things; They May Not Last...

By Ry

Memories... everyone has them, correct? Good and bad ones. Those that we treasure and those that we want to forget. Well, here is a story of mine, about a memory I have. A memory that will stick with me up to the day I die. It is a tale about how things in life can go wrong simply because you think, act, or like different things. A tale about how good things in life will never last.

This tale starts off with me in junior high. At this point in life everyday was an easy going day. I was obedient and never disobeyed my father's words or orders. Never did I turn my back on what he said. Being the only son, my father was like my brother. He was the only male influence I ever really had in life. Because of that reason, I cherished my father more than the average person would. He was a man of great potential and would never do anything wrong, well that's what I thought at the time. I was a proud kid, but I always wondered, what it is I was so proud of. Perhaps it's the fact that I'm obedient, or because my father looks at me with satisfaction. What was there for me to be proud of I constantly thought. Despite all of this troubling me, my friends and family looked at me with smiles day after day and saying that I have become their ideal son or brother they always wished for. That was enough to satisfy me during those days. Despite I was doing things I either didn't understand or were against my will, I was happy that they were happy, or so I thought I was.

After junior high I went on to high school. Fortunately for me I was accepted into PSEO. At that moment I was looked up upon by those young and old. My father was proud of me and praised me like he has never done to anyone before. My friends praised me to be the best of the best out of them all. Never once did I question myself what I was doing or what my purpose was. I just kept thinking, "My father is proud of me and my friends praise me. This has to be the right path to follow."

While I was in school during my PSEO year, I met a girl. Her name was Lilith. She became to me what no one else has ever been – a friend to me like none other could ever be. Our relationship was just what I needed. She was someone who was there for me when I was stressed, someone to talk to, and someone who was able to give me a smile when I lacked it. From this description of her, a normal person would think this is a good memory. From the first look of it, it is a good memory. The

memories about me and her I will never forget. But all good things in life come with a cost. My father, who was once proud of me, became engulfed in rage when he found out about Lilith. Why you would ask? Well that's simple, she is white, she has piercings, and a funny one, her hair was red. Constantly my parents tried to rip me and her apart. My father believed I was in a relationship that meant more than friends with her. At that time I always thought we were just friends and nothing more. But I won't lie I always asked myself if there was something more. This situation eventually got to the point where I was beaten up by my father. I still remember the blows he threw at me and how I felt after the beating. Lilith and I shared a few tears over the phone, and soon enough we talked to each other less and less. This was simply because she was white. Till this day I remember having a bad headache from the blows I sustained to my head. I was scared that the headaches might be a bad sign or a concussion from the beating, but didn't seek out any medical help. A normal person would ask why, and this is my answer. I was beaten by my father, and if I went to get my headache checked out there's a chance of others finding out that my father gave me a beating. It is because even after what he has done, I still love him. Yes, even after I lost Lilith I still love him. I was a kid and I was weak. I obeyed my father again and lost contact with possibly

Those were the most painful words
I have ever had to say to
someone. Painful for me and I
know it was painful for her as well.

the best person I have ever met in my life. After hearing this, how do you feel or what do you think? Well get ready for more because that isn't all that I have to share.

During my PSEO year I also met another girl. Her name was Rayne also nicknamed Skye. We started out as just friends and became more than that. I knew it was wrong, but I still went for it. This time around, I told myself to follow my heart not the orders of my father. Stupid me chose to follow my heart and paid for it. I kept Rayne on low profile in fear of my parents or my family finding out about her. I was in a deep relationship with her and did not ever want it to end. When I was with her, I was happy and days grew brighter the moment I woke up knowing she's in my life. Again like I have stated before, all good things in life never last. My parents soon enough found out about Rayne. I was lectured to high heavens. I nearly went deaf. I still remember the words my father

said the moment he found out: "The color of your hair is black, what does that mean? I'll tell you what it means, you are fucking Asian and you will always be Asian. There is no place for you within other races. Falling in love with a German girl will never happen. As long as you are still my one and only son who will carry on our family name and blood line, you are never to be affiliated with other races."

Ironic isn't it? Never to affiliate with other races? What does he think I do at school every day, right? As I said before I followed my heart. I refused to give Rayne up. The moment I said no, I felt an impact on the left side of my face as my head turned to the opposite side. I turned my head back to look forward where my father was standing. The moment I had my head back into position I was struck again in the same spot. This time around he did not wait till I turned my head back. My father continuously threw blows at me one after another. He soon realized that his blows were just not enough to make me submit. I was beaten and bruised, but I still resisted. This very moment is where my world came crashing down – a knife... held pointed at my neck. My father's exact words were, "Call her and break up with her now. Tell her she is a waste of your time and that you never want to see her again or I'll end your life right here and now. I will never let you shame the family by dating this German girl."

Those were the most painful words I have ever had to say to someone. Painful for me and I know it was painful for her as well. Tears rolled down my face; there was simply nothing I could have done. I go to bed these days remembering those words and the injuries I sustained. I still remember the purple passion fruit colored bruises on the sides of my head and the bright almost rainbow colored bruises I had on my mid-section. All I have now is the rain itself. Whenever it rains, I go outside to be drenched in it. It gives me a sense that Rayne is with me at my side.

My once proud family turned bitter and my relationship with them has gone downhill since then. My friends no longer praised me; they found that spreading rumors about my failure in life was entertaining. If you ever experience something good in life, embrace it and enjoy it as much as you can. You will end up regretting it when it slips away from you.

No biography was submitted for Ry.

Money Problems

By Choua Vang

Have you ever been so broke that the only thing you could eat for a month was chicken flavored ramen noodles? Until about two years ago I constantly had money troubles. Whenever I got my paycheck, I would instantly cash it then spend the money. Most of the things I bought were not even important. I was constantly wasting money and working until I realized that my life was going nowhere, so I decided that I would go back to school. I realized that if I was going to go back to school I had to have money to pay for my tuition and books, so I started to keep track of all the money I made. That was the first time in my life that I had ever tried to keep track of my money.

After the first three months of keeping track of my income, I found out that a large part of it went into food, commuting, and rent. What I found, after subtracting all of those costs out from my income, was that I wasted a lot of money on useless things. I spent over forty dollars a month just to pay for cable internet, thirty dollars a month on online gaming, and sixty dollars a month on partying. When I subtracted out all of the costs I found out that I only had twenty dollars left after every month, which made me realize I need to learn how to manage my money.

The very first thing I decided to do, to manage my money, was get rid of all the useless spending. I switched my internet over to the slowest one possible which costs twenty dollars a month now. I also decided to cancel all of my online gaming memberships; in addition, I decided to sell all of my video games. The hardest thing for me to give up was partying. It was particularly hard to give up because all of my friends were constantly bugging me to go out with them. After getting rid of all of those expenses, I found out that I had a lot of time on my hands, which made giving up all those things even harder to do.

When I was cutting my expenses, I also decided that I would try to cut my living expenses down. The first thing I had to do was find a way to cut down my food expenses, so I made a list of everything I had to eat in my kitchen. What I found out from that list is that most of the food I had only lasted about a week and was mainly junk food. After finding out that so much of my food was basically garbage after the first week I bought them, I decided to make a new list of what I could buy when I went grocery shopping. Another thing I decided that should not go on the

list of grocery items I could buy was all the junk food. Because a majority of my diet was just junk food, it made it a whole lot harder to make this list. I made sure that only food that lasted two weeks or longer went onto the list, such as uncooked rice, canned tuna, and noodles. I also got into the habit of only buying fresh vegetables and fruits when I need them to cook with, so that they do not spoil over time. By buying only the necessities I found out that I saved almost half the amount of what I used to spend.

The next thing I did to cut down on my expenses was get a roommate. Before I started going back to school, I lived alone in a two bedroom apartment, but I did not have a roommate. The only thing I used the extra room for was to store most of my junk. So I decided

Looking back now I realize that I really did not know how to manage my money until I decided to take a look at what I bought.

that if I were going to sell off all that junk anyway why not try to find a roommate. It took me about three months to find a roommate, and we decided that we would both pay half of all the bills. This alone saved me over five hundred dollars a month. What was really good about having a roommate was that I would have somebody to help me clean the place up when it got dirty.

The biggest change I made to cut my expenses was selling my car. I used to have a 1992 Toyota Supra; however, it got horrible gas mileage. I decided to sell the car because I had to drive across town to get to work, and I did not want to waste forty dollars a week on just gas. I got about \$3,500 for the car, but I also had to spend two

thousand just to buy a rust bucket Honda Civic. At first I did not like this new car at all because of the cramped driving room and lack of power, but I eventually came around to tolerate it. It was not until the third week that I had the car that I was so grateful for buying it. Just driving back and forth between my daily commute, I found out that I only had to fuel up half of the time that I had to with my old car.

When the time came for me to go back to college, I had more than enough money saved up not just for two years of college but also for all of my books. Looking back now I realize that I really did not know how to manage my money until I decided to take a look at what I bought. Just looking back on what I used to buy now makes me feel so guilty for being frivolous. But I am still glad that I did it because it taught me that to really make it in society on your own, you have to learn how to manage your money and spend it wisely.

No biography was submitted for Choua Vang.

A Little Driving on a Saturday Night

By Christopher Bies

I was out with some friends, and we were watching some cars race on the street. My excitement instantly turned to fear when the policeman arrived. “What are you boys doing here?” the police officer demanded. None of us said a word. “We can talk here or we can talk down at the station, your choice,” said the policeman. I was scared; I thought that we were going to be arrested.

Back in the early eighties, I was in a street machine car club. Back then I drove a green Oldsmobile Cutlass. Brian, a friend of mine, was also in the club, and we were out doing a little driving on a Saturday night. I asked him, “Where should we go?” He said, “Maybe we should check out Bridgman’s, sometimes other members of the club hang out there.” We drove to the local Bridgman’s restaurant to see if anything was going on. It so happened that there were a few members of the club hanging out.

There was a very clean 1968 Chevy Camaro in the parking lot. We were all looking at the pale yellow car with a monster tachometer on the dash and wondering what it had in it for an engine. It hadn’t been long and the owner of the Camaro came out of Bridgman’s restaurant. Brad was a guy in the club who owned a very fast Chevy Nova. Brad asked the guy with the Camaro, “Hey, do you want to race for fifty bucks?” The guy with the Camaro said, “Sure, let’s see what you got.”

There were five cars in our group, and the guy in the Camaro. It sounded like thunder when all of us started our engines to leave the parking lot. The other cars pulled out of the parking lot ahead of us and headed somewhere to race. Brian and I didn’t know where they were going. There was traffic coming, and I couldn’t get out of the parking lot. When I could get out, we didn’t know where everyone else was headed; all we knew was the direction they went. I was going fifty miles per hour where the speed limit was thirty trying to catch up. I thought to myself, “What am I doing? I am breaking the law by speeding to get somewhere to engage in an illegal activity. I justified this by telling myself that this was exciting and that I wanted to see which car would win the race. At the west end of town, the street came to a tee and we could only go north or south. I asked Brian, “Which way should we go?” He said, “Go north. There isn’t any place they could race if we go to the south.”

We drove north for a few blocks and then turned at an intersection and headed west. We were almost to a parking lot on the right hand side of the road where the car club members were parked. We could see the Camaro and the Nova lined up side-by-side and heading west. I could hear the roar of the engines and the tires screaming in protest against the pavement as they raced down the road. The smell of burnt rubber was thick in the air. We pulled into the parking lot and I parked my car. Brian and I got out and joined the other club members watching the cars race away from us at a high rate of speed. All of us could tell that the Camaro had won the race and then both cars brake lights came on. The cars came to a stop for a minute or so, and then they turned around and drove back in our direction. The Nova pulled up, turned around, and stopped. The Camaro drove off into the warm summer night, its driver fifty dollars richer.

Brad got out of his car and opened the hood. We were talking for a few minutes, and then a police car drove up and stopped. “Oh shit!” Brad said. The police officer got out of his car and he didn’t look very happy. I thought to myself, “Oh great! I am going to be

The police officer got out of his car and he didn’t look very happy. I thought to myself, “Oh great! I am going to be arrested!”

arrested! I could just envision calling my parents from jail. The police officer had his hand on his gun. “Why does he have his hand on his gun? We didn’t do anything wrong.” I thought to myself. He had to have known what was going on, the cars made a lot of noise when they were racing and someone probably called it in. “What are you boys doing here?” the police officer demanded. No one said a word. All of us were scared and no one knew what to say. Louder this time, he said, “What are you boys doing here?” (Silence) “Well, you boys can tell me what you are doing here or I can take all of you down to the station.” (Silence) “So, what’s it going to be?” (Silence) “Did you hear me?” (Silence) “I need an answer right now.” Then, in a very soft voice, Brad said, “My brake light came on.”

The officer said, “What did you say?” Louder this time, Brad said, “My brake light came on.” The police officer said, “I don’t know what you boys are up too, but this business has had a lot of cars broken into in their parking lot and it would be best for all of you

to leave right now.” Someone in the group, I don’t know who, said, “Yes sir.”

Brian and I jumped into my car and drove out of the parking lot. I breathed a sigh of relief, “That was close.” Brian said, “Yeah, too close, we almost got arrested.” I followed the others over to Brad’s house. When we got out of my car, Brad was just shaking his head and he was mad.

“I can’t believe that fucking Camaro beat me,” he growled. “I thought it was just some stupid fucking guy with a nice looking car with a fucking monster tachometer on his dash. I never thought he would fucking beat me. I am going to have to do some fucking work on my car. I hate getting my fucking doors blown off. I have a reputation of having a fast car and I don’t want to fucking lose it!” “Easy now, I said, it’s not that bad; he didn’t beat you by more than a car length. Oh, and thanks for coming up with the brake light excuse to the cop; that was genius. If it wasn’t for you saying that, we would all be at the police station now.” All of us talked about what had happened and left about an hour later.

On the way home I was thinking, “What I did tonight was really stupid. I could have gotten a speeding ticket, and I was almost arrested. What would my parents say if either or both of those scenarios happened? They would be so disappointed, and they wouldn’t trust me anymore.” I ended up quitting the car club and was never involved in street racing again. It was fun and exciting, but there is a reason why street racing is illegal. It is too dangerous and people can get hurt or killed. Thankfully neither of those things happened that night. I had learned my lesson.

Christopher Bies is a non-traditional student that never planned to attend college. His world was turned upside down in August of 2007 when he was laid off from a job he had held for twenty-six years at the same company. He discovered that an education was the key to future employment and started college at the age of forty-four. Christopher has never done much writing but thought he had an interesting story to tell and wanted to explore another way to be creative. Other forms of art he enjoys are photography, painting, and woodworking. Christopher also spends time experiencing nature, reading, and spending time with friends and family.



A New World

By Kenechukwu Anwah

Growing up in Nigeria was fun, with a lot of good memories. Just walking down the road and hearing a nearby river flowing lazily made me stop, listen, and appreciate its beauty. We had a house in one of the undeveloped parts of the country. Every year, we spent at least two weeks there. It always seemed like stepping into another age. No electricity or fancy buildings – just the normal log house wherein you had to build fires and light candles. It was in one of these trips that I began to really see and appreciate nature.

I was about 14, and as usual, my family went on their two week vacation. I was not excited about this trip because I had to miss my best friend's birthday party. I sulked throughout the journey and was just being difficult. My Dad understood what I was trying to do, but he ignored me. When we reached the lodge, he asked me to come with him to find wood for the fireplace. Grumbling, I followed him. It was cold and

Gradually, the forest opened its doors
to me, and I walked in.
I was let in to the secrets of nature!

the sky looked orange; the sun was going down. I was worried about bugs and every other animal that I could think of.

We walked in silence for a while; then he said, "Kennie, just stop thinking and listen; you will be amazed at how soothing and understanding this forest can be." As I trudged down the road, I tried to follow his advice. Gradually, the forest opened its doors to me, and I gradually walked in. I was let into the secrets of nature! I couldn't help but notice the beauty around me. It was quiet and time stood still, waiting, willing me to walk down the open door and explore. I let go of my guard and walked in.

As I walked, I discovered a whole new world – a world so delicate but indeed strong enough to have lasted so long. It was a world where everything was interconnected.

I noticed the rich red wine foliage on the ground covering the deep brown soil. All the little insects making their way into and out of the soil, trying to go about their business in spite of the stranger – me! As I looked up, I saw majestic proud trees – trees with thick wide spreading branches and evergreen leaves. They served as shade for growing trees and tired animals; they housed birds and provided food for many animals. I stood amazed at the wonder of creation; then I heard the humming as of many bees. Wondering what it was. I walked down the path and discovered a flowing spring – untarnished by man, clean and straight from the rock. As I looked closer, I saw so much life within it. It held so much promise.

"Kennie! Kennie!! Are you ok? My dad's voice came piercing through and broke my reverie. I was lost in my newly discovered world. I looked at him and said, "I have never been better!" I quickly gave him a hug and thanked him. I was privileged to enter into the world of nature – to be one with nature. Indeed, there is nothing as fulfilling as that!

No biography was submitted for Kenechukwu Anwah.





What I Learned

By Chelsea Riley

I will never forget how I learned to sing. It was not only one of the most fun things I ever learned, but it was something that I always felt confident doing, which was rare during that time in my life. A lot of people are afraid to sing, but the truth is anyone can do it. Not everyone is going to be the next opera singer; however, anyone who knows the basics can sing. A lot of people think singing is dumb and pointless, or when you say the word "singing" to them they don't think of choirs. Instead, in their mind they see cheesy pop stars dressed up in glitter. Learning to sing was just the beginning of many interests I developed later on, and I would love to share the experience with everyone. Also, I would love to explain to them what real singing is, instead of that mainstream music most of them listen to.

When I first learned to sing, it was mostly during middle school. My mother had suggested that I join the choir because it was a lot of fun. She had been in it in her past years and saw it as something I would enjoy. So I figured why not and went ahead and joined. Every morning we would do "breathing exercises" and our teacher taught us many different techniques. At the time we had no idea why he was teaching us this sort of thing, and we were unsure how they even related to singing. All of the other students and I found it very strange, and often outside of class we would make fun of it. However, in time we would come to understand the reasons behind his so called "silly" teachings – but not for a while.

As soon as I entered high school my freshmen year, I automatically knew choir would be my top priority to enroll in as a class. To my dismay, ninth graders couldn't be in the high choir. We had to be in one entitled Varsity. I remember being very disappointed; I wanted to be with all of the good singers. I would soon see I still had a lot to learn and even more growing to do. I was ashamed and felt stupid that I ever thought in the first place I could thrive in the upper A Cappella choir. The varsity pieces were challenging enough for me. However, none of the other students seemed to take the music as seriously as I did. They were always talking, chatting, and never listening to the teacher. She would often just go in her office and shut the door and no one would ever notice – except me, of course; I always noticed. Our concerts were never that good, probably because half of the kids never even paid attention.

My freshman year passed and I was then a sophomore, which meant I could audition for A Cappella. I was so nervous, and my self-esteem was extremely low.

I wasn't sure if I would get in. In fact, I almost didn't want to even audition for fear that I wouldn't get in. But, I did audition, and when I saw my name on the members' list for A Cappella, I was in utter shock. I had done it! I had made it into A Cappella, and I was only a sophomore. I was so proud of myself, but, yet again, I had no idea what I was in for. The teacher moved so fast; there were so many things I didn't understand. Everyone else's voices were so mature, and I still sounded like that little kid from middle school. I felt overwhelmed, and I didn't know who to ask for help. Then there was Gina; she was my folder partner. She taught me many little things that made a huge difference. Simple things like standing up straight, holding my feet a certain way, sitting on the edge of the chair with my torso straightened, and opening my mouth wider so I wasn't singing out of my nose like I did all throughout middle school. Then I remembered these were all of the silly things that my middle school choir teacher had been attempting to teach us, but we just thought he was weird. I worked hard to remember to apply these small details while singing and in time I became just like all the others with a constant, strong and mature voice. The music pieces we were singing seemed extremely overwhelming at the time, but after practicing them a little while, it all just clicked and sunk in. Then it was just natural to me.

Our concerts were just amazing, and as I stood up on stage, I would always be full of pride for being in that choir. I was always proud even throughout my later high school years. During those years I did many things other than choir, I joined the school musical which I never would have done if I hadn't been in choir or learned how to sing. I really enjoyed the musical so then I auditioned for the one act play. I started to love theatre. Then I joined speech, mock trial and many other activities that I never would have done if it wasn't for me learning to sing or participating in choir. I was so passionate about it, I think it was the only reason I even went to school.

My senior year my choir teacher told us that we could take voice lessons to help us get ready for a College Choir. I automatically knew that I wanted to take lessons; however, they were way to expensive. I talked to my teacher about it, and she provided an alternative. I found out that if I wrote an essay on why I wanted to take lessons that I could possibly get a scholarship. So that's what I did, and to my disbelief I got the scholarship. My voice teacher was sort of intimidating. He was quite blunt and never sugar-coated anything. We did a lot of vocal exercises that were quite repetitive. He even picked out some songs for me to learn to sing. They were easy. I didn't understand why he was having me do such boring stuff. Then one day he pulled out an opera entitled *Domine Deus*. I almost fell over; he wanted me to sing this for solo and ensemble! I didn't think I could ever do that; I could barely even pronounce the title of the song. However, in the end I did sing the song.

I went to solo and ensemble and sang in front of a judge. I was so nervous and my knees were shaking. I could barely breathe and my heart was fluttering. I was so nervous. I couldn't understand why. I had never gotten that way on stage during the plays, but that may have had to do with the fact you can't see your audience. Maybe a few glimmers off of their glasses here and there, but you never actually see them in full lighting. I saw my judge and that was enough to make me extremely skittish. All of my friends and family sat in the room to listen. Then all of a sudden the accompanist had already started playing, and I was supposed to sing. Full of fear I tried to concentrate on a poster in the back of the room, and I opened my mouth to sing. It came out all right; I mean at least I could make a sound at all. When I was done everybody clapped, and then the judge critiqued me. I hadn't even thought about this part, and I wasn't looking forward to any criticism. He didn't have very many negative things to say. The only bad things he talked about was how I let my "nervousness" get in the way of my performance, but he also said I had great control and a perfect tone and a lot of other technical things like that. I could just feel my ego getting bigger by the minute. After that I found out my score, turns out he had given me a superior, which is the highest rating you can get. I was surprised, and I was even more surprised when I heard that I my judge was the harshest one on site. I hadn't thought he was harsh at all.

Learning to sing is something I will never ever forget because it created so many awesome opportunities for me. If I had never joined choir or learned how to sing, I probably would never have enrolled in so many school activities. I would have never had the chance to earn a superior in solo and ensemble, of which I am very proud. If it hadn't been for me learning to sing, I wouldn't have discovered my passion for theatre. Singing just helped open up a lot of different doors that led to many things. I am so thankful that such a small interest has helped create even more doors.

To all those people who see singing as pointless, or picture a cheesy pop star decked out in glitter, or even those who say they can't sing, singing is definitely not pointless. You get in touch with many different aspects of yourself – aspects of yourself that you couldn't ever dream of. Lastly, for those who are afraid to sing or think they can't do it: You can! I did it, and I never thought I could. Not all of us have natural voices, but with hard work and practice one can easily sing. I hope everyone gives singing a chance so they can experience first-hand, like I did, how amazing it truly is.

No biography was submitted for Chelsea Riley.

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Waking Up with Nature



By Dimitrije Zarkovic

Vrrroom! Vrrroom! The dreaded sound of my vibrating cell phone alarm woke me at five in the morning. I reached around like a zombie, trying to turn it off. I got up and got ready to go to a Nature Center. As a service learning volunteer, I had to be there at opening and help out with the prep for bird banding. With mapped directions in hand, I headed out extra early. In my experience, the journey never matched the mapped out road. Sometimes there was heavy traffic, road work, merging lanes, or unexpected detours that tend to prolong the drive.

I arrived in the parking lot next to the center with time to spare. A quick nap was the first thing on my mind. I reclined my seat, turned up the heater and relaxed as the warm, artificial air began to sedate me. My rear view mirror reflected the woods

As I got deeper into the woods, the sound of birds surrounded me.

overshadowing the center, and a trail leading into them. Unable to really fall asleep, I decided to take a walk and explore. The morning April air chilled my face as hard concrete turned into soft earth and wood chips. The sun's rays began breaking through the branches and shone into my eyes, breaking my drowsiness. As I got deeper into the woods, the sound of birds surrounded me. It was of the rare type of variety and volume that could only be heard very early in the morning, a loud, yet soothing cacophony. It was like being in a busy metro area, except there was no rush, no tension, no distress caused by the sounds. I felt more awake with each step.

I kept walking further down the trail, occasionally hearing leaves rustling. When I looked for the source of the noise, I saw nothing, however. As I reached a clearing on the right side of the trail, another rustle startled me. I turned to look, and my guts shot to my chest. It was momentary fear that comes from being watched by

something wild and alive, yet unidentified. Only yards away, a large deer just stood there. My eyes quickly shot to the top of its head. No horns – a female. I relaxed a bit. The deer kept looking at me, like some relic sculpture, just standing there. I looked back into its eyes for what seemed like minutes. The mutual staring extended for so long that I began squinting to check if the animal was real. A twitch of its left ear reassured me that it was. It slowly lowered its head to browse on the ground, still watching me. I stood still not wanting to scare it away. After a while, another deer came out to join the first one. They continued browsing the ground, then leisurely walked away. After their white tails disappeared into the brush, I started backtracking to the parking lot. On the way back, I got a sense that a primal exchange had taken place.

My breath steamed and my limbs were chilled when I reached the car. As I slammed the door shut and turned on the heater, I noticed a disparity. The car felt like a monotonous, relatively isolating bubble. A flash of the morning's encounters went through my head and I stepped out of my boxy ford escort. Slightly uncomfortable, I watched the sunrise, felt the chill, and listened to the living orchestra nearby. Fully awake, I waited for the center to open.

Dimitrije Zarkovic, is a recent graduate of NHCC. With his Associate in Arts degree complete, he plans on attending the U of M for a degree in kinesiology. In his spare time, he enjoys martial arts and physical training. Once he moved from Serbia to the United States, the time and frequency he spent in nature were reduced. Today, he tries to balance living a modern life and staying in touch with nature.

It was momentary fear that comes from being watched by something wild and alive, yet unidentified.

A Brother

By Chiemeng Cha

As I knocked on the door, I heard an angry voice that sounded like a growl from a lion's roar. "You too? Why does everyone forgive him when he's done wrong?" The way his face and eyes looked at me was terrifying. It was my cousin, Leng, an eighteen-year old who was skinny and tall. Aunt Pang welcomed me into their house, and I could feel the humidity of the fresh steamed rice that she was cooking. While sitting on a sinking couch, Leng was waiting for Peter, his brother, to come back home. Leng said to me, "I hate my brother. I hate him to my guts. You know how it was when I was younger. I was alone after he left our family six years ago. He deserves to be in that smelly old jail. Mom and I had nothing when he left. When he comes back home from jail, I won't even speak to him or even look at him in the eyes. He will never be forgiven."

After some time, Leng brought out some games for us to play. Even though there were dozens of relatives over already, Leng didn't care about them. "Have some respect for your elders, boy," said one of the balding relatives who was in his forties. Leng's face got so red that it looked as if he was about to explode any time. I watched quietly as he ran into his room slamming the door behind his back. I could hear him turning on his old rusty radio. The radio from his room got louder and louder. Aunt Pang knocked on the door yelling, "If you don't turn off the music, I will not let you see Peter when he gets here!" Suddenly in a split second, the radio was turned off.

Leng was in his room for some time, quite a while actually. Some of the bored relatives began to gossip about Leng. The things I heard from them were so rude. "Maybe Peter should just stay in jail, who knows, he might even stab Leng. Who would ever want to live with a kid like that?" Though I didn't see it, I could sense that Aunt Pang was crying deep inside her heart. She wanted to say something to the rude relatives, but couldn't because of how the Hmong culture is. Aunt Pang was a woman who didn't have a husband anymore. There was no way Aunt Pang could say anything. Elders could speak their nasty old minds and do what they wanted without any worries. But she could not stand up to defend her son. We could never talk back to elders because we would be looked down on. Those who are Hmong and who speak against the Hmong culture are considered trash. Talking back to an elder was "disrespecting" him or her no matter what the situation was. Some say that

the Hmong culture is corrupt because of the older generation because they have caused great pain to the new generation through the years of discipline. An example of discipline in this Hmong culture is that the girls have to stay home and clean every day without being able to play with their friends. If they do not listen, they will be beaten. This makes the boys want to help the girls but if they were to help, they would be beaten as well because it's not the boys' job. Their job is to please the parents with their grades and if they didn't have good grades, they would be a disgrace to the family and were not known as their "son".

Leng was still in his locked room and we had been waiting for a full two hours now for Peter to show up. "I'm tired of waiting. This family is going to fall apart anyway, so who cares?" said a relative. I looked at all of them. They all seemed angry because Peter was supposed to have arrived twenty minutes ago. It was as if they were waiting for him to get home just to say bad things about him.

As I was waiting, I thought to myself about the stories Aunt Pang told me. Whenever Aunt Pang would go visit Peter in jail, Leng would never agree to go with his mother. Every time he refused the offer to see his brother. He used to look outside his small window trying to hide back his tears when his mother left. He did this to make sure that when she was gone no one would see him crying. He held a huge grudge against his brother for leaving the family. He had to become strong. Being a nuisance by crying would not lead him anywhere, so he decided to stop crying and be a man. He had to become strong for his mother and support both of them. He found jobs with the help of temp agencies at a young age to have money for his mother whenever she needed it.

Leng came to visit me about once a month. Every time he visited, he would look older and older. He was like an old man in his teen years. His back would be in a humped-over position. His eyes were worn and he never bothered to smile. Both hands dragged toward the ground when he walked. His hair would always be messy, like his bed. His clothes were old. It was as if he had no emotions.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the front door, and everyone woke up from their boredom. Aunt Pang unlocked the squeaky door and there he was. A small amount of light from the door made Peter look like an angel. But when the door closed, he looked like an awful man dressed in a dirty, old white shirt. His beard was grungy. I could tell he had not shaved for some time. All he had with him was a backpack and a plastic bag. In the bag, he pulled out a Bible and gave it to his mother. His mother hugged him sobbing.

She fell to the floor and Peter picked her up. It seemed as if she was crying for an eternity.

Peter came to shake everyone's hand including mine. His hands were rougher than the feel of concrete. One by one, our relatives left the house. They gave their "best wishes" to Peter and by the time I knew it, they were all gone. He turned to me, "Wow, time changes; I remember when you were just a small kid. Now you're a big young man." We both laughed a bit and talked about how things changed. "Mom, where the heck is Leng at?" asked Peter. His mom was too busy cooking so another one of the relatives pointed at the door of Leng's room. "So that's where he's been this whole time, huh?" Peter got up and walked towards Leng's room. He paused for a bit, noticing that Leng had his door open and was peeking through a small crack. I watched as the atmosphere became heavier. "Why don't you get out of that room? It's me Peter. I miss you, man." I could sense part of Leng wanting to come out and see his brother. The other half hated his guts. Eventually, he came out to see his

When he comes back home from jail, I won't even speak to him or even look at him in the eyes.

brother, looking as if he was going to hug him. Peter opened his arms wide, but he was ignored by Leng's dazed eyes looking at the ground. Leng walked past Peter as he stood there with his eyes at the ground now. I could see small tears coming down Leng's face. Peter never did say he's sorry or say anything about what he did was wrong. All he did was try to act like a brother. He tried to do what brothers do. He tried to play video games with Leng. He tried to play chess with him. He tried to take him outside and play baseball with him. But Leng would not forgive his brother. His mother forced Leng to go play outside with Peter. I was invited so I had no choice but to go play catch outside with them.

The field where we played catch was small. The dirt was also very wet from the previous night's rain. After an hour of playing catch, I got tired and wanted to rest from the hot sun. The other two continued to play. As they were throwing the ball back and forth, Leng relentlessly threw his glove on the ground, "What is this all of a sudden? Even though it was an accident, you stabbed father and killed him, and you're trying to act as if nothing is wrong? I'm a grown man now and I don't need someone like you. In fact, Mom and I don't need you. Get the hell out of our life. You're not my brother and I'll never forgive you no matter what."

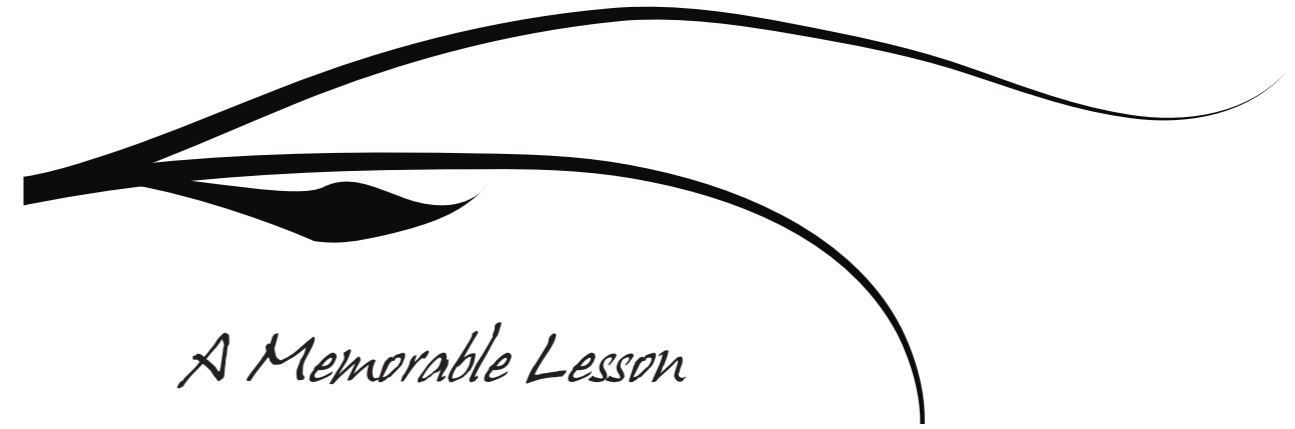
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nothing when he left.

The next thing I knew, Leng picked up his dented bat and went after his brother. Peter stood there expecting to get hit by the bat. Instead Leng punched Peter in the stomach. Peter went face first on the soggy wet grass, not able to breathe. “That pain you feel is nothing compared to what mom and I went through. I understand where you’re going with this, but I’m just having a hard time forgiving and forgetting.” Then Leng left and walked back home.

As of right now, three years later, I’m not sure if Leng has forgiven his brother. After all, killing his father was an accident. I feel that Leng just wanted to show how much pain he went through by punching Peter in the stomach. On the other hand, Peter was just trying to be a nice brother to Leng. He was gone for six years; of course, he missed his brother. If it was me, I wouldn’t know how to say “sorry” after all those years. I would try to say sorry in different

ways like how Peter tried to say sorry in his own ways. I just think that it will take time for Leng to fully forgive his brother. I think that Aunt Pang was able to forgive Peter because he is all that Leng and she have left. It wasn’t Peter’s fault that he accidentally stabbed his father. Aunt Pang had every right to miss and forgive her son. I feel that everyone just needs time to forgive and forget about what happens in the past and look toward the future.

Chiemeng Cha’s parents were born in Laos and immigrated to the U.S. after the Vietnam War was over. They began their new lives in Fresno, California where Chiemeng was born. He moved to Minnesota when he was about four years old. He speaks English and Hmong. He has been at NHCC for about a year now and is studying graphic design. He likes to play video games, to break dance (BBoy), and just to hang out with his friends.



A Memorable Lesson

By Liliia Latkovski

My first karate lesson was a memorable lesson for me. It was a great day, January 11, my first day in my third semester of college. Finally, one of my dreams came true. Since I was a child, I liked to be independent and strong. This independence sometimes created a lot of problems for me because I have three sisters and three brothers. With seven kids in the family, I am number four – the middle one. Every time when we couldn’t divide something, we started to fight, and the stronger one would get all the candies or toys. All of us liked to watch movies with Jackie Chan, and that was when I understood that I wanted to learn karate.


Finally, one of my dreams came true.

When I asked my parents about learning karate, they said it was not for discussion. So, now that I am an adult and I can decide what is good and what is not for me, I chose to study a martial art.

When I got to the gym for the first lesson, I was the only girl in the class. All the students were nice. Our teacher told us the real meaning of learning karate. He said, “Karate – it is not just fighting; it is a way to protect yourself and someone else who needs help.” Those words inspired me. When I saw all those movements he showed us, I understood that one day I wanted to be a karate teacher. So, now I have a second dream, and I am sure I can do it.

Sometimes life makes those turns you cannot predict. My life had a big change after just one lesson. Also, together with my Korean form of karate, I am learning the Korean language – I already know some of the words. Maybe it sounds a little bit funny now, but when my friends ask if I am serious, my answer is, “Yes, of course.”

No biography was submitted for Liliia Latkovski.



A Journal Entry: Who's Challenged?

By Joanna Lukach

I work as a CNA (Nurses Aid) every other weekend at a nursing home. I have found that I have learned so much about life working there with the residents. They have taught me so much, even though they do not know it. Ninety-nine percent of them have no idea what is going on anymore...or so we like to think they have no idea what is going on.

The interesting thing about working with the elderly is that they regress in time. They go back to the point in their life where they are one hundred percent reliant on someone else taking care of them, just like a child. These adults will literally sometimes tell you what is exactly on their mind or have the most intriguing view on a situation just as a child would. It really makes me stop and think.

This past weekend I had an interesting situation come up that made me think about Rachel Carson's writings on man's connection with nature and how we have taken it upon ourselves to "conquer" it; how our "power" is marked with irresponsibility, and how there is little awareness of how we are part of nature and how we have taken advantage of nature by changing it for our convenience.

In the dining area at the nursing home, hanging high on a wall, there are four different ducks mounted on the wall. I believe they are ceramic, but are made to look like real ducks shot and hung up on the wall. Also, hanging on the walls are numerous pictures of nature, a variety of birds, trees, moose, and such.

I was assisting a resident by the name of Ardeth. Ardeth is almost a hundred years old and suffers from dementia. She sits in a reclining wheel chair and basically cannot move much. She is one-hundred percent dependent on our help for everything now, and, although she will carry a conversation on with you, it will not make much sense. She often talks as though she is in a different time, which she may very well be! Also in the dining room at the same time was a man who was visiting his mother along with his nephews.

Ardeth was facing the pictures on the wall and also could see the ducks that were mounted on the wall. This is the conversation we had:
Ardeth: "Are we in the woods?"

Me: "No Ardeth, you are at Lake Ridge Care center. You are not in the woods."

Ardeth: "Well look straight ahead, don't you see those trees?"

Me: "You're right Ardeth; there is some trees there. Do you see the birds and the moose?"

Ardeth: "Yep I do. We are in the woods aren't we?"

Me: "Well I guess you could say we are in the woods, but we've tore down a bunch of trees to build this building and some roads I guess."

Ardeth: "Why the hell did you do that? It was the bird's home before it was yours. Do you hear those ducks?"

She often talks as though
she is in a different time,
which she may very well be!

In the mean time, the man in the room was listening to us and started to tell his nephews what kind of ducks were hanging on the wall. And then went on to tell his nephews how he would take them out to practice shooting some birds to get ready for duck season.
Ardeth: "Tell that guy to shut up. I'm trying to listen to the birds. He's scaring them away. What if they shot him? He must not know we are in the woods."

I thought this conversation was so perfect with what Rachel Carson says in *Of Man and the Stream of Time*. "Nature is the part of the world that man did not make."

There is no doubt we have literally torn down our natural habitat for our convenience, and it is justified by the idea that we are above nature. We are in "power", or we think we are.

Ironically, the man in the dining room obviously overheard Ardeth say that last comment, and he laughed and said "Wow! I hope I do not ever get like that!"

Truly, it's too bad he's not.

Joanna Lukach lives in Buffalo, Minnesota. She is the eleventh of twelve in her family. She has been to Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Prague, Mexico, Costa Rica, and about 25 states within the US. Her favorite "hot spots" are the jungle in Costa Rica, the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state, and Prague. She currently owns her own bookkeeping business and is a Certified Nurse's Aide, and a fulltime student. Her hobbies are hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, cooking, writing, reading, laughing, and enjoying life. She is currently studying for a career in social work/justice and journalism. She is very passionate about social issues and feels we all need to be made more aware of the many issues there are in our world, not just the ones that affect us personally. She feels we are all woven together but may not always see opportunities to tighten our connections. Because of this idea, she is passionate about journaling because it helps make us aware of the opportunities to connect with others and grow together.



Coming Home

By Michelle J Kaunzner

The life of a motorcycle enthusiast is unexplainable. There is a certain freedom you feel when out on the open road, and the camaraderie that just seems to come natural among motorcycle riders is unmistakable. This amazing culture of individuals from all walks of life has one thing deeply emblazoned in its hearts; it is our love of the ride that binds us. And within this lifestyle and culture, there lies a deeply spiritual and nurturing part of us that is easily drawn to the aid of others. We are able to, at a moment's notice, pull off amazing fundraisers, attend events to celebrate lives, or just sit back and enjoy the ride along the winding roads – wherever they may take us. In my travels I have experienced more roadside assistance and respect on the road by fellow motorcycle riders than anyone who is not a rider. Some of us can be thrill-seeking adrenaline junkies who ride in motocross races, exhibitions or trail riding (where they literally scale terrain like rock climbers), but when it comes down to it, we are woven from the same fabric – the call of the open

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road and the love of our freedom. There is nothing like it for us... and there never will be. It is within this second family of mine I found yet another calling – that of the Minnesota Patriot Guard Rider. The experiences we share together are like none other and our duty is to honor those who selflessly serve our country, and their loved ones. Our missions are genuine, our hearts true and the stories speak for themselves: they call them Angel Flights.

Sometimes the Angel Flights are organized for those in medical need, but in this case, they are used to bring home the remains of a fallen soldier. And it is our part, as members of the Patriot Guard Riders, to be there to show our respect for those who risk their very lives for America's freedom and security. For us it is all about honor, dignity, and respect, and we shall NEVER forget our heroes and continue to honor them as well as stand up for our own rights as motorcycle riders.

His name was Daniel. He came home on such a flight and we had the honor of “standing the flag line” in his honor at the funeral home. It was our first mission as Patriot Guard Riders – a mission that inscribed such a memorable image upon our hearts that we will never be the same again. My husband and I arrived at the mission site, were briefed by the ride captain along with the others, lined up holding our flags along the street and into the drive, up and down the laneway into the funeral home. Shortly after the family arrived, we were pulled from the line and asked to perform a most honorable task... the presentation of a plaque to the parents of the fallen soldier to thank him for his selfless acts in service of his country. The tears that fell from the parents' eyes as they looked at us when they were presented spilled over into our own. They thanked us, hugged us, and, as quietly as it began, it ended, and we left the funeral home to return to the flag line – forever touched by the moment we were granted. Afterward, many of us mounted our motorcycles and rode in honor of the fallen soldier before retiring to the local Legion Post where we were welcomed by the family and veterans there. It is one of many opportunities present to someone who is a motorcycle rider.

Michelle J Kaunzner is originally from Worthington, Minnesota. She has lived primarily down the center of the map as she was an Air Force brat for a few years in Minnesota, Kansas, Utah, New Mexico, Texas, and back to Minnesota in the fall of 1982. She does not speak any languages other than English but has taken up some ASL, German, and Spanish over the years. She started at NHCC in the early 2000's but stopped to raise her daughter. She returned in 2009 to complete her Liberal Arts Degree in the hopes of following a career into crisis counseling. She loves yoga, walking, and music, and is an avid motorcycle rider. She and her husband, Mike, are both members of the Minnesota Patriot Guard Riders. She also has a red belt in Tae Kwon Do, practices Aikido, and is drawn to the Celtic heritage and has read much about the culture. She has raised and bred exotic animals, and is a member of the Minnesota Herpetological Society and Toastmasters, International.



What One Trip Can Do

By Alina Andoniy

Living here in the United States, I think that we are separated from the whole world and all the problems going on around the world. Our biggest problems as children are not getting a cell phone when we want one or not having the latest fashion to wear, unlike some kids around the world that have to fend for themselves. I think that children who grow up here in the United States don't really know what it means to not have something.

When my mom, sister, brother, and I went to Moldova for the first time in 2004, I think my sister, brother, and I learned what it means to not have and what it means; to fend for yourself not because you want to but because you are forced to. Born in a poor village in Moldova, we moved here when we were so young that we didn't remember much about the village and the living conditions there. When we got to Moldova, I was so ashamed of the place where I come from. I looked around and all

My little brother thought we were
too high in class to be living in a house
that was run down with an outhouse
and no inside shower or bathtub.

I saw were farms and poor villages that didn't have much. The children were out playing in dirty clothes and they were dirty from head to toe, and I personally thought I was too good for that place. When my little brother, who was three at the time saw the house we grew up in he said to my mom, "Mom, this is not our house." But my mom replied, saying, "What do you mean it's not our house? Of course it is." and my little brother said, "Mom, it's too ugly to be our house; our house was prettier than that." My little brother thought we were too high in class to be living in a house that was run down with an outhouse and no inside shower or bathtub. He thought we were too good to be living on a farm.

After staying with my aunt and uncle for three weeks, I think my whole idea on life changed. While we were staying there, I met kids that couldn't hang out because

they had to go work in the fields all today so that they had food to eat. That's when it hit me: here we get mad because our parents don't make us the exact meal we want to eat, but around the world there are kids that don't have a meal everyday because the crop isn't always good. Here in the United States we complain about not having the latest fashion when there are kids around the world that get no new clothes all year round and wear the same stuff for as long as it fits them or until it tears apart. Those three weeks changed my whole perception on life. For the first time since I could remember, I wasn't worried about how I looked when I left the house to hang out with my cousins. For the first time, I didn't complain about the food my aunt served for breakfast lunch or dinner. For the first time in my life, I was thankful for everything that I had and everything my parents did for me.

Living here in United States I think we forget about how good we have it here and about how bad others have it around the world. Although I went to Moldova and changed how I thought for a while, here in the United States I find it is easy to forget how difficult it is for others to live because we have everything we will ever need and more.

Originally from Moldova, Alina Andoniy and her family moved here in August 2000 and have lived here in Minnesota ever since. She has traveled to most states within the United States and has been back to Moldova two times since 2000. She speaks Romanian and understands Russian. This is her first semester at North Hennepin Community College and is here to earn a paralegal degree. Her favorite things to do are hanging out with friends and family. Her favorite person to hang out with is her two-year old baby cousin, Adrian, "the most precious thing life can offer". She also likes to sing.



Going It Alone

By Kehinde Sosina

I boldly got on the bus as if this journey from home was not out of the ordinary for me.

I'd never felt so alone in my life. I was on a bed that was just given to me, in a room that I inherited by default. The drawers were empty. There is nothing on the desk and no pictures on the wall of this box-shaped room. This pale blue painted room was far from mine to me. It resembled a children's hospital waiting room without the people or toys more than anything. Did I want to be here? Yes. More than anything I wanted this room, the new life I was about to journey on, and the college experience. Yet, all I could do was sit and listen for a sound or wait to be awakened from this beautiful solitary dream. I could hear the murmurs of my new roommate's family and friends helping her put dishes in her new cabinets and set up her new room. One person is letting out quiet tearful goodbyes as she helps my other roommate put up her new bathroom linens. I have no linens, no pictures filled with smiles, no friends, no family; I have nobody. It's my first year at school, and I have nothing but a suitcase, a carry on, and the loneliness.

It had been a six and a half hour trip from Minnesota to Chicago on the Mega Bus. My twin-brother and friend were the only people in my life who had cared to see me off. I wasn't talking to my mom. My dad had been M.I.A. since I could remember, but I couldn't let that get to me. I had come so far from living on my own and just trying to graduate high school. This lengthy journey couldn't be interrupted by "Why didn't my mom care enough to help me graduate?" or "How could my dad afford his lifestyle but not try to help me better my life?" Knowing I had to keep my emotions subdued, I put on a strong front for my audience of two. I boldly got on the bus as if this journey from home was not out of the ordinary for me. The two of them watched sadly as the bus door closed. My friend burst into tears and began waving. My brother ran after the bus to imitate the corny comedies we watched together so often. When my bus finally pulled off, the streetlights began turning into red, yellow, and green splotches as my eyes slowly welled up. I decided to close my eyes and sleep the entire way to avoid having to feel what was going on. I was going to college in a place that I had been away from for so long, with no one I knew, a mother who wouldn't speak to me, and my entire support system out of reach.

In my mind, this experience should have been like what it was on television. I should have been surrounded by friends and parties from day to night. I pictured myself increasing the number of friends I had on Facebook. I should have been passively flirting with my college dreamboat, not desperately calling my busy brother for moments of camaraderie I wasn't getting or too afraid to pursue at school. This current desperate Kehinde Sosina was not the Kehinde from a year ago, or even two months ago. I was a meek, self-conscious, hopeless person. I remember sitting by the trash in my apartment waiting for someone to come out of their room. When I believed a sound was building, I would slightly place my ears on the door. My plan was to get on the elevator with the person leaving and start casual conversation. During the prepared dialogue, I would say, "Well, stop on by if you're ever looking for something to do." In my mind, this would end my hobbit lifestyle.

Each day I spent a minimum of one hour on my exterior. The clothes, shoes, hair and make-up had to be up to par. Perfection was far from obtainable for me. The more I tried to "be liked," the more frustrated I got when I wasn't accepted. I was so caught up on being the "it girl" that it never occurred to me that girls were catty individuals who rarely liked their female peers. For my first "coming out" at a social event, I spent three hours getting ready. On the way to the gathering, I began thinking about what life at home with the people I cherished used to be like. It never bothered me to be by myself. I remembered going to malls and parties alone. Restroom trips with the girls were never a part of my character. Yet, I had instantaneously transformed into this needy being. I needed to be accepted. I desired to be liked and surrounded by others constantly. It occurred to me that I got on a bus and came to a house that was

not a home. I knew from the start, coming into this that I would be by myself. It was not a surprise to me that my "dad" would block my calls, my family would not support me, and I would be spending every moment during the day anxiously figuring out how I would pay for a private college.

It then occurred to me that I was at the school of my choice, and no one had helped me get here. No one wrote my entrance pieces nor paid my tuition or bills. I did this. I got me here. I left everything behind because I trusted myself to be my own guide. To lead me in a direction where I would not fail, but succeed. I didn't make it to Chicago just because a group of cat-like girls liked me. I made it because I thought I was worth the investment. People didn't like me in Minnesota and that never stopped me. When I went to social events because of my living situation, people persecuted me as a person. But that didn't stop me from focusing on paying my rent at sixteen or making it to school. Through the grace of God and persistence instilled in me, I needed not one soul on this planet to validate or "save" me. I could and have done it on my own my whole life and would continue – with or without the approval of others.

No biography was submitted for Kehinde Sosina.





The Grave Hill

By Margarita Kachula

There is always an up and a down to every story. My story has its ups and downs as well. During the second year of my missionary trip, a couple of my friends and I decided to go explore a hill that stood on the side of a Moldovan village. It was a beautiful hill with bunches of trees standing in random areas. During the Soviet Union, the top of the hill was filled with grape gardens and apple orchards; however, after the Soviet Union fell apart, the hill was abandoned. Now they call it the Grave Hill because from the village side, it looks like a giant's grave.

We decided to get up there in the evening, spend the whole night up on the hill, and watch the sunrise in the morning. One evening, we gathered all of the supplies that we could find, which was not much. We found an axe, a blanket, a flashlight, and some vegetables that we could roast on the fire.

That evening, while getting up the hill, I watched nature calmly fall asleep. The rodents were running back to their nests, and the birds were flying back to the top of the trees. None of the animals seemed to care that we were there; they were just doing their evening tasks, preparing for the night. The flowers closed in for the night, and the wind calmed down.

Arriving to the highest flat area of the hill, we unpacked and just watched the land around us. The air had a clean, warm smell. The trees around were playfully moving their leaves back and forth, making the whole forest below us seem as if it were dancing. Meanwhile, on the other side of the forest, the city was turning its lights off and disappearing from our view. It was very still and quiet around us, with only the sound of the wind blowing onto the trees and grass. Looking back at this moment, I am reminded of the story written by Lester Rowntree called *Collecting Myself*. She wrote about nature with great description and of the coyote that used to follow her around. Also, she wrote about the quietness out there, and the dangers that could happen, which did not seem to scare her. She knew the other side of nature: "monsters." Lester, like us, became part of nature while being in the wild, when we went up that hill.

However, things changed for the worse when it became dark all around. It seemed for us that it was too quiet. We kept hearing strange sounds that startled us. And all

of a sudden I saw a very dark spot a bit farther from where we were located. The shape resembled an animal, such as a stray dog or fox. I quickly alerted the others, and we decided to start up a fire in our area, hoping that the animal would get frightened and run away. With only one axe available and one flashlight, we were set to find a dried up tree. Luckily, there were some dry trees by our location. I was constantly working the flashlight with my shaking hands, another person was holding the dry, dead tree, and the other was trying to chop the tree down. With trembling voices, we quietly chatted with each other, trying to make a backup plan. Finally, we

She knew the other side of nature: "monsters"...
Things changed for the worse when it became dark all around.

got one tree down, headed back to our area, and started up a fire. Sitting back to back, we looked around our space again, and once again, there he was, the shadow of an animal, not moving anywhere. Once the fire was close to dying out we got up again, and repeated our new ritual of going on a hunt for a dry tree, cutting it down, and together carrying it to the site. This continued throughout the night.

Towards the morning two of us fell asleep, and one was awake for the look out. Before the sunrise, we were woken up by some chirping of birds by a tree nearby. The sound was a sound of safety for us, a sound of life, and new beginning. I quickly stood up, and looked toward the area where I had seen the shadow of an animal. To my surprise, it was just a dark green bush that was in the middle of already dry grass. We made a huge fuss about a dark green bush.

After getting a good laugh about our "beast," we watched the sunrise slowly come upon us. It was one indescribable moment. There were no other people around, except us. We were merged into nature like we were never before. I believe that things would have gone a lot worse if we would have intruded on living nature, such as chopping a living tree down, or scaring any animals. The man in the story *To Build a Fire* had intruded on nature, and the final result for him was death. Nobody knows what could have happened to us that night. Although somehow, nature knew that we meant no harm.

For the first eleven years of her life, Margarita Kachula lived in a small country in Europe named Moldova. Then her family and she moved to the United States. Since then she has visited Moldova two times, which was a missionary trip to a small northern village. Russian is her primary language, but she also speaks Moldovian and understands Ukrainian. In her fourth year at NHCC, she is trying to pursue the Nursing Degree. She loves music and has never passed a day without listening to one song or another. She also loves to help others; it brings joy into her heart when she sees that she can help someone get through an issue that has come into their life. Most importantly, she is glad to have God at the center of her life. Without Him, she says, "My life would not be happy, or complete in any way. I believe that He is the one which created nature for us to enjoy and take care of." This essay describes the greatest moments where she felt physical fear.

Relearning the Importance of Our Elders from the Ojibwa Example

By Benjamin Martin

Hearing the word elder can conjure up various images in different people's minds. Some may picture an older person hunched over a walker, slowly inching their way down a narrow hallway at a retirement home, while others may picture a wise old man, filled with insight and advice to life's many trials and tribulations. How about a warrior who is on the front lines of a battle that consists of keeping one's history, traditions, and culture alive for the sake of posterity and whose primary weapons in this battle are experience, memory, and determination? This description would be fitting for the Anishinabe elders from the land of Ojibwa people. Like many of the North American Indian tribes, the Anishinabe epitomize the notion that to know and understand one's elders is to know and understand one's history. While analyzing the importance of elders, I will examine the role that elders have played in North American Indian tribes and focus specifically on the Ojibwa. I will then compare the Ojibwa with what may be called modern day, "mainstream" Western European and American cultural norms as they relate to elders. After this, I will discuss what all people can learn from elders in general and reflect on my relationships with my own elders.

Because of the many hardships and adversities that American Indians have had to endure over the last 400 plus years, including the extremely negative ramifications of the Allotment Act of 1887 and the government led boarding school policy that was implemented shortly thereafter, the roles that American Indian elders have played over time have changed. According to the Encyclopedia of North American Indians, in the past, "Elders played vital roles within tribal cultures in family and camp life, political organizations, social and economic activities, and religious ceremonies" (Berthrong). Elders were involved in every aspect of their society, taking leading roles in their communities.

Now certainly not all of these roles have changed. For instance, elders still take primary roles in religious matters, including, for the Ojibwa, conducting sweat lodges and leading pipe ceremonies. As far as education goes, some Ojibwa elders, who were once deprived of their right to teach their youth because of the aforementioned boarding school policy, are now taking leading roles in this endeavor. At the Ojibwa based Nay Ah Shing American Indian School in Onamia, Minnesota, there's "an advisory board made up of tribal elders [who] Once a month...meet with the schools' teachers and administrators to discuss Ojibwa cultural matters" (Hill). According to the school's website, "Tribal Leaders and Elders are continually work-

ing to further develop and enhance...school programs" (Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe).

On top of all these roles elders used to play, they now have a new one, which consists of keeping their culture alive. Considering that the U.S. Census Bureau marks the number of American Indian and Alaska Native persons at a combined 1.0% of the total U.S. population, it would naturally be hard to resist the mainstream cultural influence that surrounds American Indians today (United States). After all, what once would have been called cultural imperialism by the U.S. is now simply known as mainstream American culture. Now certainly American Indians don't have to resist American culture if they don't want to, but if they choose to find out more about their cultural roots, they can turn to their elders who have in some cases become keepers of their traditional ways.

Some contemporary Ojibwa authors have highlighted this role of elders in their literature. Winona LaDuke, an Anishinabe author and political activist, has written both fictional and non-fictional books, and in her novel, *Last Standing Woman*, she states that, "This is a work of fiction although the circumstances, history, and traditional stories, as well as some of the characters, are true, retold to the best of my ability" (LaDuke 10). In *Last Standing Woman*, LaDuke incorporates important insights into the Ojibwa culture and their relationships with their elders. One role of the elders in this novel is to pass their people's traditions, beliefs, and history to the next generation. For example, the character Moose Hanford goes on a cross-country adventure to the Smithsonian to retrieve the remains of his people's ancestors that had been taken as artifacts by anthropologists years ago. Upon successfully retrieving the bones, Moose and his people want to give their ancestors a proper burial, which they call "the reburial ceremony." During the reburial ceremony, LaDuke writes that "Many of the oldest songs and ceremonies had been forgotten [and]...had to be recalled from [the]...memories of the oldest people" (LaDuke 281).

LaDuke also notes that "Dreams were important to the Anishinabe, especially the dreams of old people [and] Many religious traditions, hunting secrets, or medicines came from dream instructions" (LaDuke 125). Hunting and medicine were necessary for survival, and religious figures often times held prominent positions within the Ojibwa culture. These are extremely important elements to the traditional Ojibwa culture, and they are derived from the dreams of their elders.

Dennis Banks, an Anishinabe cultural and political activist, is best known for co-founding the American Indian Movement (AIM). In his autobiography, *Ojibwa Warrior*, Banks talks about how he was

longing for a spiritual side to life. While on his quest he says, "I talked with one of our elders, King Bird" who pointed him in the direction of "Old man Henry Crow Dog" (Banks 95 & 96). It was Henry Crow Dog who not only conducted the first sweat lodge in which Banks took part, but also acquainted Banks with a man who would seemingly become his spiritual advisor: Leonard Crow Dog. The spirituality that Banks came into contact with through these elders would play no small role for AIM either, considering their website claims that AIM "...is first, a spiritual movement, a religious re-birth" (Aimovement.org). It would be safe to say that this would not have been possible without the elder's influence and their determination to preserve their traditional ways.

After reading LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman* and Banks' *Ojibwa Warrior*, I am certain that the Ojibwa have a genuine reverence for their elders. In a 2005, Wall Street Journal article titled, "Respect for the Elderly," Jenny Tyndale comes to the conclusion that "Though there appears to be many cultural differences between the various tribes of Native Americans, one of the few values that are shared by the race as a whole is the care and respect for the elderly members of

Why have we moved away from revering older people?

the tribe" (Tyndale). In the same article, Tyndale comments on how modern day, mainstream, western culture treats their elders in comparison to the Native Americans. She writes, "In general, we who reside in the western world do not see the value of having our elderly family members in our lives" (Tyndale).

Even worse than ignoring and neglecting our elders are incidences of abuse. For instance, in December of 2008, charges were filed against two teenage girls for abusing elders in a nursing home in which they worked. "According to the criminal complaint, [these two teens] spit in resident's mouths, groped genitals and breasts of some residents, and taunted other residents" (Associated Press). Although this may be an unusually cruel and disturbing case, it is not an entirely isolated one. The simple fact that I got this information from a website named, "Nursing Home Abuse News," which contains information on similar incidences, as well as provides access to lawyers for those who have been abused, is telling of how some young people today view the elderly. Tim Madge, in an article from *Nursing Standard*, titled, *Time to Respect our Elders*, sums all of this up nicely when he writes, "Society [specifically the UK] has moved rapidly in the past 100 years from revering older people for their experience or longevity, to ignoring them, neglecting them and occasionally abusing them" (Madge).

On top of all these
roles elders used
to play, they now
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culture alive.

How has this happened? Why have we moved away from “revering older people?” One possible explanation is that in many cultures, moral rules concerning the treatment of the elderly are derived from religious traditions, and while the western world has grown increasingly secular, utilitarian ethics has filled the vacuum. Utilitarian ethics is basically a belief that whatever does the most good or makes the most people happy is what’s best. Of course, older people often times need extra care which consumes time and energy, rack up costly healthcare bills late in life, and move too slow for our fast paced world. Naturally this line of thinking has led some to argue for the rationing of healthcare for seniors and the legalization and moral acceptability of euthanasia, which would both open up resources for more productive, younger members of society. Patricia Lanoie Blanchette, M.D., noticed this trend in thinking and concluded that there is an “old-age prejudice that exists in our culture” (Blanchette). She also noted that there is an “argument that precious healthcare resources are squandered on demented elders who would be better off dead and that caring for older people is generally not only expensive, but futile” (Blanchette). The doctor rejects this argument noting that healthcare services are not necessarily a zero-sum game and that “People’s lives are priceless at any age” (Blanchette).

I agree with the doctor and believe that this prejudice against the elderly is not only faulty but also quite dangerous. The elderly in our society may not be able to keep up with our fast paced world or work manual labor jobs as they once could, but they are certainly productive members of our culture in immeasurable ways. The elderly have experienced the ups and downs of life, raised children, fought in wars, seen their friends and family pass away, and witnessed the rapid changes that have taken place in the last century. Residing in their memories are images and stories that we would be lucky to find in history books. Our elders are often times living testaments to how resilient human beings can be in a world that is quite often cold and cruel. When we willingly and intentionally disconnect ourselves from our elders, we are foolishly rejecting living knowledge and advice that can help us make good decisions and avoid poor ones in our journey through life.

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My grandparents have certainly given me advice that I will cherish for the rest of my life. As I reflect on my relationship with my grandfather, I am reminded of a story from Dennis Banks’ *Ojibwa Warrior*. At one point in the book, Banks reminisces about an old, seventy-year-old, half-blind woman that he and his friends used to make fun of. He says, “She would come out of her house with a bag of tobacco in her hands, go to that special tree of hers, and sprinkle the sacred tobacco around the base of the trunk. She would gently touch the tree and speak to it in the old language, and chant and sing to it” (Banks 21 & 22). To my knowledge, my grandfather never did anything quite like this, but he would tell the same stories over and over again. My brother and I would often times joke about this tendency of his, and we’d get bored and restless while listening to him. Like Banks, I regret making fun of my elder and am now grateful for the time I spent with him. In retrospect, Banks says, “I loved her singing even though I laughed at her, and I now know how close she was to the Great Spirit” (Banks 22). I too loved my grandfather and am grateful now that he told me those stories so many times, because if he hadn’t, I probably wouldn’t remember them today.

In the Ojibwa culture, elders are given a place of prominence, not out of mere kindness or respect, but out of a recognition that elders deserve that place. They deserve that place of prominence because the whole of Ojibwa people can benefit from the wisdom, experience, and knowledge of their elders. I know that I learned the definitions of bravery, perseverance, kindness, and gentleness from my grandparents. I also learned the meaning of sacrifice from both of my grandfathers who served in the U.S. military during World War II. I learned that many men and women have paid the ultimate price so that my family and I can live in peace. This is a fact that many younger Americans take for granted because they have not studied their history. I believe all cultures would do well to emulate the Ojibwa when it comes to reviving their history and respecting their elders, and I sincerely hope that the western world will return to their respective tradition of doing the same.

No biography was submitted for Benjamin Martin.

Just Me

By Beth Frykman

I train in Aikido because it fills a space in my soul. It brings a balance, a center, to my life that I’ve never known with anything else. When I train, I feel joy. I feel frustration and fatigue and lots of other things, too, but I feel at home in myself on the mat. I don’t see anything particularly special about what I do; I see myself as just another one of the students. I believe that is how I am seen by the others in the dojo, as well. This is us; this is who we are. We train. It defines us.

A few times a year, we participate in public demonstrations in which everyone goes up and shows techniques for a minute, give or take. At those functions, I am no longer viewed as Beth. I have become, in the eyes of the audience, one of The Women. I stick out. I do the same thing that the men there are doing, and most of them can do it more precisely, know more techniques, and have spent many more years dedicated to the art than I have. Yet because I am a woman in a martial art, somehow it’s viewed as something of consequence.

I’ve had more than a few women tell me that they were inspired by my throwing a guy into the air. I find that incredibly humbling. For me, this is just what I do. I didn’t set out to even the gender tables in martial arts. I didn’t set out to do anything, really; I was curious about a class, I took it, and I’m still showing up. I was bound to get better at it eventually. I honestly don’t see anything remarkable about what I do, but when women see me do it – see me just being myself – it gives them courage. Women who have been physically abused by their partners have told me how deeply affecting it is to watch me both take a hit and get back up as well as take on a man who dwarfs me by ten inches and pin him to the ground. Some women who see me demonstrate wind up training regularly themselves. Some of them are a little braver after that – at least for a while (hopefully a long while). Some of them, especially women who grew up in cultures drastically different than that of the U.S, have never seen a woman be so strong and didn’t know that it could be like that.

It’s amazing to know that, without pretense or artifice, I have a place in this world making it just a little bit better for others.

Born and raised in Minnesota, Beth Frykman has managed to overcome a childhood involving hotdishes and Jell-O salads. She has traveled to most of the states with regional names involving the word “western.” She looks forward to adding “south” and “east” to her list at some point. She has been to Canada, Mexico, and recently learned the difference between ramen in Japan and ramen from a thirty-three cent packet from a U.S. supermarket. Her favorite saying is Joseph Campbell’s “Follow your bliss” and spent the first three decades of her life trying to determine what made her blissful. She is now trying to figure out how to follow writing, Aikido, and zombies to a fruitful career. Yes, an anti-zombie martial art flick could be on the horizon.



Refugee Story

By Josephine Myers

Living in another country as a refugee can be very hard. I once was a refugee in the country Ghana. I missed my country and the time I was living there.

Living as a refugee really showed me how life is on the other side. When I was in Ghana in the refugee camp, my family and I lived in a tent for years. There was no good drinking water, and we didn't have enough food for the whole family. We had to stand in line all day to wait for a truck to distribute water and food to all the refugees in the camp. One had to be strong to stand in line to get food. There were lots of people in the line. The line was not in order. The refugees in line were pushing because everyone wanted to get food and water for their families. Some days we went without food because there were too many people to be fed that day. As years went by, my family and I had the opportunity to travel here to the U.S.A. I'm glad that I am in the U.S.A.

Looking back on those years we spent in Ghana makes me stronger for today.

No biography was submitted for Josephine Myers.

Some days we went without food because there were too many people to be fed that day.

A Thought Away from Home

By Cynthia M. Jallah

Who will bury the unburied?

During the Liberian Civil War, children were dead due to starvation. Left in the empty kitchen on the floor, while trying to lick their tongues in an empty bowl or hoping to taste a drop of water. But life failed them and left them to be buried.

During the war, boys put their grandmothers in wheelbarrows to carry them, but the stronger and the wicked overcame. They emptied the carrier and disappeared leaving the lifeless on the side of the dusty road left to be buried.

During the war, girls ran from grown ups who tried to harm them,

No biography was submitted for Cynthia M. Jallah.

but their feet could no longer stand; they dropped and fell. Strength left them and life ended behind the bushes... left to be buried.

Women ran at the sound of the guns with babies held in the back and in the front of them-hoping to take them to safety and not knowing their destination. But just before they could find their compass, the faith of motherhood ceased. Hope could not be found and destination diminished; life left prematurely as they held on to mother's last breath and were all left in the middle of the bridge... left to be buried.

Who will bury the unburied?

A Clouded Vision

By Chan Nguyen

Even though the two schools are situated a thousand miles apart, Québec's and Minnesota's school systems almost match.

Bam. Tears clouded my vision. Snot built up in my nose. As I rushed to the nearest bathroom, blood began to dribble down my nostrils. I yanked a handful of toilet paper to clog up my nose. A concerned adult hurried in and asked, “*Ça va bien?*” “*Ça va*”, I nodded. Additionally, she told me my location: the boys’ bathroom. My face reddened up even more. First, I needed to make a scene bawling my eyes out in gym and then in the *boys’* bathroom, no less? Pierre, the boy that had crashed into my head while rolling in a barrel, apologized. This was the only time that I cried during elementary school in Québec. Similarly, I only cried during elementary school in Minnesota in first grade. While a Russian boy presented his presentation in ESL (English as a Second Language) class, I pushed a blue container of markers onto my neighboring peer’s desk. The scraping noise caused a loud commotion. Hey, she used them, not me, so why had she put them on my desk? After ESL class ended, Ms. Hanson, the ESL teacher, scolded me about making a ruckus during the boy’s presentation. I burst into tears, ashamed. Afterward, I feigned a teensy, weak smile at Ms. Hanson, who had tried to soothe me. I still tear up when I reminisce about how elementary school in Québec and Minnesota differed drastically but compared in some ways.

Even though the two schools are situated a thousand miles apart, Québec and Minnesota’s school systems almost match. Québec’s school system would not seem that dissimilar to a Minnesotan pupil. I started kindergarten at the tender age of five. I attended *maternelle* (kindergarten) while my brother had grade two class and my cousin had grade four class in the same *école primaire* (elementary school). In kindergarten, I needed to attend school for the same number of hours as my brother and cousin. I attended school every day besides Saturdays and Sundays. School began in the autumn and ended in the summer. The *Québécois* school system divided school terms into three months, equaling *un terme*. Likewise, a Minnesotan’s elementary school system would not seem that different to a *Québécois élève*. Although I did not start in kindergarten in Minnesota, I learned that my first grade peers started kindergarten at the same age as I did. Even though we are two years apart, my brother and I attended school at the same time until he attended middle school while I attended fifth grade. However, unlike my *Québécois* school, my elementary school in Minnesota divided kindergarten into A.M. and P.M. kindergarten. I resented the fact that my fellow first grade classmates had attended

kindergarten for only half the day, whereas I had needed to attend kindergarten for the same time as my brother and cousin in Québec. I cheered up when I learned that my fellow peers and I needed to attend school everyday, besides Saturday and Sunday. In Minnesota, I noticed that school started in the same season as when the days darkened earlier and ended in the same season as when the weather allowed shorts and tee shirts outside. In addition, Minnesota’s school system divided terms into trimesters equaling three months.

Although the school systems in Québec and Minnesota are comparable, the languages and customs are not. The language and customs of Québec would seem alien to a Minnesotan. Only one teacher, Louise, taught me how to sing *ah-bay-say-day-uk-ef-ghay* and count *un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix*. Everybody called me Chàn Phannng. I called my parents *maman* and *papa* around my friends. At the same time, a Minnesotan’s language and customs would seem just as foreign to a *Québécois*. Instead of one teacher, two teachers taught me how to sing a-bee-cee-dee-e-ef-gee and count one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. My name shortened from Chàn Phanuong to

I cheered up when I learned that my fellow peers and I needed to attend school everyday, besides Saturday and Sunday.

Chan because everyone pronounced it “Chan Pong.” Among my friends, *maman* and *papa* reluctantly became mom and dad.

Speaking of friends, I made friends easily in Québec, but not so much in Minnesota. I made friends the first day of kindergarten in Québec while playing with prismatic blocks and Barbies. I had friends with short, spiky, ebony hair, long, straight, caramel hair, or frizzy, messy, golden hair. Their complexions ranged from porcelain ivory to pale olive. Although I don’t remember their names, their faces forever remain in my memory in the form of a photograph of us from my first birthday party. In Minnesota, however, I did not make friends as easily as I had in Québec. I had a diverse group of friends, similar to my group of friends in Québec, but females mainly constituted my friends. I remember their names, even though they are no longer in my life. I don’t have any photographs of my elementary Minnesotan friends at my birthday parties either; I never celebrated my birthdays with my Minnesotan friends in elementary school. After years of flitting from group to group,

I finally found a group of friends that I could trust and depend on.

Without any friends, Gym and Music would have dragged on forever. Québec’s idea of Music and Gym differs drastically from Minnesota’s. Music consisted of banging on triangles and other assorted instruments in the classroom, singing along to *Frère Jacques*. While singing, I needed to hold hands with my classmates and walk around in a circle. I smiled whenever I purposely stood next to Rocky to hold his hand; he had lent me his gluestick when I didn’t have one. The other activity in my *Québécois* elementary school, Gym, can only be described in one word: random. Louise brought us to attend Gym in the cafeteria. I would run back and forth to my heart’s content until I grew impatient to start my favorite Gym activity: rolling in barrels. I dizzied myself rolling around like a maniac until Pierre’s barrel banged into my face and marred my love of this activity. Like Québec, Minnesotan Music and Gym classes had their share of mishaps; however, they dragged on forever. Ms. Hansen taught Music in a different classroom than my first grade teachers’ shared classroom. One time while singing, I enthusiastically twirled around and slipped on the carpet mat that I sat on. Ms. Hansen yelled at me. My skin turned a deep shade of crimson; my peers stared at me while I stared back. Their message shone in their eyes: *alien*. Music did not drag on forever as Gym class did, though. I called Physical Education “Phy Ed” or “Gym” simply because Ms. Gerber taught me Phy Ed in the gymnasium. Gym in Minnesota made for grueling days of exercise, running the dreaded Pacer test and doing agonizing push-ups and curl-ups. In Minnesota, I experienced something that I had never experienced before in Québec: the chance to play in teams. Once, when a team game ended, I kicked a ball over to the other team’s side after Ms. Gerber blew the whistle. The other team won. A boy that saw me kick the ball exclaimed, “Why did you kick the ball?” I shrugged. I did not want to explain that in the heat of the moment, I wanted to appear intimidating to the opposing team. It didn’t work. Instead, I managed to make a fool out of myself yet *again*.

After Gym and Music, I finally arrived at every elementary student’s favorite time of day, lunch and recess. A *Québécois* looks forward to lunch and recess with the utmost zeal. I had lunch and recess with upperclassmen in the *cafétéria*. Even though I didn’t have to pay for school lunch, I brought lunch in my Sailor Moon lunchbox; everybody else brought lunch from home too. The school allowed open lunch, but my mom only picked my brother and me up for lunch on Fridays to eat ramen and watch Pokémon. Usually, I missed recess on Fridays because my mom drove my brother and me back to school during recess. During recess, I played on the humongous playground. The playground had a variety of equipment to play on

during the warmer months, but I looked forward to the months when the temperature dropped below zero. During these frigid months, frost covered the playground equipment, so I had no other option than to slide on the icy banks. I needed to stand in line to slide down these icy slopes. Then, I needed to climb up the slopes to the top and wait again. The wait was worth it, though. With the same zeal as a *Québécois école primaire élève*, a Minnesotan elementary pupil looks forward to lunch and recess. I was a Minnesotan elementary student, but I was not always happy at lunchtime and recess. Lunch overlapped with other older grades, and recess did too. Carrying my lunch, I hung my shoulders and stared at the floor whenever I passed an elder student in the cafeteria to sit down. My parents needed to pay for my lunch, and everyone mostly bought lunch. The school did not allow open lunch, but I remember some parents brought McDonald's or Subway to their kids. After lunch, I would exit the school to play on the playground for recess. The playground had less playground equipment than the one in Québec, and during the winter months, the supervisors wouldn't allow me to slide on the banks or throw snowballs; thus, I built snow forts and snow angels by myself. One time, I feigned sickness to stay inside during recess. My teacher asked me why I stayed inside instead of playing outside. I answered, "I'm sick." "You need a doctor's note," she replied. She even wrote to my parents that the doctor needed to give me a note to confirm my sickness. I frowned when my mom

wouldn't bring me to the doctor. When the teacher forced me to leave class for recess, I frowned.

Reminiscing on my elementary experiences in Minnesota tears me up. I could hardly keep any close friends and tried to attract people's attention, isolating myself. I frowned all the time; I couldn't find my place. After I finally started to be myself, I found the place in Minnesota that satisfies me: in a close-knit group of friends similar to my group of friends in Québec. School activities got easier and school itself did too. I won't forget that school can start off as harsh as a bitter fall without friends, but with friends, school can end as bright as a summer sunset.

Chan Nguyen, a PSEO student at NHCC, was born in Québec, Canada, where she lived for six years. However, her parents are from Vietnam, so she is of Vietnamese heritage. She learned French at that time but then forgot it when she moved to Minnesota, where she had to learn English. So she speaks English and Vietnamese but is relearning French at school. Even though she was not born in Vietnam, she is fond of Vietnamese culture and Vietnam itself. She has visited it once and would like to again. In addition to her studies, Chan likes reading, playing the piano, and filling in sudoku boxes.

We could leave
our possessions
out overnight,
without worrying
about anyone
stealing them.

Remembering Many Positive Things about My Hometown

By Khalid Farah

I remember many positive things about my hometown. First, the weather was excellent: it stayed between 40 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit all year around. Therefore, it's not surprising to see people wearing sandals in the middle of winter. We could also play outdoor sports any time of the year. Ice storms, snow, and black ice never happened in my hometown. In addition, we did not experience tornadoes, hurricanes, or any other violent winds. For those reasons, there was not much complaining about the weather in my hometown.

I also remember that my hometown was a safe place to live. We could leave our possessions out overnight, without worrying about anyone stealing them. Everyone was friendly and the whole town spoke the same language. People in my hometown never cared about their accent because it was the same as everyone else's. Therefore, violence caused by language barriers was completely absent.

Finally, we always ate fresh food because the farm and the ocean were not far away. For example, fish would come to us the same day it was caught. Also, fruit, vegetables, meat, and any other food we needed came to us the same day we ate them. Moreover, the food we ate was familiar to everyone so that it was not necessary to ask whether certain meats were kosher or not. I long for you, Burao, Somalia.

No biography was submitted for Khalid Farah.



A New Way

By Patience Ford

I'm a Liberian by birth. On February 9, 2009, I moved to the United States with my daughter. Being born and growing up in Africa, I come from a discipline different from that of the United States' culture.

Upon our arrival, my daughter started school after two weeks. It was great – new friends, teachers, new country, and so on. Three months into her schooling, I noticed a change in her behavior. Whenever I asked her to do her work at home, she would make excuses. So one day I was so upset that I told her, "I'll spank you if you don't do what I ask you before I return." To my surprise, she told me she would call the police. I was so shocked because she would have never done that in Africa. First, that is considered disrespect and, second, she wouldn't dare talk back at me. But because of the system that is in place in the United States, I guess I will have to find a different approach. I have learned from my daughter that there are a lot of differences in the U.S. and African culture, especially when it comes to discipline and authority.

No biography was submitted for Patience Ford.

I was so shocked because she would have never done that in Africa.



We Didn't Know

By Doris Robinson

We called ourselves the Pantherettes—a group of young girls looking for a cause. The name reminds me of hair barrettes and pantaloons, and I laugh now because we didn't know. Then, with hand thrown up – Black Power – I felt honored to "Say it Loud." I wore my hair in an afro, huge and high, larger than life. We should have known then – but we didn't – that the organization we took our name from was Marxist and murderous. We just wanted to belong and to "Be Proud."

The name came from the Black Panthers, a radical and militant group because we thought the revolution had come, but we didn't know that the revolution was never to come to Minnesota, to Central High, back in those days, during those times. To do our part because we didn't know what revolution meant, we picketed the school to change the library name to the Huey P. Newton Library rather than some German name that we didn't know.

The school, afraid of revolution and change – so we thought – didn't give in to our demands but called our parents. We were suspended from school and sent home amidst cheers from students because we had started a revolution. We walked with our hand held high in protest, in revolt, "Power to the People." Our parents walked steadfastly behind us in quiet resolve, their heads hung down just a little, but we didn't know it.

At home that evening all the family – my mother, father, two older brothers who were father-figures, my two sisters and the dog – gathered to discuss my involvement with the Pantherettes. This was my time to explain to them because they didn't know. After so many "Thou Shalts" and "Thou Shalt Nots" the law was laid down. So, I hung up my name and combed out my hair because that was the end of the revolution.

Doris Robinson is the youngest of five children. She comes from a very protective, close-knit, and loving family. Her parents immigrated from the South in the early 1950's during a time of hardship, racism, and discrimination. The Civil Rights Movement was a time of extreme importance for the entire nation. The turbulence of that time affected us all in different ways. Strong family values and Christian principles guided her through this period of discovery and identity. She is currently retired after 20 years from the Minnesota Department of Corrections, where she provided leadership and guidance to others. She is currently a Christian Minister and completing her degree in Writing Studies at NHCC. She plans to write a fiction novel and a nonfiction book of memoirs and to learn to speak Spanish fluently.

I wore my hair in an afro, huge and high, larger than life.

Where I Learned Compassion

By David Olson

The word compassion is derived from the Latin word “co-suffering.” Compassion is an emotion that is defined by the feeling of a sense of shared suffering and a desire to alleviate that suffering. The precursor of compassion, in my opinion, is the emotion empathy. Empathy is the capacity to recognize and share the feelings of another being. To feel empathy, a person needs to feel that they have something in common with other people, to feel like you can see yourself in another person’s experience, or shoes. I believe that these emotions need to be actively felt and lived. Compassion is an act and a choice. I don’t believe that I realized these things until recently in my life.

It’s more than a little embarrassing to admit that I have gone most of my adult life without experiencing the giving of compassion. I know that I have been on the receiving end of compassion many times. I just don’t recall the giving of compassion ever being a large part of my personal experience. Any compassion and empathy that I have learned has come from the observation and emulation of the people that I have met in AA.

The first time I went into an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting I was scared to death. I won’t bore you, dear reader, with the details of the long and winding road that led me to this place. Suffice to say that I got here in the rather conventional alcoholic fashion. It’s not that original of a story. My terrified feelings weren’t that original either; everyone that I know from that world was terrified when they first made their way to the rooms of AA. One of the first things that I noticed about the people in the rooms was how fucking shiny and happy they looked. I was a little taken aback. Most of the people looked healthy. Most of the people didn’t look like they were about to burst into tears at any moment. Most of the people didn’t smell like vodka was coming out of their pores. Most of the people that I met at that early meeting looked like they were happy and content with their lot in life. I wasn’t one of those people. I was at least 60 pounds overweight. I looked like I was liable to get violently ill at any moment. I definitely smelled like vodka, and I looked like I was considering any number of violent crimes and was weighing the pros and cons of them all. But most of all, I looked like I was the most unhappy person that ever lived. At the time, I was. I had run out of options. I had run out of time. I had painted myself into such a corner that I was willing to consider giving the idea of

Most of the people that I met at that early meeting looked like they were happy and content with their lot in life. I wasn’t one of those people.

sobering up a try. It was a big deal, me considering getting sober. I’d had a lifelong love affair with liquor. Quitting was the absolutely last thing that I wanted to do – ever. I thought that people who actually wanted to STAY sober were a little mentally ill or, at least, kind of dumb and boring.

I had been brought to the meeting by a friend of mine. Because of her kindness and grace, I wound up finding whatever it was that I needed to find. She had been in the sobriety game for a number of years and was one of the few people that I knew who I was willing

It’s more than a little embarrassing to admit that I have gone most of my adult life without experiencing the giving of compassion.

to trust with my current situation. The fact that she was willing to help me at all was a little miracle in itself. I hadn’t treated her very well over the previous few years. I was a terrible friend, to be honest. I abandoned her when she needed me the most, and the fact that she was willing to help me at all was a testament to her character and personal growth over her time in AA. She took me to the meetings and showed me the ropes. She was, and still is, a terrific friend and teacher.

The lessons that you learn in early sobriety are difficult ones indeed. It comes as a genuine surprise when you figure out just how selfish and ungrateful you have been in your life. It is even more shaming when you are taught these things by people that are the definition of selfless. I found myself becoming involved in an organization that was almost religious in its fervor to help other alcoholics. It was as

close to religion as I was willing to get, still is. Many of the other members develop relationships with God that they have never had before. Many others strengthen relationships with God that they used to have but let go because of the progression of their disease. Luckily, they don’t proselytize the God thing – too much anyway. They allow those of us who are agnostics to continue to be agnostics.

It’s within this organization that I have learned the true nature of compassion. I’ve learned that it is a ton of hard work. I’ve learned that it needs to be actively practiced, often. I’ve learned that if you don’t have it, you are missing out on one of the most gratifying experiences that humans can have, connecting with another human being. I’ve also learned that connecting with another person is actually a good thing and that selflessly helping someone brings more happiness and good karma to the helper than it does to the one being helped. I didn’t know any of these things before I started in AA. It’s somewhat embarrassing that it’s taken me this long to find out these things. Its better late than never, though.

No biography was submitted for David Olson.





Remembering a Tragic Time

By Jadee Johnson

I remember during the Civil War in Liberia, my home country, when my family was having sleepless nights being afraid of rebels or the government forces knocking on our doors to kill us.

I remember walking behind rebel lines and thinking that we were freed of being liberated, but only for my mother to be singled out, accused of supporting the government force, and shot to death right before the eyes of her children. We were too afraid to cry for fear to get killed as well.

I remember being rescued by crossing the border into the Ivory Coast as a refugee and feeling some degree of relief for a moment, but then I started to worry about my dad who was still back home in the heat of the war.

I remember when my dad told us that he was about to be killed many times by the rebels, but being a school teacher, he was rescued on different occasions by some of his students who were either rebels or not rebels. This I remember and live each day to forget the horrors of war.

No biography was submitted for Jadee Johnson.

We were too afraid
to cry for fear to
get killed as well.

We all should take
those destructive
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a positive attitude.

Mindset

By Mural Corraya

“Good memories or bad memories” – which memories do people hold onto throughout their entire lives? People usually hang onto the best and the worst memories for a long time. One of the best memories in my life was made by my 6th grade class teacher named Sir Sarat Chandra Das who taught me and other students how to improve and change our lives just by changing our negative thinking habits.

In every grade, we can find good and bad students. And all of the bad students are not getting poor scores because of their study routines. Sometimes they focus more on what other people think about them. Other people’s negative thoughts discourage them to work hard. After the first day of the 6th grade, we learned that by giving priority to others, we were just hurting ourselves. According to Sir Das, we all should take those destructive thoughts under consideration with a positive attitude. If we set our mind and heart into something and work hard toward the goal, then nothing can stop us from reaching our target.

After that class, till now, I always try and follow his advice. I can see the result not only in my student life, but also in my everyday life activities. Sometimes, I don’t succeed in my tasks, but I don’t regret for not using my time wisely. In real life, it is sometimes hard to ignore others, but if you can follow this recommendation, I believe, it will also help you to change your life for the better.

No biography was submitted for Mural Corraya.



Empty Mind, Complete Self: Living in Pursuit of Expertness

By Abraham Levin

Since my earliest memories, the one defining trait I've had is an analytical mind. Even as a young child, I was always one to search for explanations and justifications, much to the occasional exasperation of my parents and teachers. The 'what' of a matter seemed almost useless to understand without a corresponding 'how' and 'why'. As I grew older, this ceaseless analysis became my sharpest and most versatile tool, and most of my academic and recreational pursuits were based on systemic and objective approaches. As useful as my reliance on deliberate thought was, however, it would occasionally leave me paralyzed with indecision when confronted with more subjective, 'softer' tasks. It was only about three years ago, in fact, that my growing interest in the Japanese martial art of Aikido led me to explore a new paradigm: a way of no-mind.

It was only about three years ago, in fact, that my growing interest in the Japanese martial art of Aikido led me to explore a new paradigm: a way of no-mind.

What is meant by 'no-mind'? Given the common idea that one's self is in one's thoughts, the concept of eliminating the mind seems almost nonsensical and certainly not productive. It's important to understand, then, the Japanese view of the mind. If one were to ask a Japanese man where his 'self' is, he would be more likely to point at his heart than his head. This, obviously, isn't literal, but it exposes how conscious thought is regarded in Japan: as a filter, or even a barrier, between the heart's intention and the body's action. Zen Buddhist teachings describe 'expertness', an ideal state where one abandons the censors of the ego and the thinking mind and just does as one's unconscious self knows to act, with "not even the thickness of a hair" between one's intent and one's action. In this state, there can be no paralysis from over-consideration because as the interfering mind is simply not consulted.

As my physical training in Aikido began, it seemed as though my typical deliberate approach would serve me well because beginners are taught techniques with a step-by-step methodology. It quickly became apparent to me, however, that this would be insufficient. Any time we practiced flowing technique, my body was stiffened as my head overthought the motions. Observing the graceful, fluid, and seemingly effortless movements of my instructor and his advanced students, I started to realize that they were doing something fundamentally different. They could hardly even be described as responding to attacks. Their motions, unlike my stilted reactions, were simultaneous with that of their training partners. I eventually realized the simple explanation: things like planning, logic, and thought had no place in the equation. Their wills and their bodies were as one, with nothing allowed to get in the way.

As of now, I have no delusions of having achieved such unity of self, but I try to find new ways to pursue that expertness each day. Whether it's through something as esoteric as martial arts, as academic as writing, or as mundane as cooking, I attempt to stay more in touch, with what I feel and rely less on what I think. The martial way, after all, is as much about the mind as it is about the body, and in the words of Musashi Miyamoto, "When you're not training, you're not training."

Abraham Levin is a born-and-raised Minnesotan, but he has had the opportunity to travel across the bulk of the United States and overseas to Japan. After graduating from NHCC this year, he's moving on to study mathematics education at St. Cloud State University, where he plans to study, tutor, and continue to train in Aikido until he has this "harmony" thing a little more figured out.



My Life Story

By Fahmi Ushe

They put us in jail
for two days.

Life lead me to places I never thought that I will be interested to live in and it changed my thinking of what are good way of life. When I was young I have always dreamed of becoming a professional soccer player. Nevertheless, my father joined a political group against the Ethiopian government in 1997. After a few years the government got terrified when this political group members number increase and when the organization become well known across the country. Then, the government set out to crush the movement. They started to arrest anyone who is a part of the group and who support the organization. I was too young to know what was going on, but my father knew it was only a matter of time before they would come execute us all.

After a few days, my father decided to escape to the neighbor country which is Kenya. My Father took me, my two brothers, my two sisters, and my mother along with him. My father knew crossing the border was going to be hard, but he never thought it would be harder than it was. The Kenya soldiers are mean and corrupted. They took all the money my father had and they treated us like an animal. They put us in jail for two days. I remember the sadness in the face of my mother. If I was a grown man as I am right now, I would have made the situation more complicated because I do not like to see my mother mistreated. It was difficult to communicate with them because of the language difference. At one point I wished that I stayed in Ethiopia even thought I knew my father would be in danger. As we were waiting patiently, a Borana Soldier walked in the room. Since Borana people live in the border, they speak both language Oromo and Amharic. After staring for quite a while, he asked the other soldiers the reason we were arrested. Even thought I wasn't able to understand the language at that time, somehow I knew he was different from them. The next day this guy set us free.

My father had friends in Kenya who were in the same political group. We stayed with them for a couple years. They were nice enough not to make us pay house rent. However, we bought our own groceries with the help of my uncle from Ethiopia. He sent us one hundred dollars a month. As the time goes by, my uncle was not able to help us anymore, so we were forced to go to the Refuge Camp called Kakuma. I was amazed by the fact that 70,000 refugees from Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia (Oromo) lived there. Each one of us had the same hope which was to get out of there. With the help of the United Nations I was able to come to the United States.

Finally, I came to United States at the end of 2004. Life was so much easier and different for me. I feel like I am responsible for the freedom of my people. I do not want to be a professional soccer player anymore; I want to be someone who will be able to help those who are living in Kakuma Camp. I believe my experience made me who I am today. I want to educate myself to live the "American Dream." Nelson Mandela said "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." I want to be able to help kids from all over the word who are going through the same problems as I had. Moreover, I want to be the one who brings peace to my country using my knowledge.

No biography was submitted for Fahmi Ushe.



A Journey to the United States of America

By Tam Nguyen

Pirates jumped
into the boat
with machetes,
swords and guns.

My brother-in-law grew up during the Vietnam War. His father served the Republic of Vietnam. After the war, they were maltreated by the new government, the Vietnamese communists. The communist regime oppressed every person related with anyone who served for the old government. For that reason, many people fled out of my country such as my brother-in-law. Like an adventure movie, the story of how my brother in-law fled has deeply impressed me. He and his companions fled the communist government on a boat in the 1980's.

In late 1981, he and his companions planned to use a boat for their escape. At first, they prepared food, water, gas and everything else necessary for this journey. After three months, they were ready to go. They were very excited to flee from Vietnam to Malaysia because they were looking for a better life and the freedom in another country.

All the people slowly gathered in the early morning to the place where they were picked up. They began moving slowly and quietly in the dark at 2:00 am. They were scared and nervous when they paddled in the small canoes to the sea-boat. The sea-boat was not very big. It could carry about seventy people; however, over one hundred people packed into the boat. After two and half hours of waiting for people who were late, the captain moved the boat slowly and kept straightaway looking for a safe passage to freedom. Finally, the boat came to international territory waters and kept going to Malaysia.

After two days, a bad thing happened. The engine broke, and it made the boat drift in the sea for several days. Unfortunately, on the fourth day pirates appeared and ran straight on and shot at the boat. The pirates jumped into the boat with machetes, swords, and guns. They separated the men and women and began threatening everybody. One young man tried to fight back for his money and jewelry, but he got shot in the head and was killed. This really scared people. So they gave away what they had, including money and jewelry to pirates. After the pirates left, the poor people stayed with nothing on the broken boat.

On the eighth day, a poor old man on the boat died because the passengers ran out of water and food. To prevent the spread of disease from his dead body, people on

the boat decided to throw his body into the sea after many hours of persuading his family members. People were saddened by the death of the old man. Two of his grand children cried and tried to hold his body from some young man who came to take it. Day after day passed. Everybody was so tired, thirsty, and hungry. People lost all hope because they heard stories about people who died for lack of food and water. They were praying and waiting for a miracle to come from God. Then this miracle came indeed.

It was a big ship coming from far away straight to the boat on the eleventh day. Every person saw a big flag waving at the top of the pole on the boat. It was a U.S. Navy ship. They cried and yelled, "thank God, thank you for help." The ship stopped. The U.S. Marines came and helped. They were treating people on the boat very carefully. They gave them food, milk, chocolate, cakes. "Thank you Americans," the saved people cried.

The U.S. Navy ship pulled the boat to the Bidong Island, Malaysia. On the island, the "boat people" stayed in the refugee camps, where they studied English and waited to find a new place to live. They didn't worry about clothes, food, or medicine because the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (International Organization) paid for these things.

Finally, my brother in-law came to the United States in early 1983. He always thanks Americans when he tells me his story. He said the U.S. Marines and the Navy ship saved him and the people on the boat and gave them a new life with a lot of opportunities in this country, the United States of America. To have a life in the United States of America, he bet his life on that journey of many dangers, including an attack from pirates. Now, he has a happy life with two kids and is very successful.

Tam Nguyen came to the United States from Vietnam. He speaks Vietnamese has been at NHCC since 2011.

My Favorite Memory

By Mohammed Hussein

Bale National Park is a beautiful place in Ethiopia. It is located in the southwest of the capital city, in the northern part of the Sanetti between Dennshow River valley to the savannah grassland, which is covered with plains, bushes, and woods. The southern part of the Hareenna is guarded with evergreen vegetation that proved home to many wild animals like mountain goats, walalbags, red fox, frogs, and yellow neck robins.

For my people, the Oromos, it is the old landmark. They gave the name Dennshow Park meaning Cold Mountain. The winter season is always dry, but the sun is very hot during day time and cold at night. The wind arises in spring from the high mountain to the lowland. But summer season is always cold, wet, and rainy. The grass turns green and grows long. The green vegetation covers the Waybe River through the valley of Sahya. For most, this valley is where they hunt their prey.

At a distance in July and August the streaming of the sun seems almost like fire. The great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass popping up. The monkey population screams loudly. The big and dominant males are fighting with the smaller ones to show them that they are in charge. The mothers isolate themselves and focus on caring for small babies. The waterfall is about 4,000 meters between both sides of the narrow and deep valley. From the high altitude the spark of the water makes a rainbow by the sunset. The valley is surrounded on both sides with beautiful flowers like wild roses, very small yellow sun flowers, and many other flowers around the park. Honey bees and other insects fight over the blossoming flowers for nectar.

When I was a child, I liked to sit on the edge of the bed in my father's room before going to sleep. The only thing I wanted to know was animal names and how they survive out there in the wild. Sometimes, he told me everything he knew from the smallest animals to the king of the wild. But sometimes he made up stories.

One day, when I was ten years old, my dream came true. My father took me to the park. We enjoyed the high altitude on horseback and on foot. It was the happiest day of my life. After a few years in my homeland, I decided to go to the United States of America. When I went back home, my father was very sick, and he passed away, so my dream changed to visiting the park again by myself, but I still keep the beauty of this magical place and the memory of my father.

Mohammed Hussein was born in Ethiopia in Bale Robe, located about 430 kilometers from the capital. He is the first generation in the United States of America. Most of his family members are still back home in Ethiopia. Mohammed speaks three languages: Oromic, Aramaic, and English.

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